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**On LIFE within the Society-of-Captives:
Exploring the pains of imprisonment for real**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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Psychology

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Abstract

Institutional and social discourse upholds the prison as an effective rehabilitative solution to crime, but more recently there has been increasing criticism of the prison as a producer of harm rather than healing. Despite such criticism, discussions of the rehabilitative potentials of prisons predominantly exclude and silence insider, incarcerated voices in criminal justice debates and literature, and often do not describe what those ‘inside’, like me, are living and experiencing.

The primary aim of this project is to theorise twenty years of lived experience of incarceration in the hope of contributing to the work being done to problematise risk-averse, harmful correctional practices. Through a deeply reflexive autoethnographic performance, the reader comes with me beyond prison walls, into the largely closed off, inaccessible world within. Through navigation of my lived experience of imprisonment, I reflexively theorise memories of incarceration that are usually only speculated upon through objective, exclusionary research. The account that emerges from theorising incarceration ‘for real’ analyses the constraints of political narratives and risk averse policy and practice produced within our prison system, and within the bodies that system contains.

Through an interweave of autoethnographic field noting, performance and analysis, the research unpacks the connections between the structural, socio-political issues, and the pains of incarceration. Using Arrigo’s Society of Captives (SOC) thesis, the harms being produced are theorised with regard to subjectivities constituted through prison – the prisoner, their guard, and society at large. Theoretical storytelling shows how socio-political issues are having considerably detrimental impacts on correctional policy and practice. Prisoners are neither seen nor heard, and their keepers too are held

captive, unable to engage with their charges ethically lest they be reprimanded for doing corrections differently. Through this multi-layered harm, a society of captives is being perpetuated within which the very harm and risk it proclaims to alleviate is reproduced.

Embedded in a pursuit of social justice, I argue for a relational, ethical praxis wherein people are seen, and heard, for real. The change is not only theorised but rare instances of it, and the healing power it produces, demonstrated.

Through autoethnography's theoretical praxis, and embracing of the SOC thesis' pursuit of becoming, my research also involves considerable personal movement. It illustrates how, through the utilisation of autoethnographic methodology, in particular reflexive process, it becomes possible to ethically resist harmful representations and risk-focused correctional practices. In making these movements the research brings us out of prison, and provides in-depth consideration of my bodily attempts to reintegrate into the community after two decades of largely harmful carceral experiences. In these, the narrative contributes to a growing consciousness, global debate, and movement regarding prison, rehabilitation, and how community safety is best served. And it contributes to a process of becoming within me, a bodily movement, a transition into a place where humanness can be done differently...

Acknowledgments

Well, we've made it. I say 'we' because, without the long-term support provided by many, this research would never have happened. That is even more so given that it began, and was largely written, behind prison walls. There's no doubt about it, it took a community for my research, and the present me, to become possible.

Pivotal within that community has been Massey University. First and foremost, my Supervisors: Professor Leigh Coombes, Professor Mandy Morgan, Dr Stephanie Denne, Distinguished Professor Paul Spoonley, and Prison Education Officer, Jayne Waugh. Collectively, you have taught me the importance of relational ethics, and of the power of working together. It really is the only way to ethically overcome injustice. You all agreed to take on the witheringly-frustrating challenge of supporting a person to do a PhD from the inside. And it was hard for you – the prison lockdowns, lack of computer access, the countless cancelled phone calls... Perhaps most significantly, you absorbed my pain and stress without complaint. Indeed, you held me in a safe place when I no longer had the strength to do so. My gratitude is beyond explanation.

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to Associate Professor Damien Rogers. You were with me every step of the way, during my first ever visits to a university campus. And you supported me despite the risk of there being reputational impacts for you. Thanks for your commitment to justice, mate. A heartfelt thank you is also due to Massey University as an institution. From the start, the University has stood by me, never balking at my criminal past. Even when I erred on the inside, the University's support remained steadfast. So much so that it saw fit to grant me a Doctoral Scholarship. In doing that the University not only made it financially viable for me to

study, but *saw* me. And in that seeing, it helped me believe in myself when others were telling me there wasn't much (in me) to believe in.

Sitting between the University and prison has been a mix of academics, prison volunteers, and friends. I want to make special mention of Hazel, and Marie. Hazel, your editing skills are remarkable. Marie, you kindly took home and painstakingly typed the many hundreds of pages of handwritten field notes, thus helping me stay afloat amidst the constraints regarding computer access. And to Emeritus Professor Greg Newbold, and Dr. Paul Wood, cheers guys. Having both done what I was doing, you provided living proof that what often felt impossible was, in fact, doable.

And then there's the Prison. As destructive as it can be as an institution, there are many amazing people within. My academic journey began at the same time as I was trying to learn how to begin a life sentence. Yet, right from those early, undergraduate days there were prison staff who walked alongside me. From Prison Officers to Case Managers and Education Tutors, you all worked to make the impossible possible. At times you encountered withering adversity, trying to keep my study going. I cannot name everyone. But Jayne, you were with me the longest, and fought the hardest. Somehow, amidst the ever-tightening bureaucratic constraints on how you could do your job, you found a way to keep providing support. Without your efforts, this doctorate and my becoming in and through it, would not have occurred. In the efforts you provided, you are a representation of the caring, relational, different rehabilitative approach I advocate for. Indeed, you stand as an example of precisely what the Department of Corrections should be aspiring to achieve.

Remarkable as all these people are, so much depended upon the support of my family. Nan, Tim, Mum and Aunty Kate... In all honesty, I'm not quite sure what to say. But, Nan, your consistency and loyalty was at times the only dependable, sure thing

in my life. And Kate, you helped me resist when the system tried to suffocate my studies; you were my voice in a world where I was otherwise voiceless. The level of support provided by you all is, really, unquantifiable. In short, I survived prison, and did so without losing myself. Actually, *we* survived because there were many a day when each of you was walking those corridors with me. Thank you for your love and loyalty.

Now that I'm home, there is hope. And Hope. Thank you for being so accepting of my past. And thank you for teaching me so much about this new world I'm in. It has not been easy for you. You have had to endure the burden of loving someone who carries the burden of incarceration upon their soul. And, in that sense, you have been denied a part of me. You have also had to endure another part, the stress that has come with my research. You've made the sacrifices quietly, without complaint. That matters to me, and I appreciate you very much.

It would be inappropriate for me not to acknowledge those I harmed. I am sorry for the pain I inflicted upon you. No amount of effort, research or whatever else can atone for my actions that day...

As with the PhD itself, there is more that could be written here. But one must, at some point, lay one's pen down. All most of you ever asked of me is that I make it, get the PhD done and prove that change is possible. Well, lovely community of people who have helped me get this far, the Doctorate is done. And I am home. I can only hope my research, and I, have done your efforts justice...

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...identities within a society of captives are marginalized for one and about all. This is how the social person is reduced in being and repressed in becoming.... Overcoming the harm of this social dis-ease requires a journey through captivity's madness. (Arrigo, 2013, p. 684)

Prologue

On a journey into madness...

It is so cold this evening. Although it is only 8.30 pm, I've spent the last few hours in bed. With the light off. Procrastinating, dreading having to get up and make a start. As I toss and turn in the darkness the light outside my room comes on and, squinting out from beneath the covers, I see a guy I get along with really well pass by. I get on with him because beneath his body armour is a heart. And, unlike many, he lets me see and feel it. It's lonely here and most of the time it is hard to see into or imagine other, better worlds. Under such conditions one descends into a monotone, existential state. Knowing that the guy will be here for the night, somewhere, everywhere, made me feel a little better. He represents hope and, in here, hope is life. For me it is sanity and non-institutionalisation. Years have turned into decades, with hope becoming ever harder to grasp. When he walked past, though, I was reminded of a better world, a place where I could be with nice people – or at least be able to avoid tortured ones. His fleeting presence was enough to get me up. I am now sitting at my bench.

It's very dark and is raining heavily. The physicality of my surroundings prevents me from hearing the rain on the roof. However, several metres beyond my window is the roof-edge; I can hear the water cascading over it, falling three stories to the cracked concrete pavement below. The odd rumble of thunder in the distance breaks the silence between bouts of rain. Weather has always moved me and I thus cannot help but ponder the appropriateness of tonight's storm to my long doctoral journey. As with the one tonight, many storms lay ahead and, by the time we've navigated the madness, it is my hope that you will know and understand me. It is my hope that we'll have grown, each becoming something more through our meeting,

metaphorical/distanced/strained as it may prove to be. But that point is many seasons distant. Vast swathes of mountainous terrain stand between here and there.

This journey will be so much more than just academic...

For real. I need to develop understanding of myself. I occupy space in a place that very loud voices claim is about growth, about healing. The public are regularly reassured of this, as am I. Yet I am uneasy about these correctional and political meta-narratives; my body often does not feel cared for or grown, except perhaps in a musculature sense, a prisonised sense. In order to move, to rehabilitate, I need to know *why*. Why is there this gap/tension between what is supposed to happen to/with me and what is happening to me? Why is rehabilitation a fight? Why do I not feel like the person the dominant narratives tell me/us I am? What do those narratives mean for my rehabilitation? How can I speak back to these and have more say in my creation?

These are some of the key questions with which this research is concerned. As I embark on it, however, I worry... Do I have the tenacity to see the journey through? Do I possess the requisite academic prowess to do what has never before been done in this country – a doctorate from the inside?¹ By virtue of my acceptance and scholarship, the University certainly thinks so. But I'm wary of institutions. And besides, *mistakes happen*, so the University's confidence in me is not enough. I want to do this research. With all of my heart and soul. It is just that the latter has become so habitually wary, cynical and constrained that it is suspicious of the feasibility of possibility...

¹ Dr. Paul Wood began a PhD in prison, but did the majority of it upon release (Skelton, 2012).

Is
it
really
possible
for
the
research
of
a
k i l l e r
to
contribute
to
positive
change
within
the
criminal
justice
sector?

I am hypervigilantly aware that there are powerful experts who will assert that, no, it is not. *When I think of this, I begin feeling very small.* And, as will become clear throughout this journey, there are also other obstacles continually washing up against my body, threatening to overwhelm me. Sitting amidst the pain, I wander to where I'd like to be...

A cabin

*Perched high up on windswept cliffs, perhaps somewhere overlooking
the English Channel.
I've never actually been to the Channel,
or many other places.
But tattered issues of National Geographic enable many dreams.
My cabin is old, small and plain.
It consists of one room.*

*One door.
Rough-hewn planks provide a floor.
Walking across an unkempt field toward the cliff edge,
I enter,
walk across the small room,
seat myself at the worn wooden desk, standing in a corner.
There is a window in front of me,
another to my left.
I can hear and feel foamy seas bursting against black rocks far below.
The sky is dark,
rolling,
angry.
Rain occasionally splatters against thin panes of glass.
The cries of a solitary gull float in over wind-weary grass.
Quietly resisting nature,
a small open fire,
halfway along the wall behind me,
graceful as a choir.
As I sit writing, Macrocarpa spits and glows.²
The fire eases my woes,
calms my body's throes,
helps me confront the stories of institutional pain that will inform my
autoethnographic flow.*

Feeling the cold leech into my arms through the steel bench, looking at the names of past residents etched into its tired surface, I long for that cabin. Dreaming of

² Yes, thanks to reviewers' comments (including yours, Paul) I now know that there's no Macrocarpa in the United Kingdom. But, within a prison cell dreams are all I have. I can feel Ellis and Bochner (1996) whispering in my ear, pointing out the extent to which the inaccuracy of my dream illustrates its authenticity. And Arrigo (2013) whispering in the other, telling me how illustrative it is of the realness of my captivity.

it, I glance up at the porous blocks surrounding me, hoping to see the warm flickers of orange that I know are not there. Within the cabin's soft wooden walls lies peace. Within its atmosphere would rest the stability and safety necessary to entering the 'stream of consciousness' that, as will be seen, my methodology requires. I would feel considerably less overwhelmed by my personal and doctoral voyage were I sitting in the cabin, safe and with the soft glow of a computer screen to help ease the pains of academic labour.³ Of course, this journey I am embarking on would not be what it is were I not where I am. Alas, I must embrace my demons and face what is coming.

Contributing to my dis-ease are the practical difficulties. To type, I have a pen. To Email, I have envelopes. To discuss the complexities of postmodern, post-structural theories of psychological research, prisonisation and rehabilitation I have only myself, and the many voices lying therein. I am, though, used to talking to myself and, because I have no choice, cannot afford the luxury of diagnosing it as unhealthy.

Combined with these concerns regarding practical barriers such as my inability to type my work or converse with other students, there is the arguably more consuming issue of my cowardice. I'm scared. This research requires that I explore my body, analysing its movement in relation to institutional treatment. Such work necessitates that I attend to poor decisions that have been made, both by me and about me. I must analyse the places and spaces I have occupied throughout the state's occupation of me. I balk at the prospect of this. I have control over very little. But my stories, secret little moments, they're mine. Even the shrinks, with all their expert powers of persuasion,

³ Much of the writing for my thesis was completed long-hand in my cell at night. Precious computer time was reserved for producing final drafts.

haven't succeeded in getting there. I fear letting anyone in because, once they're in, the stories are out and I lose the shred of agency I presently hold.

Living in a contested, dangerously coerced space I have become adept at negotiating various selves, being the right person at the right time. For example, I have manipulated – pretended to be friends with people I do not like. I've worked to convince people in a particular space that I enjoy being a part of that space, when in fact I despise it. But this has all been okay as it is behaviour only I am aware of. This research will, already is, forcing me to shine light into hidden crevices I never believed would be exposed. I now face the prospect of not only having to re-visit them, but to share what I find. It does not feel good. I attempt to embolden myself through consideration of the importance of my research. For one, my narrative is focused on discovering and illustrating how correctional policy and practice works for real. Through the telling and analyses of my experience, I hope to show what it is *doing*. This is very important as there are few firsthand accounts of such issues in the literature (Austin & Irwin, 2012; Buck et al., 2024; Fassin, 2015/2017; Gaucher, 1998; Irwin, 2003; Jewkes, 2015; Newbold, et al., 2014; Ross & Richards, 2003). As I aim to demonstrate, such accounts are needed in order to develop more efficient, jurisprudential correctional policy. My research is also significant in terms of personal growth. Certainly, through its process I hope to grow bodily. I hope for the increased self-awareness, cognitive and emotional development that must surely come with deep analyses of one's self.

Despite these social justice and personally rehabilitative possibilities I am worried. I fear that in revealing various selves, I will put myself at risk of shame and criticism. There are moments and decisions that I am deeply ashamed of, others that I am ashamed not to be ashamed of. I fear what may eventuate in telling these. Certainly, many of my past selves and decisions are long-buried. Revisiting them is going to make

them real again, forcing me to acknowledge *me*. I suspect that engaging in this process is going to challenge current conceptualisations of myself, of my self-image. However, all I can do is suspect because I am embarking on the unknown. And that, perhaps, is the most disconcerting issue of all.

The carceral conditions producing my pain...

At the time I began this research, in 2018, I was still incarcerated. I'd served nearly sixteen years by then. Although having since been released on Life parole, I remain intensely connected to the pains of my incarceration. And, as is the case for most long-term prisoners I know, I fear I always will be. It is from those pains, and an ever-increasing concern regarding the state of our correctional system, that this research emerges. During my imprisonment, I experienced harmful outcomes both around and within me, and bore witness to numerous elements of that system, from educational policy to assessment practices to prisoner work schemes, being adversely affected by fear of risk. Further, conditions within the system have, in my experience, declined to alarming levels. And numerous Ombudsman's inspections, conducted at prisons around the country, strongly suggest that those conditions are a serious concern at a systemic level. For instance, it has been found that issues such as lack of programming, levels of institutional violence, long hours of lock-up, and poor facilities are of significant concern in many prisons within the Correction's estate (e.g., Boshier, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2022, 2023. See also: Harris, 2020; Miller, 2022; Sommerville, 2022; Whitten, 2021). Many of these issues have received national media attention (i.e., Cornish, 2022a; Dennett, 2021; Whitten, 2021). Such has the severity of the situation become that, at Waikeria Prison, one of the nation's largest jails, complaints regarding

living conditions led to a serious incident; over a six day period in December 2020, the entire high-security facility was destroyed by twenty prisoners amid protests over living conditions (Redstall, 2022). Despite Corrections' subsequent denial of the prisoners' claims, and characterisation of their behavior as riotous, wanton destruction, numerous other prisoners' from the jail have, since, substantiated the claims of the men who led the uprising. Perhaps most telling, however, is observations made by the Chief Ombudsman. Having conducted an unannounced inspection of the prison only twelve months earlier, his staff expressed significant concern, noting that, "Most tāne in the high security complex (HSC) were double-bunked in cells originally designed for one, and living conditions were poor. Tāne in the HSC were subject to a basic yard-to-cell regime and limited activities" (Boshier, 2020a, p. 1). The prison system's public discourse, following the Waikeria prison riot, is just one example of many I have witnessed wherein official narrative sanitises and strongly minimises the pain of lived reality behind prison walls. But, as will later be discussed, so rarely does long-term lived experience of our prisons make it over the wall that society largely knows no different, and so is captive to these dominant narratives.

These experiences and 'I-witnessings' are accompanied by alarming statistics. For instance, Aotearoa/New Zealand's prison muster reached an unprecedented 10,695 in February 2018, forcing the Department of Corrections to announce emergency accommodation measures, including plans to house prisoners on the floors of prison gymnasiums and in police cells (Stewart, 2018). And, indeed, by March 2017 the situation was becoming critical: the muster had ballooned to 10,820, with the nation's eighteen prisons then being so full that there were less than 50 vacant beds left across the entire prison estate (Walters, 2022). The financial cost of prisons is also of considerable concern, and long has been. In 2011 then Minister of Finance, Bill English,

stated that New Zealand’s prisons were “a moral and fiscal failure” (Fisher, 2018, p. 1). Yet, despite numerous senior Cabinet Ministers endorsing his statement and committing to address the issue, since 2005 the annual cost of operating our prisons has doubled (Gluckman, 2018), with prisons costing the country \$938 million to run in 2017 (Gathey, 2018). And, in the five years since the current government took office, these costs have not decreased. Indeed, the annual operating budget has risen \$140 million since 2018, being \$1.3 billion in most recent figures. Within this rise is the cost per prisoner, which had ballooned by 2022, to around \$150,000 per year. That is up \$30,000 per prisoner, per year, compared to 2018/2019 figures (Dahmen, 2022). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, in 2023 Police Minister, Ginny Anderson, drew attention to Mr English’s characterisation of our prison system, again stating that it is failing as a cost-effective solution to social problems (Truebridge, 2023). And, certainly, if rates of reoffending are anything to go by, the prison is surely failing. Despite the promises of successive governments, rates of reoffending have long remained unacceptably high, with around 37 percent of prisoners being reimprisoned within two years of release, and 50 percent of all prisoners within five years (Bakker & Riley, 1999; Department of Corrections [DOC], 2024; Johnston, 2016; Khanna, 2021; Mills et al., 2022; Ministry of Justice, 2023; Nadesu, 2009; Newbold, 2007; Radio New Zealand [RNZ], 2018). Further, less than a decade ago we had the second highest rate of incarceration in the OECD, with only the draconian penal policies of the United States producing a per-capita rate of incarceration higher than ours (JustSpeak, 2014; Khanna, 2021). Although it has since reduced, the rate at which New Zealand incarcerates its people continues to far surpass that of other Commonwealth nations (Boomen, 2018). Speaking in 2018 about the state of the prison system, Justice Minister Andrew Little described it as “stretched to breaking point” (Gathey, 2018, p. 2). MP Rawiri Waititi has gone even

further, noting in the wake of the Waikeria protest that “...the current system is broken and...continues to feast on the dysfunction it creates” (as cited in Rutherford, 2021, p 3). Combined with my insider experience of it as destructively risk-averse and harmful, these outcomes suggest that the prison is dangerously under-performing with respect to its obligations to society, rehabilitation in particular.

And, since my release, it appears the situation is only worsening. I was paroled in 2022, during the Covid outbreak in prisons. At that time, incarcerated life was dire: all visits and reintegration activities had long been suspended, along with almost all prisoner employment and programmes (Maher, 2022; Sherman, 2022; Smith, 2022). And, alarmingly, due largely to severe staff shortages, the amount of unlock time was drastically reduced. In some cases, prisoners were only getting out of their cells for an hour every few days (Burrows, 2022; Espiner, 2020a; Hunt, 2022; Leask, 2023). This received significant media attention and has been characterised as amounting, essentially, to solitary confinement (Espiner, 2020, 2020b, 2020c; People Against Prisons Aotearoa [PAPA], 2023). Corrections strenuously defended its position, pointing to the pandemic as the sole reason for the intense control measures (Burrows, 2022; Espiner, 2020c; Small, 2022). However, it is becoming clear that the ‘rolling locks,’⁴ lack of visits, and cessation of rehabilitation activities are no longer due to

⁴ ‘Rolling lock’ is a term used by both officers and prisoners to describe a particular style of regime. A rolling lock occurs when there are not enough staff available to unlock all prisoners within a unit at once, as would normally happen. Due to the need to maintain staff-inmate ratios, prisoners will be unlocked in small groups, each getting an hour out before staff ‘roll out’ the next group, and so on. In severe cases, one group of staff will move through not just one Unit doing this, but across several Units. For example, in one eight hour shift, they will progress through two separate Units, giving the forty men

Covid but are, in fact, symptomatic of a far more complex situation. I continue to communicate with people locked in the system, both prisoners and veteran prison staff. Having careers spanning three decades, the latter assure me that the prisons are in the worst state they've ever been, and are at breaking point. It is, they say, managerial dysfunction, staff retention and shortages that are the real problems, not the pandemic. And, indeed, as the country moves on from the Covid restrictions, largely returning to normal, the staff shortages in our prisons remain. They're crippling, and it is not simply a matter of officers being on leave due to Covid: there are over 500 full-time prison officer positions unfilled (Cornish, 2022a; Sherman, 2022; Small, 2022; Walters, 2022). Corrections' Association Union head, Floyd du Plessis, has defined the staffing crises as the worst it's ever been (as cited in Walters, 2022). With turnover at around fifteen percent it is, evidently, an issue of retention (Cornish, 2022a; Owen, 2024; Walters, 2022). Corrections' is losing prison officers faster than it can recruit them (Galuszka, 2022b). Indicative of the extent of the issue, when questioned in mainstream media as to why it has not got enough staff to facilitate family visits, Corrections' Deputy Chief Executive – Māori, argued, in 2022, that they are working harder on recruitment than ever before. Amidst this he mentioned that, "Last month was the first time, ah, in, in, in a number of months, that we've had, uh, more people recruit and stay with Corrections than we have leave" (Rameka, as cited in Forbes, 2022). And yet, eight months on, the staff shortages remain critical. Visits for many remain suspended (Smith, 2022). And certainly, the staff I've recently talked to are saying that institutions

in each an hour of unlock, in groups of ten. When on such a regime, it is excruciating. The staff will normally start with cell one, so will let out cells one to ten first. For the person who occupies a cell somewhere within the 31-40 range, it is a long wait)

still do not have enough prison officers to allow prisoners to be unlocked more than a few hours daily, let alone to facilitate rehabilitative activities such as employment and weekly family visits.⁵ Entire units in various prisons have had to be closed as there are no staff to secure them. The prisoners from these units are sent out across the prison estate to wherever beds can be found (Gourley, 2022; Pennington, 2022, October 9). This happened in the last unit I was in, at Auckland Prison. It, Unit 9, was the prison's only reintegration and working unit, and had thus been opened with considerable fanfare and anticipation. However, with Management subsequently removing the staff to fill gaps elsewhere, the unit was closed down, only a year after it opened.

We hear of the media reports of these issues, of the FACTS. But what of the *stories* from behind the walls, the lives? Imagine being told you have to pack your belongings and, within a few hours, leave your house... As you pack, you'll be wracked with pain, thinking of the friendships you're losing; friendships often carefully cultivated over many years, and that provide a semblance of normality, and safety. Suddenly, and without compassion, you are ripped from all these and sent off into a world of others' having, once again, to navigate the painful, damaging process of integrating, socially, culturally, politically, into a foreign cell-block, an environment almost certain to receive you with hostility. And lying in bed at night knowing that, now being many hundreds of kilometers away from your family, your children, you are unlikely to see them for a long time. Educational courses you were doing will end, no

⁵ At Auckland Maximum-Security prison, for example, due to severe staff shortages the entire maximum- and high-security divisions of the prison continue to be denied contact visits (Leask, 2023). The men confined there have not been able to see their families in person since 2021. As of writing, 2023, staff sources tell me there are seventy unfilled full time positions at the prison.

longer able to be completed once you are torn from support networks you, and others, have worked so hard to establish. I've been through this, and watched countless other prisoners have to go through it. When news of such moves come, the entire Unit will become tense. People gossip, pester staff, try and find out whether their name is 'on the list.' Those who aren't breathe very quiet sighs of relief. The less fortunate, however... Well, some will attempt to physically resist being moved, doing such things as barricading themselves in their cells (Wickcliffe, 2018); once staff get the door open, usually by tearing it off its heavy hinges with a hydraulic jack, the prisoner will be chained and carried out to the waiting escort van. Others will submit complaint forms, and/or call the prison complaints line. In my case, I enlisted the help of family, who in turn engaged the assistance of a local MP. I was fortunate: the MP contacted Corrections' Head Office, who saw the injustice that was occurring and promptly instructed the Prison Manager to leave me right where I was. But such intervention should not have been necessary. Just as it should not be necessary for a group of women incarcerated at Arohata Women's prison to have to file a High-Court lawsuit recently in an attempt to have their forced transfer blocked (Gourley, 2022). Their lawyers noted that the forced relocations (due to staffing shortages) were "discriminatory, disproportionate and contradict the department's policies on the treatment of Māori and women prisoners" (as cited in RNZ, 2022, p. 2).

Without doubt, these forced transfers are damaging. I will never forget the fear I felt when given orders regarding mine; the thought of being extricated from the safe haven I'd spent years creating for myself.. And my study: any transfer away from Auckland Prison, whose education staff had established the relationships with Massey University necessary for a person with no internet or computer access to do postgraduate study, would have been obliterated. That Prison Management considered

it morally and ethically legitimate to manage me in a way that would destroy my rehabilitative progress is deeply concerning. Yet, such are the conditions for those living within the dysfunction of our totalitarian, political and risk-focused system. And, indeed, I was one of the lucky ones. Very few have access to strong outside social and political support and so are unable to have unjust correctional practices overturned. Lacking access to any voices other than their own, these people are far more vulnerable to the whims of the correctional machine.

Contemplation of these conditions raises many important, and worrying, issues. How is it, for instance, that prison management have no time for the voices of their charges, yet suddenly seem to care when their own superiors do? That local Managers alter their decisions when National Office becomes involved strongly suggests not only that the validity of the decisions they're making is questionable, but that there is a strong disconnect between prison management at local and national levels. Certainly, given their overturning of local directives, it appears that Corrections' top bureaucrats are somewhat unaware of the happenings and lived realities of the prisons they oversee. Of most concern, however, is that the aforementioned complexities also indicate that prisoner management is being driven not by rehabilitative ideals and policy but by agendas and power relations. And yet, for the most part, we do not see this in mainstream media representations of the prison system. Rather, we are fed stories of factual excuses, of staff shortages, of health and safety factors, of *any* reason that creates the perception that, when it comes to their imposition of harsh, damaging and inhumane conditions, the hands of the captors are tied. Indeed, I intend to argue, and will illustrate, that those dominant representations, co-produced and intensely reified through mainstream news media, are purposefully used to render invisible other stories, of

political agenda, power, ambition and risk-adversity, that lurk in the shadows. Those conditions, we will see on this journey, infect every part of the prison, for one and all.

It is in this sense that the staff shortage narrative, employed so extensively by Corrections, is used to legitimise various restrictions, and has become so widely accepted. As *other* narratives/stories indicate, however, the staff shortages are merely a symptom (a serious one, nonetheless) of a complex, systemic dysfunction. A senior officer told me, soon after Corrections' implementation of the Covid-related restrictions, that "Management will be loving this" (Confidential source, personal communication, March 23, 2020). Although I had a fair idea what he meant, I asked him to elaborate. "Because they hate having to allow you lot things like visits, and programmes," the officer continued. "They see them as security risks and as too much of a privilege. Any excuse they can get to stop them, they'll jump on it and milk it for all it's worth. As they're doing now." The officer is not wrong. Two long years later, they're still 'milking it,' refusing to re-commence visits in many prisons, continuing to cite safety, and staff shortages. Further indicative of the underlying attitudes and risk-adversity fueling harmful prison policy and practice, well-known critic of the prison system, former prisoner Arthur Taylor, has spoken about the issue. He says that:

"I'm going to put it this way, if they wanted to get visits back tomorrow they could and would."

"I was in prison when we had the prison officers all go on strike. The navy came into Pāremoremo [Prison] and normal visits carried on exactly as before."

"The prison officers went on strike, the navy supervised it very well. So, it's not rocket science." (as cited in Smith, 2022, p. 2).

Of course, Corrections hates Taylor, according to inside sources, since he speaks such truths publicly. And that is not surprising: institutions of power often take a dim view of any discourse that questions their legitimacy (Arrigo, 2013; Foucault, 1977; Lyotard, 1984). Indeed, it is a key reason why prison staff so seldomly speak out against their conditions. And when they do, it is often only when those conditions have become overwhelming. It would appear that the situation at Auckland Prison has reached this point. Officers I've recently spoken with suggest that the staff retention problem there has a lot to do with working conditions, and a "toxic" management culture (Confidential source, personal communication, March 7, 2023; See also, Coughlin, 2023; Galuszka, 2022a; Keogh, 2023; Miller, 2022). It has been said, by those on the ground, that the Management and culture is so fractured the prison is a "powder-keg," ready to go off (Confidential source, personal communication, March 7, 2023; Confidential source, personal communication, May 18, 2023). All of these issues, I'm told, are contributing to significantly higher levels of tension and violence within the prison, and also to very low staff morale. And, indeed, the situation for Corrections Officers has been described by their Union as dire: "They're tired, their exhausted, [and] they don't feel valued..." (du Plessis, as cited in Small, 2022, p. 1). Just this week, families of prisoners in Auckland Prison spoke to media, saying that conditions there continue to be so severe they fear a Waikeria-like protest is inevitable if widespread reforms do not happen soon (McConnell, 2023). Bearing in mind that Auckland Prison is the country's only Maximum-Security facility, these issues are, quite frankly, deeply concerning.

As I hear these things, I feel so relieved that I got free of the place when I did. Such was the disastrous, dysfunctional and chaotic state of the system in the year leading up to my release that I thought it couldn't get any worse. Yet all indications are

that it is. And so, my concern has actually increased since being home. However, hearing of the worsening conditions is not the only reason for my growing concern. Rather, in now being in the world outside prison fences, I am closer to the political rhetoric proclaiming efficacy in our system. Through this new location, wherein I am free of the information constraints prison imposes, I am gaining another perspective on just how misrepresentative that rhetoric is from my experience behind the walls of our nation's prisons. For example, now having access to that incredibly powerful tool known as Google, I was recently able to watch a video clip in which a top Corrections' executive went to lengths to deny that the staffing issue was either a crisis, or symptomatic of deeper underlying issues (Sherman, 2022). How is it that there are such counter narratives, and such denial, by officials, of the conditions within the facilities they oversee? And how/why is it that mainstream media so readily peddle these damaging narratives? Narratives that deny, and render invisible, the harmful experiences of so many, staff and prisoners alike... It is issues such as these that motivate me to draw on particular poststructural theoretical frameworks to delve into the murky politics, power relations and media representations producing such harm and dysfunction.

It is so scary, and so concerning, to be bearing witness to narratives that are so far from describing the world I have just spent twenty years in. Certainly, the harms I witnessed during my incarceration, and that continue to plague the correctional system and the lives of those imprisoned within it, are occurring within a context of apparent penal reform and continued political emphasis on the prison as an effective rehabilitative solution (Bhamidipati, 2022; DOC, 2018, 2022; Gluckman, 2018; RNZ, 2024; Taylor, 2024). Indeed, the current Government ascended to power amidst promises of sweeping reforms. Both correctional and government narratives are

saturated with reform and efficiency-related rhetoric regarding policy improvement and offender-centric approaches to rehabilitation. Proposed changes included abandoning the idea of a \$1 billion Mega-Prison (Stewart, 2018), increasing the focus on rehabilitation and making drastic reductions to the burgeoning prison population, decreasing it by 30 percent over the next 15 years (Gathey, 2018). In 2019, Corrections launched a five-year strategy, Hōkai Rangi, through which it planned to achieve those objectives (Devlin, 2019; DOC, 2019). Extensive emphasis was given to Hōkai Rangi, and it continues to be applauded, at every turn, by the executive (i.e., DOC, 2022; Los'e, 2024; RNZ, 2020; Smith, 2021; Walters, 2022). Even amidst the misery discussed above, and the decimation of rehabilitation programmes and activities that is so clearly occurring, the official narrative refuses to make any meaningful acknowledgement of, or take any accountability for, Hōkai Rangi's failings (i.e., Johnsen, 2020, 2021; RNZ, 2020; Trafford, 2022; Walters, 2022). Instead, a narrative of great success stubbornly, and somewhat ridiculously, persists. In sharp contrast, reform advocates argue that Hōkai Rangi exists on paper only, and that 'sweeping' reforms are needed that go well beyond what the failed strategy proposes (Cornish, 2022b; Johnson, 2020).

In pursuit of these reforms, high profile criminal justice summits were held in 2018. And a panel of the nation's 'leading experts' has been convened to have an ongoing, national conversation about improving all aspects of the criminal justice system (Safe and Effective Justice, 2018). Whilst these efforts are important, I am concerned that they will fail to address a long-standing and significant void in the discussions and research regarding incarceration and rehabilitation. The 'expert' panel, for instance, is comprised of academics, lawyers, and a former policeman/politician (Safe and Effective Justice, 2018). What of those who are actually living in prisons, who are subjected to incarceration and 'rehabilitation'? Should not their perspectives

be given considerable space in the discussions? After all, it is reasonable to argue that their raw experiential knowledge of being locked in prison cells, being assessed for risk, and being positioned as dangerous, can make contributions of at least equal value to those of outside ‘experts’. Unfortunately, however, prisoners’ voices regarding experiences of imprisonment and rehabilitation are rarely heard in criminal justice debates (Ross & Richards, 2003). The situation in the academic literature is no better, with Bullock and Bunce (2018; see also Blagden et al., 2016; Morgan, 1999) noting that studies of prisoner rehabilitation “do not deal explicitly with how prisoners experience [it]” (p. 2).

My research seeks to write into this empirical gap. Utilising a critical, performative autoethnographic methodology, I will produce an account of life behind prison walls. This will connect stories of imprisonment and rehabilitation to dominant correctional and rehabilitative practices to show how they are experienced by a prisoner. Drawing on the Society of Captives [SOC] thesis (Arrigo, 2013) to interpret my experiences, it will be argued that the prison and all connected to it is/are being held captive by both a preoccupation with risk and a culturally-mediated fear of dangerousness. This, it will be proposed, is limiting the correctional focus to one of reduction and control in which the prisoner and their pains become invisible. I intend to develop connections between this focus and everyday prison life to illustrate particular ways in which the risk-focus is undermining the possibility of rehabilitation. Specifically, I will attempt to identify particular linguistic, symbolic, material and cultural forces/processes through which correctional risk-adversity is producing harm/prisonisation. Part of this work will involve a poststructural interrogation of the connection between dominant correctional and media narratives, and my body and identities. I aim to demonstrate that the misrepresentation of identity is one of the key

ways in which the prison is producing harmful outcomes. Through these discussions I will also work to show how the dysfunction of the prison, as seen in such issues as the staffing crises and restrictive conditions, connects to, and is being produced by, a complex interweave of competing political, social, financial and personal agendas.

As concerned as I am with producing knowledge that may contribute to the improvement of the prison as a means of rehabilitation, my research is also concerned with my own development. For example, in arguing that my identity has been appropriated I hope to not only reveal a process through which harm is being inflicted but to create movement within myself. Primarily, I aim to reconstruct elements of myself through being able to draw on interpretations and discourses other than the totalising correctional ones that have long positioned me as a dangerous, criminalised other. And that, as will be shown, heavily restricted my knowing of the (my) prison world to that of a convict. This autoethnographic process of contributing to the literature via the narration of my experiences aims to be empowering and healing, allowing my pains to be heard ‘for real’.⁶ Certainly, through problematising the construction of my ‘criminal’ identity, the research will show how risk and dangerousness are culturally constructed commodities rather than stable actualities. Such knowledge can contribute to freeing us from the totalising power of “hardened discursive forms and practices” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 25) and may help enable the correctional focus to move toward recognition and privileging of people and their pains for real (Arrigo, 2013). As I will argue, and as I expect my bodily movement/growth will illustrate, such a focus is fundamental if the prison is to be made more effective as a means of lowering criminal

⁶ Discussed by Johnson (2013) as essential to rehabilitative movement and recovery, I will be developing the ‘for real’ concept during my argument for an ethical, efficient approach to rehabilitation.

risk. These aims/arguments require attending to a number of questions, several of which I have already posed. Others will be introduced as this journey unfolds. Such is the embodied character of an (my) autoethnography that one's (my) story "almost certainly changes and grows as the author authors and re-authors their writing" (Grant et al., 2013, p. 2). Consequently, I know not the precise path my analysis will take.

Chapter One - Introduction

I have to say, it is unnerving, not knowing just where I, and this research, will go. Having spent so long in prison, I'm no stranger to uncertainty. Still, I avoid it where I can. Uncertainty is stressful. The idea of not knowing the areas, academic or otherwise, one must navigate through... Yeah, that is stressful. But it is also, as I have learnt through being exposed to things like sudden prison transfers, unavoidable.⁷ Alas, I just do my best, grasp on to whatever slither of assurance/safety I can, and pray things will work out. And what I can get some sort of momentary grip on, at this point, are the methods, analytical frameworks and processes my research draws on. Giving life to my research and making possible the possibility of becoming, it is important to now turn to consideration of these. Accordingly, the following chapter will discuss the society-of-captive's thesis. This will lead into consideration of autoethnography. Through discussion of these theories, I will explore the epistemological understandings that both inform them and enable them to work together as my metho...

Fuck

⁷ Transfers of prisoners, from one prison to another, often occur without warning. Particularly with well-settled, long-term prisoners, the system tends to worry they'll resist if given warning of a transfer. And so, whether due to prison capacity issues, or because staff just don't want that prisoner there anymore, transfers of individual prisoners tend to take place suddenly, and in the early hours.

I've been robbed of my place...

Fuck

Stabbing

The above paragraph was written on a Friday morning, when I was still up in 'Parry.'⁸ I had planned, as I began saying above, to move into the methodology of my research, beginning with a discussion of Arrigo's (2013) SOC thesis. This work was to begin around lunchtime, after getting out for some fresh air in the exercise yard. However, those plans were obliterated shortly after walking out of my cell door. I will return to the story of my methodology. But first, a story of the world within which the chapters regarding it were produced... An introduction to my world... What happened when I left my cell illustrates the chaos of prison, of how your body is never allowed to relax, to be at peace.

Fridays are always a short day for prisoners in New Zealand's prisons as the afternoons are reserved for staff meetings and administrative work. Every Friday (even public holidays) all prisoners except those with jobs are locked up at 11.30am and often left locked until Saturday morning. Consequently, things like our one-hour minimum unlock entitlements all have to be crammed into the morning. With the 48 prisoners in each cell-block divided into groups of 6, it is hard for the staff here in maxi to get everyone their turn in the yards between 9.30 and 11.30am.

It is a hectic regime. The yards are a 200 metre walk down three flights of stairs, along a fifty metre mesh-covered walkway, with six gates to pass through along the way. Intensifying the process even further, prisoners must be moved to and from the

⁸ 'Parry' is the term used by most within Aotearoa New Zealand's prison system, staff and prisoners alike, when referring to the nation's Maximum-Security prison. It is short for 'Pāremoremo.' Known as Pāremoremo Prison for decades, the institution's name was only changed to Auckland Prison in more recent times. Alas, although I make use of the various names, I am referring to the same prison.

yards individually. There are four yards so the screws⁹ have 24 prisoners in the yards – six in each – whilst the other 24 still inside are showered. The men are let out in groups of three to shower, for ten minutes. Once everyone has had their turn, we are swapped over. That is, everyone who was in the yards gets brought in for showers whilst those inside go out for yard time. Provided no-one stops along the walkway to yell out to their bros in the adjacent cell-block, we get 45 minutes in the yards. Usually, though, a half-dozen will stop to talk and on these occasions movements slow to a trickle. Yard time gets reduced to thirty minutes or so. It isn't much when there are six of you in the yard, all wanting to use the payphone. In such instances the physically strongest and/or most dominant egos of the yard will get on the phone first, with the quieter guys – the 'peasants' or 'chumps' – missing out. The latter will have to wait around 27 hours until yard time the following afternoon.

There have been moments/times where I've been a peasant. It's a long wait.

I dislike the Friday regime here in maxi. For me it is a morning of frustration, a quick breakfast of two Weetbix at 8.15am followed by pacing back and forth listening to countless doors clanking open and shut around me. Three paces forward, turn, three back, turn... Waiting for my door. One can follow each guy's progress to the yards because each of the six gates has a unique sound, with the fifty-year old remote-operated locks making a loud clang. Some of the grill gates squeak, others rattle. I think about the morning's writing as I pace. I'm happy with what I wrote. Three months into

⁹ 'Screw' is the term, widely used amongst prisoners in Aotearoa New Zealand, when referring to prison officers. The name came about due to the primary job of the prison officer being to turn, or 'screw,' their key in the locks of cell doors (Looser, 2001). Interestingly, many prison officers also refer to themselves, and colleagues, as 'screws.'

my Doctorate, it is the first proper drafting I have done; such has been the struggle to find my autoethnographic voice. I have fought to move beyond the traditional scientific research practice of separating everything into chunks, to do a conventional, linear write-up of my research. Gradually coming to terms with my methodology, autoethnography, this struggle is becoming more about traditional research habitus than lack of knowledge of alternative methods. It's still an issue though and I know that I'll attempt to retreat back into the comforting, familiar folds of positivist, realist rigidity during future struggles with my methodology. The present moment, however, can be characterised by a feeling of everything being 'all good'. I've got the tune, for the first time. And it feels great!

Embracing these new understandings, I was not as frustrated with the slow Friday regime as I would be normally. I planned to go to the yard, make a phone call to my Nan, then carry on writing once back in my cell. I used the time pacing to think about what I needed to do. Having at last found the beginning to my research, I know that I now need to attend to issues of methodology. I must describe the SOC thesis, autoethnography, and discuss the specifics of my approach to them. As I paced the 2.5 metres from the back wall of my cell to the barred cell-front, I decided that the best way to start all of this was with a discussion about my methodology emerging as part of a response to concerns regarding the realist knowledge assumptions underlying traditional ethnography. I expect to outline the issues with those traditional assumptions, before unpacking the poststructuralist and postmodernist context/theories within which both the SOC thesis, and autoethnography, are located. First, though, some fresh air ...

With a loud metallic clang the locking mechanism above my door released and it rattled open. My turn had come. The trip to the yard was uneventful, indistinguishable

from the hundreds of previous ones. Three guards are always stationed at the landing exit. One works the heavy iron grill gate that gives access to the landing, one operates the antiquated crank-handle mechanism that moves the cell doors, and the third screw conducts a frisk search of each body as it passes through to head down the stairwell. We exchange pleasantries as I approach. Opening the gate with a huge brass key to let me through, I take a few steps, turn and place my hands against the concrete wall. I have done this so many times that I could almost say that I am used to another man's hands rubbing themselves all over me. Almost. Rub-down done, the guard reaches over his shoulder and pulls the 'wand' (metal detector) from where he stores it, wedged down inside his stab-resistant-body-armour (SRBA). Pushed in there against his back, with the handle sticking out, it gives him the look of a sword-wielding Ninja. He waves the wand over me, front and back. I then kneel to put on my shoes, which have just been checked to ensure that there are no shanks hidden inside. I dislike these practices but do not begrudge the screws for carrying them out.

They are necessary where I live. As will soon become evident.

Cleared to go to the yard, I head down the stairs, through the double-gate sally-port in the basement, and down the long walkway that runs parallel to the cell-block. Guards follow my movements via CCTV and remotely open each gate as I approach. Everything around me is dull and grey, both the steel and concrete. The external walls of the towering cell-blocks either side of me have never been painted. The one exception to the drabness are the thick steel bars covering the ground-floor windows. Decades of rust and baking in the sun have forced most of the paint off but, if one happened to look closely, they'd see a bit of light blue colouring; a final stand amidst years of abuse and neglect. Within a minute I've reached the three guards stationed outside Yard 1, the last yard to be filled. As mechanical 'good mornings' are exchanged, the steel bolt

securing the yard gate shoots back, allowing one of the screws to pull the gate open. A heavy bracket mounted above the doorframe prevents the gate opening more than two feet so one has to turn sideways to pass through. In the past, those in the yards have rushed the gates as the screws unlocked them, trying to force their way out, to take control. The recently-fitted brackets eliminate this, permitting only one body through the narrow gap at a time.

I'm the last of our 'six' to get to the yard. With me safely inside, a screw slams the solid gate closed and they head back up to the block to help run the showering regime for the 24 prisoners still locked up. Someone is already on the payphone so I pace the yard, killing time. The yard is a perfect square, about ten meters from one end to the other, with 24 foot high concrete walls and galvanised steel mesh enclosing the top. There is a dirty steel toilet in one corner behind a metre-high barrier, the phone is bolted to the wall in the opposite corner. There are two foot-wide, three-foot long solid concrete seats nestled against one wall. About halfway along the wall from these seats is a pull-up bar and directly opposite that, a dip bar. A basketball hoop is also affixed to one of the walls. The hoops are rarely used though as only a couple of the four yards have balls – and they're pretty flat. It takes ten seconds or so to pace from one end of the yard to the other, but it is still good exercise. The endless turning gives one's legs a pretty good workout. Think of a Lion pacing up and down in its cage at the zoo...

My turn on the phone comes around quickly. I ring my Nan. Nothing particular to talk about today. I just check-in and see what is happening on the outside. As routine as these calls may be, they are significant to me. They remind me that there is a world beyond prison and that there are people in it who care about me. Many prisoners, most actually, are not so fortunate. I wonder how it feels for them, watching those of us who are lucky enough to have people to ring. I should spend more time considering their

plight, but I don't. I think the other struggles I have prevents me seeing theirs: We are all stuck in our little worlds of pain and deprivation. Phone call over with, the next guy in the queue jumps on and I resume pacing. Beneficial as the turns are for my leg muscles, I must take care because, being winter, the concrete floor is slippery, with puddles dotted here and there. I did not talk to the boys in the yard much this morning. My mind was on autoethnography. I knew that, whilst it has infinite variations, I had to find an approach to introducing and overviewing the field that did not generalise. That did not silence autoethnography's diversity. To attend to this it is important to focus on what the various examples share. I need to look for principles. During my engagement with numerous pieces, including research on workplace experience (i.e., Grant, 2013), gender marginalisation (i.e., Briggs, 2017) and experiences with bulimia (i.e., Tillmann- Healy, 1996), it became clear that autoethnographers are working from a similar set of assumptions around knowledge and its access. These are very different to the traditional positivist notions of truth and reality that postgraduate study of dominant research methodologies and 33 years of mainstream Western citizenship have instilled in me. As I thought of this, I realised that deconstructing those learnings will require attending to my self, to those parts of me involved in the maintenance of problematic epistemological views and assumptions. And, to do this, I recognised that I would, first, need to go into the society of captives theory [Arrigo, 2013], to draw on its focus on the connection between body, agency and governance. Exploration of those connections would/will help me understand how it is that I am moving – and being moved – in certain ways, sometimes problematic ways. Hmmm, just when I think I've lifted the lid on my self, I find that, under that lid, is another...

At some point amidst these thoughts I suddenly became uneasy and glanced at my watch. I saw that we had been in the yard just over an hour. This was very unusual;

the tightness of the Friday regime does not permit additional unlock time. As thoughts of study rescinded I became aware that it was rather quiet – those around me had obviously noticed, earlier than I, that something was up. The yards are bunched together in a row and normally quite noisy, with the sounds of intense cardiovascular and combat training emanating from them. You can always tell when the guys are doing this as the dull thuds of human bodies colliding carry from one yard to another. The usual routine is for men to pair up and take turns kicking each others' thighs and stomachs. This allows them to not only refine technique but also to condition themselves for fighting. It hurts and each strike is often followed by a strong exhalation. But not today. My first thought was that the screws must be doing a raid, tipping the cells for contraband and weapons. I then realised that this was unlikely given that half of the prisoners were still in their cells. Not long later I heard the buzz of the walkway gate as three screws arrived to begin shuffling us back inside. When my turn came, I asked why they were late.

“There’s been an incident”, one replied.

“Up or down?” I ask as I step out and adopt the position, ready to be frisked. Assuming the incident to be in our block, I wanted to know which of the two levels it had occurred on (the block is three-story, but the basement level consists of empty recreation rooms rather than cells). Having been in C Block for a year, I am pretty aware of the personalities and politics of the place. So the apparent ‘incident’ surprised me as I had not known something was afoot.

“Nah, D Block” a different screw replied. “Most of our staff have been over there responding to it”, he continued. “That’s why the routine’s all fucked up.” Giving furtive glances to one another, and running late, it was clear the officers were uncomfortable and did not want to elaborate. No matter. I knew I could extract specifics

from a screw upstairs so, taking my hands from the wall, I turned and headed up the walkway.

How does one find their autoethnographic voice amidst such chaos, I wonder? How do I maintain a process of shifting from a binaristic/separatist relationship with my methodology to an embodied, holistic autoethnographic self? It is possible that what I require to achieve such consciousness (clarity, space to be) can be found in what I dream of having? I dream of peace a lot. In particular, what it would feel like to live without fear of violence, what it'd be like to begin a week of study certain that the likelihood of witnessing violence, being violent, being smashed in the face, is very low. I wonder how much easier it would be to concentrate on my study? I could at any time be a witness, target, and/or perpetrator of prison violence. Today's incident will ensure that I do not forget this. It is never possible to ascertain where it may come from, or when. Living in such uncertainty for so long has shredded my nerves: I tend to get paranoid and am easily frustrated. Most prisoners around me are paranoid. I participate in their paranoid fantasies (but they could be true) weekly. And the screws are suspicious of my/our paranoia. So it is important to be paranoid. You will never see the fists and shanks coming if you are not. I am lucky that, having lived this way for so long, I rarely recognise it as twisted or fucked up. Opening up and acknowledging the twistedness of my life would, I fear, be too stressful as I would want to resist and avoid a reality that cannot be avoided. Well, at least for as long as I have to maintain that particular life. So I normalise it.

How I am going to get through this autoethnography, then, I have no idea...

In these early stages, wanting to introduce my research methodology and work through the conditions of its emergence, I console myself with the knowledge that I do not have to 'go there' just yet. But I know the requirement to open up, to turn inwards

(Rodriguez et al., 2017; Tarisayi, 2023), is coming and I fear it. It is going to mean showing you my various selves, which means I will have to re-know all of them too. So we're not going too deep too soon. And besides, at this point, I doubt that I have the necessary awareness to get us there. Damn, I have become erratic and have lost my place. But I am not apologising for what some may call unscholarly incoherence. Three days ago I had a plan and I had found the tune needed to begin presenting my methodology. But it was taken from me.

The suspicion, apprehension and anxiety I began to feel as I headed in from the yard was not misplaced. As I walked into my cell and the door slid shut behind me, I thought about how tense and preoccupied the officers were. With the exception of the kitchen workers from A Block, the entire institution was locked down by 11.40am. There will be no general unlock until 1.00pm tomorrow. I'm lucky, though. Being a 'mess man' I was allowed out at about 3.00pm. My job involves filling the hot water jugs, making the tea, and carrying the 48 hospital-style dinner trays up from the basement to each of the four landings. I set about doing this. Most of the staff throughout the prison had been called to D Block to shift 'crims'¹⁰, and to carry out a full search of that unit. Only two staff had been left behind to sort dinner, and they were stressed out. There was no peace. The block had gone very quiet over lunch and into the afternoon. But once the men detected a bit of activity following my unlock, they stirred. The most accurate indicator of impending activity is the slamming of the sliding grill that leads, from the stairwell, into the top-floor landing. Whenever there is an incident and

¹⁰ A slang term, used by some old-school staff and prisoners, to refer to prisoners by their status as criminals.

lockdown, we always listen for it. If one listens carefully enough, the grill can be heard from any of the 24 cells on the top floor. The guys were pretty hyper – no doubt agitated at the disruption to the routine, and feeding off of the negativity and tension saturating the atmosphere. A few kicked their cell doors and yelled out. I suggested to Matt that he and Steph feed-out on the middle landings whilst I do the top two. Normally the six staff assigned to each Block distribute the meal trays but, circumstances being what they were, Matt agreed.

As I served the trays and hot water, the men bombarded me with questions. We prisoners have an intense need to know what is happening when something goes down. This interest is largely self-centered: does the incident involve me? Can I benefit from it? Could there be consequences for me?

“Lion¹¹ got stabbed-up bro”, I replied to his question as I slid a tray in to the man in the first cell.

“By who?” one of the guys further down the landing asked.

“The C”, I said as I moved down the landing, pushing the dinner trolley. Some of the men were crouched down at their food slots talking, and those in cells further down were calling out. Aware that information relating to the incident was now approaching, they were desperate to know. Everyone was talking over everyone else, clamouring to ask others what I’d said before I’d even finished saying it. Some sounded contemplative. For others it was just a buzz. I did not feel the same way. I have committed serious acts of violence and have been walking prison corridors longer than most of these prisoners. But I want something more. Something beyond violence and

¹¹ All people appearing in stories, throughout my research, are given pseudonyms.

incarceration. Having reached cell twelve I turned and headed back down the landing to do the other side. Near the front, a guy stopped me and asked, again, what had gone down. I reiterated all that I'd managed to find out earlier in the day, when I'd come in from the yard. He knows The C and, wanting to indicate that he is 'in the know,' commented that The C's home-made knife was a long one and that he'd have "gone hard", going for "eye and face shots". As I went around and reloaded the dinner trolley, I felt troubled at the interest with which I received his comments. I resented the stabbing. I do not like that sort of thing, least of all because it makes me feel as though positive growth is impossible. As though peace is impossible. It has reminded me of the fragility of my existence, that anything can, and does, happen in here and that I must never allow myself to become too relaxed or at peace. This, as will become clear to me through this research, has consequences for who I can be.

I have been around, and occasionally engaged in such chaotic behaviour for so long that it seems normal to me. It is, I think, within this normalisation that the above paradox resides: I don't like the violence and want something better, yet was still interested – intrigued even – to hear about it. Given the years of proximity to it, I can function relatively unaffected by it. Several incidents over the last week convince me of this. For one, there is a big shank on our landing somewhere – one of two prisoners has it. But that is okay. I know enough about them and am vigilant enough to handle any issue there. My paranoia serves me well. Secondly, just the other day one of the five other prisoners I mix with exploded into a rage during medical-round, smashing his chair up against the bars of his cell door and screaming at the screws outside to "open the fucking door". Interestingly, this man has named himself after the brand of knife he used to attack his victim. On several occasions, I've heard him boasting, in the

yard, about his actions. It largely unaffected me.¹² Further indicative of my conditioning to the violence, about four days ago a guy on the landing behind us refused to get locked up. Additional staff had to come upstairs to get him into his cell and it created a bit of a scene, a lot of yelling and aggression. But whatever. I see how far I have come, or how dehumanised I have become (depending on perspective), when inexperienced prisoners are sent here. They ask to go to the At-Risk Unit; they cannot deal with the violent events, with the constant noise the place creates in one's body. I went to the At-Risk Unit once.

But not anymore.

Sometimes I can even study through such chaos, getting myself into that special place in which real academic flair emerges. I suspect, though, that there is some psychological price to pay for being able to continually absorb craziness and stress without obvious affect. Surely I have to have lost or relinquished some part of myself to be able to maintain sanity amidst insanity? I do wonder, though, if one would actually be able to tell if they'd gone insane? The sliver of reflexivity I can muster here suggests to me that were I taken and placed amidst people outside of prison, they'd fairly easily see the losses that my coping strategies are hiding from me.

Having taken all the empty trays back downstairs for the kitchen staff to collect, I have a quick shower and am then locked up. The two staff head off to D Block to assist with the drama. It is about 4.20pm. Normally I would eat my dinner, watch The Simpsons at 5.00pm, then study. I love that show. The light-heartedness and utter

¹² In an earlier draft, I mentioned the crime specifically. However, the brutality of the story far exceeds any value that breathing it could offer.

ridiculousness of it helps me shift the part of myself that I have control over into the more civilised, calmer space I need to be in to study. But there will be no transition into peace tonight. The day's events have me firmly in their grip, reminding me that, whatever else I may want and try to be, I am a convict first. Sometime around 9.30 this morning three gang members in D Block attacked Lion. As told to me by staff who responded to the incident, one attacker king-hit him whilst another tackled his legs. The third, the main assailant, then went at him with a shank, stabbing him in the eye, neck, and arms. Word is that he may lose his eye, and the tendons in one arm were hacked through, almost severing the limb. Lion has already had a limb amputated as a consequence of criminal violence, so the arm would have been his second. There was blood all over the landing and Lion was down when the screws arrived. He was rushed to hospital by ambulance and is expected to be there some time.

My plan to come in from the yard and begin writing about the theoretical frameworks of my research is over. It has been taken from me, very much against my will. The clarity and tune I'd found earlier are gone and with it the ability to write about anything other than how I feel. It frustrates me to lose something I worked so hard to find. I do not think, though, that the loss of one day's clarity is the salient issue right now. More pressing is that I am back to questioning the wisdom of enrolling in a Doctorate. How can I possibly expect to get through one in here given the chaotic shit that characterises incarceration?

Am I deluding myself in thinking that I can get my mind away from prison whilst in prison?

I'm tired. My thoughts are fleeting; coherence seems impossible. I am literally writing these sentences as they come to mind. And they will not be edited for dramatic effect – a convention autoethnographers' do engage in when appropriate. I should be

making more of an effort to employ these conventions. As I keep saying, I should be weaving together discussions of the society of captive, and autethnographic theories. I should be delving into the epistemological assumptions informing them, and discussing the ways the two theories intertwine and work together, beautifully, to enable my methodology. But I just cannot. I am too disturbed by the loss of my agency.

The stabbing of Lion has not touched me at all but has also touched me deeply. I've been stabbed by the madness too. In this moment I'm super-conscious of my mortality, of my limited ability to protect my life and sanity from those society holds to be the nation's most dangerous men. I mean, if Lion's not safe, who the hell is? Referred to by most of us here in the maximum-security prison as 'Lion' due to his hulk-like size, Lion is serving two life sentences and is one of the most feared convicts in the system. I have heard screws speak of him as 'untouchable'. So I am being consumed by a state of hypervigilance at the moment, thinking I could be invaded at any time, wondering how I will be able to achieve my goals in such conditions. I feel like the civilian citizen who, bombarded by continual reports of rising crime in the media, becomes preoccupied with the possibility of becoming a victim. But at least the outside citizen can go and buy more locks for their doors and can rely on neighbours to help with surveillance. I'll just have to keep doing combat conditioning in the yard, keep running my own one-man surveillance operation...

Ah, surveillance... Yes. Instead of studying, I monitor the atmosphere for possible conversations. If I detect one, I will listen. There are various methods of cell to cell communication. In some prisons one can talk through the air vents or drain pipes. Another effective method is for both parties to empty the water from their toilet bowls and then talk into the bowl. This makes for a very clear conversation, even if your cells are far apart. Whether it involves scooping the water out of my toilet or crouching

at my air-vent for hours on end, I will attempt to monitor all that is said. Prisoners do not talk about the weather during those conversations. And, for this reason, nor will I be the only person listening. During the quieter periods – sometimes months – the conversations become less frequent and the need to monitor less intense. Today's stabbing, however, has increased the danger-level and the need to run surveillance is high. This behaviour is an embodiment of paranoia and loss of agency. I need, not want, to do it. I am powerless in this moment. It is not nice to sit on the floor, huddled over the stained toilet bowl, head turned sideways to hear better. As I process the echoing, far-away whispers, another part of me sees across to my bench where my books and pad are sitting. Where I should be sitting. I want to be there, but I need to be here.

Only once over the years have I ever detected my name. I was a new arrival to C Block, Parry, in 2011. The landing (as with the whole Block) was filled with gangsters and, as I lay listening to several talk that night, I heard someone say something like “I don't like that new fulla's fucken face”. I etched the voice in my mind and the next day identified its owner, a mean-looking Mongrel Mob Rogue patch member. I was well aware that the majority of the twelve bodies on the landing would have heard his comment and that eyes would be on me at morning unlock. A conflict would surely come unless I devised a plan. Watching the mobster closely I saw, over the next day or two, that he was thoroughly immersed in prison culture and enjoyed discussing anything prison-related. So, despite the boundaries created by his foul-mask and my clean face, by his warrior-ness and my whiteness, I saw some commonality between us and exploited it. Looking in through my cell bars several days later, he enquired, bluntly, about the books on my shelf. Selecting one of the more visceral accounts of prison I had amongst my textbooks, I turned to the bars and asked if he'd like to read it. Although suspicious, he accepted it with a tight “shot bro.” That first encounter heralded the

beginning of a friendship that, seven years later, remains strong. But had I not heard what he said that long night in 2011, I'd likely not have engaged with him and, having no reason not to, he would have acted on his initial reaction of dislike and attacked me. So my hypervigilant listening behaviour and possession of prison literature served me well that day.

Several days have passed since the stabbing. Things have settled a little, though we have not yet heard why it went down. Was the attack over something trivial, or was it a hit? Everyone wants to know, and in time we will. In the interim, I must capitalise on the relative peace that has descended and tell the story of my methodology. I will, as first said a long breath ago, begin with a discussion of Arrigo's (2013) SOC thesis. From there will come chapters on autoethnography, and the ethical framework of my research. Whilst each has its own chapter, it will become clear that the theories informing my research are deeply intertwined, and share important epistemological principles. Through these we will come to understand how it is that one's self is able to be a location for research, and how it is that that location is analysed, and knowledge produced through it.

Chapter Two - On the Society-of-Captives, and life within...

I'm sitting here playing with one of my locks. I'll talk more about my lock interest, and the trouble it caused me, later. I only mention it now as, amidst admiring my lock, handling it, turning the key back and forth, memories are emerging of how I never used to be able to entertain my interest in locks, or even mention them. That I can, now, is reminding me of how intensely the system often responds to healthy behavior, difference and human potential. And that leads me to think of Arrigo's (2013) contention that we all reside within a society of captives, wherein people are categorised, commodified, and managed according to rigidly defined cultural and social rules. Contemplating this, it is hard not to wander back to prison considering that it is, after all, perhaps the most intrusive/powerful mechanism through which those rules are enforced. Indeed, when I look back over my life within our risk-based correctional system, I see how extensively, and with such totality, I was risk-assessed, and managed according to that risk. It dominated every aspect of my life, from sentencing and induction into prison, through to rehabilitation, ability to work, access compassionate visits, to restrictions on the sorts, and number, of books I could have in my cell... Even this PhD, as rehabilitative as it is, provoked more risk assessment and management than I care to think about. In every single one of these areas, life has been a desperate, often maddening struggle. It seemed that every step forward I tried to take was mired in bureaucracy, in hoop-jumping and, usually, in "DECLINED" responses from the Man. And the continual risk assessment and assignation to various categories of "dangerousness" and apparent high criminal risk led to me being known in particular

ways which, in turn, heavily dictated the extent to which I could be. Certainly, I could only ever move within the tightly controlled parameters of whichever category I was locked. Beyond the provision of vague, ‘catch-all’ reasons like ‘escape-risk,’ and ‘unknown quantity,’ those who were doing the locking did little to explain to me why I was being allocated to particular categories. In that sense, my interest in locks served me well: I came to learn that I could gauge how the system was seeing me through the quality of the locks it used to contain me.

It took a very long time for those locks to become smaller.

For a long time, there was little understanding or reflexive consideration of these machinations of the system. I did not think critically, nor did I question the narrative, or my assessment and treatment. When prison managers said “That’s just how the system works,” I simply thought, well, that *must* be how it works. I have always been a free spirit but I deferred, complied (mostly), and just ran with the only other narrative available to me, that of my fellow prisoners, which suggested that, “The system’s fucked bro. Just gotta roll with it.” And so I remained ignorant, of both my docility and of the injustices being perpetuated. Not until 2013, eleven long years into my sentence, did I begin to awaken to the plight I was in. And it was a plight, I would come to learn, that affects us all, prisoners, prison staff, and wider society alike.

In the final year of my undergraduate studies, I came across a course the likes of which I’d never encountered before. It was in the realm of psychology, forensic psychology in particular. Yet it did not approach issues in the typically clinical, rigid way that I’d become so accustomed to, both through previous study and years of experience of the practice of correctional clinical psychology. Instead, it took on a

refreshing criticality, amongst which it actually reasoned that through a risk-saturated approach, correctional psychology, in practice, is participating in the production of a society of captives within which multiple layers of harm are being perpetuated. That recognition deeply resonated with me as it was such a validation of my own experiences and witnessing of correctional psychology. It made new narratives possible and enabled me to see that my situation, and the risk/dangerousness categories I was positioned in, were being driven by something more than any inherent deficit or issue within me. Perhaps of even more importance with regard to empowering me is that the course encouraged me to look for the relationships between institutions and individuals, and the ways in which these work to produce the dysfunction and harm so rampant throughout our system. Indeed, it pushed me further than that, also delving into why those relationships and harmful productions are as they are. To do this work, the course took me into a world that was, then, very foreign to my hitherto captive self. Recognising that I first needed to understand the principles of knowledge, of what is considered legitimate, illegitimate, and *why*, before I could properly understand and navigate critical theories of prisonisation such as the SOC thesis, it focused on the epistemological and ontological principles through which those theories emerge and through which, I would come to learn, policy, practice and experience within our system is shaped. I thus embarked on what has become a long, continuing journey into post-modernist, post-structural ways of approaching our world. All of that work, and resulting movement, has been so important to this research, to unpacking and embracing the theoretical perspectives necessary to its production, necessary to my liberation and ability to recognise not only myself and my production as a being of risk, but my right to be accountable to myself – to resist that production, to speak, and *be*, in *other* ways. Central as these principles are to the emergence and development of the SOC thesis,

and thus to my methodology and development, it is important we consider them. Indeed, it was through them that my introduction to both the SOC thesis, and autoethnography, occurred.

An epistemological turn...

I still remember the beginnings of my engagement with postmodern theory. The memories are rather vivid, both due to what I found to be the sheer complexity of the theory and the outcomes it would have for me once I finally managed to make some sense of it, and then find my place within it. My sense-making began to really develop once I came to understand that the postmodern approach emphasises critical analyses of the conditions shaping knowledge (Hook, 2008; Lyotard, 1984; Richardson, 2000). That theme challenged so much of what I'd learnt, and thought I knew of the world as a place where meta-narratives and institutions were held to be unquestionable. Yet, once I got my head around it, I recognised that the postmodern focus not only allows me to reveal the culturally constructed and partial character of the knowledge shaping my imprisonment and subject location but also enables me, and us, to see how dominant, totalising knowledge forms significantly reduce the possibility of alternative epistemologies and ways of being. I'm going to show you how it is through this focus that it becomes possible to 'write back,' to challenge meta-narratives through production of the sort of alternative account I am weaving together in this PhD. This 'narrative turn' and the emancipatory potential it creates are at the center of the postmodern approach (Epstein, 1995; Lyotard & Brügger, 2001; McHale, 1988; Sparkes, 2024; Valentini, 2019).

To problematise positivist notions of knowledge as total and objective, postmodern enquiry draws attention to the development of knowledge. This focus is particularly powerful as it enables me as researcher to see knowledge as emerging through a combination of conditions that nullify the possibility of universality (Cosgrove, 2003). For example, in arguing that knowledge develops in a haphazard, often accidental fashion, Foucaultian theory allows us to see that it is fragile, fluid, and fragmented (Abi-Rached & Rose, 2010). In taking this view, postmodern theory thus shifts the focus from trying to capture a subject definitively to that subject's 'dissolution', whereby the various events/discourses that produce it become the focus of research (Denzin, 1986). Hook (2005) calls those events "vector[s] of forces" (p. 16), the 'conditions of emergence' that give rise to what traditional approaches call 'constructs' or objects of study. These conditions can include any number of structures, be they political, social, historical, and/or technological (Arrigo, 2013; Gergen, 2001; Hook, 2005). With respect to this research we have already encountered many, from prison events and culture to correctional bureaucracy and discourse, as well as to technologies of incarceration that control my body (and sometimes mind), such as security classification.

Poststructural theory is important here. As a "particular kind of postmodernist thinking" (Richardson, 2000, p. 8), poststructuralism shares a thread with social constructionism in its emphasis on discourse as a site of meaning-making. However, a specific function of the poststructural approach is that it brings a criticality to the analysis of language/knowledge. Indeed, it critiques the conditions underlying knowledge constructions, drawing attention to the cultural rules, political motives and power structures within which meaning is discursively formed (Parker, 2013; Richardson, 2000). For example, poststructural analysis involves asking such questions

as who is speaking, who can be heard, and who is served in/by a particular narrative (Gergen, 2001; Muncey, 2005)? This critical approach not only enables us to see how knowledge/reality is mediated by, and thus located in, culture (Rosenberg, 2003) but that, far from being value-neutral or “iron-clad” (Mitra, 2010, p. 5), it is often used deliberately in order to achieve specific agendas. Illustrating this argument, Arrigo (2013) points to the ways that the identities and experiences of incarcerated people tend to be appropriated by traditional scientific (and so Western, neoliberal) and correctional/institutional narratives. This, he notes, has involved the histories of imprisoned people being constructed/represented in a manner that both denies societal (i.e., poverty, colonisation, victimisation) and correctional harms perpetrated upon them whilst simultaneously legitimising and thus facilitating a continuation of those harms. It is in this sense, Mitra (2010) asserts that ‘expert’ discourse works to minimise the socio-political structures underlying harmful knowledge constructions. The poststructural critique of such structure and discourse is, therefore, especially important to the work I’m doing to problematise the relationships between correctional/media narratives and my subject position. Through being able to identify and position the dominant narratives and institutional discourse I’m exposed to as problematic, I become able to then unpack them such that we can not only better understand the harms they are producing but, through that understanding, empower ourselves to move to better places.

In terms of what it enables, another central aspect of the postmodern framework upon which my research draws concerns its emphasis on the ways in which the dominance of one form of knowledge can reduce the possibility of alternative epistemologies. The marginalisation of knowledge can result from any number of things, from the sort of harm-denying agenda supposedly objective science pursues, to

the imposition of realist perspectives, which view experiential knowledge as value-laden, and thus biased. Consideration of medical definitions of disorder, emerging from a positivist, empiricist epistemology, provides an illustration of the latter. It has been observed, for instance, that medical professionals tend not to take much interest in the experiences of the diagnosed community as such knowledge is disregarded as lacking academic rigor (Coyle, 2007; Jones et al., 2021; Moloney, 2010). It is through this delegitimisation of certain knowledge forms that meaning-making is held to be “inseparably bound with the practice and maintenance of institutional power” (Hook, 2005, p. 6). One result of this power is that qualitative accounts privileging social context and lived experience have been repressed (Gergen, 2001; Parker, 2013). Another is that knowledge becomes unnaturally disembodied as the human body, in its inherent emotionality and thus subjectivity, is rendered illegitimate and unrepresentable within the scientific realm (Lyotard, 1984; Tamanui, 2012; Tierney, 2000).

With respect to research on prisoner rehabilitation, disembodiment and dismissal of experiential knowledge has significant consequences. It has, for example, contributed to an almost total lack of prisoner voice/experience in the rehabilitation literature (Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Ross & Richards, 2003). Of more concern, however, is that it is producing negative outcomes in less visible locations, behind prison walls. I can attest to this, *personally*. In the following notes, written several years ago in reaction to my reading of Tillman-Healy’s (1996) discussion of medical disinterest in lived experience of bulimia, I ponder the impact that lack of consideration of prisoner (experiential) perspectives in rehabilitation theory has had for me when engaging in psychotherapy.

... you will not find accounts of the experience of prisonisation, of what it feels like and means to be incarcerated and prisonised, in the correctional clinical psychological literature. [Indeed], there is a strong lack of attention to the emotional and cultural experience of imprisonment, and how that experience can criminalise. They [the psychologists] appear to have little interest in our experience. I detect this in the significant lack of attention given to our opinions regarding the influence of prisonisation on our behaviour and attitudes. At best they'll listen, body twitching in disagreement, before saying, "You can't worry about all that". "You've just got to get over all that and do what's right..."

What is right in their world is often wrong (and dangerous) in mine.

Their denial of my reality is infuriating and I have found, at times, that in response to these denials I exaggerate my prisonised behaviour deliberately – my version of 'Fuck You.' The lack of recognition of my world can [therefore] be a significant barrier to rehabilitation: both in terms of [the therapists'] understanding of the issues to address and my receptivity to their change efforts. In refusing to enter or acknowledge my reality I will be vastly less likely to enter theirs.

I suspect that an important reason for the psychs' denials/minimisations is that real acknowledgement of the effects of imprisonment would place some of the responsibility for prisonisation at the institution's doorstep. The system obviously does not want to take responsibility for that,¹³ so shuns any suggestion of the connection. Accordingly, the prisoner who dares introduce the role prisonisation has played in his

¹³ Why not? What might it mean for them, their methods? Hmm...

*antisocial behaviour is a brave soul for he will be told he his justifying, that he is the one minimising.*¹⁴

My reflections at the time, illustrate the postmodern argument (i.e., Gergen, 2001; Muncey, 2005) that dominant knowledge forms can lead to the misrepresentation and/or silencing of the worldviews/experiences of minority groups. They also show how the suppression of experiential perspectives may be hindering the efficacy of rehabilitation approaches. Certainly, my body's throes as a target/subject of that suppression illustrate how the lack of consideration of a prisoner's conditions of incarceration produces pain and so threatens to alienate them/me from those tasked to help them/me. These instances raise questions about the effectiveness of the current correctional approach to rehabilitation and, ultimately, therefore, of the prison institution as a mechanism designed to contribute to community safety via the fostering of human potential. And they are but a few of the instances I've experienced that illustrate the harms undergoing psychological treatment in prison can involve; there are many stories to come...

For me, the most powerful aspect of the postmodern principles and arguments I am discussing is that they create space for alternative interpretations, for those stories I am now able to tell. When we consider knowledge as socially constructed, and mediated through language, movement/change becomes possible. Certainly, in opening spaces for other perspectives postmodern theory enables a process of critical analysis and

¹⁴ I am very uncomfortable with the gender specificity here, having left 'she' out only on the basis that I have no information regarding the approach to, or experience of, rehabilitation in women's prisons.

deconstruction through which we can reassert ourselves (Cosgrove, 2003; Parker, 2013; Tierney, 2000). One way that it has become possible to break free of hitherto unquestionable representations of both ourselves and our world is by writing back. This involves problematising dominant, totalising forms of knowledge by challenging the traditional writing practices which give rise to them (Richardson, 2000). Emphasis is placed on the researcher as a “situated speaker, [a] subjectivit[y] engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it” (Richardson, 2000, p. 8). Accordingly, within that climate research becomes about producing localised, partial narratives; stories that recognise the cultural diversity and multiplicity that characterises our world and ourselves as inextricable parts of it. Through writing back it becomes possible for the researcher, for me, to be seen in their work, and even for that work to be about themselves, about their experiences (Douglas, 2013; Hernandez et al., 2022; Spry, 2001; Whitinui, 2014). And, of great significance to me given my desire to challenge institutional positionings of my body, at the center of the postmodern agenda is liberation, whereby the marginalised can draw on postmodern perspectives to destabilise narratives that have long held their identities captive (Spry, 2001; Tierney, 2000). My research is an embodiment of all of these possibilities. Certainly, it is to this place, of agency, that that undergraduate psychology course, taken in a cold, concrete prison cell so many years ago, has led me.

As I ponder this I am aware that, whilst postmodern theory is helping me become possible, it has also laid at my feet great responsibility. Indeed, and as we’ll see as I discuss the two main postmodern theories that enable my research, I must use that agency not only in service of my own possibility but as part of a wider postmodern pursuit of the allowance, and celebration, of difference. “Let us wage war on totality”, Lyotard (1984, p. 82) writes; “let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate

the differences...” (p. 82). In the forty years since Lyotard’s call to arms, postmodernists have contributed to the liberation of much of the occupied territory that so concerned him, with the ‘self as subject’ well represented in the academic literature by the turn of the 21st Century (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Unfortunately, however, enclaves of indifference to difference remain. Through the SOC thesis I am taking us within one of these – the prison.

The Society of Captives thesis and I...

It seems so long ago, the time when I took the undergraduate course that, unbeknownst to me, would introduce me to the SOC thesis and all it has made possible. So much movement has occurred since then. I have changed so much. I’m no longer locked in a concrete cell. Indeed, I’m no longer in a physical prison at all. Rather, my personal becoming has reached a point wherein I have progressed from my own incarcerated grappling with the SOC thesis to now being able to enjoy the privilege of lecturing students taking the very same course I once did. To be able to contribute to their introduction to the SOC thesis feels...unbelievable. It also feels necessary and fulfilling in that I feel I am holding myself to account to the SOC thesis’ calls for resistance, for us to become active in pursuit of change; where the SOC thesis has awakened and enabled me, it is ethically important that I play my part, to help awaken and enable others. We will revisit/unpack this story of my movement and teaching a little later. For now it is enough to say, wow, both my conditions and person have improved so much, in and through the SOC thesis. And in that sense my introduction to it, all those years ago, has proven nothing short of life-changing. Indeed, I have formed a relationship with it and I’m hoping that through this chapter you, too, may join us...

Given this relationship, it is important to draw attention to my positioning of the SOC thesis. I often refer to it not through its primary authors (Arrigo, 2013; Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009; Arrigo et al., 2011) but as an entity in its own right. Indeed, in its theoretical breadth and revolutionary imaginings (Brown, 2013) the SOC thesis, to me, transcends both its authors and readers. As opposed to being a disembodied, rigid theoretical stance hidden away in academic texts, the SOC thesis constitutes a movement. My belief is that any of us can, through our engagement with its revolutionary praxis, its concern with pursuing a better world, become part of the SOC thesis as well as allowing the thesis to become part of ourselves. For me the SOC thesis is, in this sense, alive. And for this reason I often write that *'The SOC thesis argues...'* rather than just *'Arrigo argues...'* When I do so I am still speaking of arguments that can be found in Arrigo's (2013) summary of the SOC thesis. But I feel that I need to give life to the SOC thesis as bigger than either Arrigo or any other individual. Further, I feel that in doing this I am attending to the SOC thesis' multiplicity and embeddedness in *my* being, and am approaching Arrigo's work in a way he'd be happy with.

Notably, I am not attempting to reduce the significance of Arrigo's contribution. In developing the SOC theory Arrigo and his colleagues have pulled together numerous theoretical threads in order to reveal relationships between otherwise structurally isolated, and often overlooked, forces. The significance of this to understanding the systemic production of harm cannot be overemphasised. However, in the time since this work began the thesis has been taken up and contributed to by many residing within the society of captives it proposes (i.e., Brown, 2013; Coombes et al., 2016; Luff, 2016; Johnson, 2013; Ward, 2013). Accordingly, when I refer to the thesis I am thinking of an active body of knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, of a collective, academic and otherwise, all of whom are working towards the societal change the SOC thesis

hopes for. So whilst I do (and must) cite the individual voices I encounter within the SOC thesis's body to acknowledge specific contributions and myself contribute to understanding of its emergence, I strive to walk with the thesis in a relational and holistic manner. A manner that transcends purely academic engagement and that does the thesis' complexity, breadth and praxis justice by not reducing/tying it to singularities/generalities. In this, the SOC thesis and I seek to speak not for, but with, one another.

The SOC thesis will mean different things to different people. For those seeking to question and analyse dominant correctional narratives and practices, the thesis is likely to be met with interest, and to be rather enabling and comforting. Conversely, for those with vested interest in the present state of the system, the thesis may seem rather problematic, confronting, and therefore decidedly dis-comforting. I'm guessing I do not need, at this point, to say which of these I fit in to? Given my goals of not only understanding my experiences of incarceration but also troubling their production, a fundamentally important aspect of the thesis is that it provides me a critical means for understanding correctional harm/prisonisation. By now, you'll have heard me use this term often. It has emerged from, and embodies, an acknowledgement that the experience of incarceration is odd and, inevitably, harmful. One of the foundational studies upon which the SOC thesis draws involved an ethnography of the experience of confinement within an American Penitentiary (Clemmer, 1940). Clemmer, and later Goffman (1961), drew particular attention to the ways that institutions totally confine, and 'prisonise.' That is, they found that imprisonment is so regulated and burdensome that it leeches into and suppresses almost every aspect of a person's life.

I actually encountered these early studies quite some time before meeting Arrigo. And, as with the theorisations I'd later encounter in the SOC thesis, those in these early studies spoke strongly to my experiences. I felt quite connected to them, and re-engaging with them now is reminding me why.... You see, in providing me understandings of behavior, culture and process in maximum-security custody, Clemmer (1940) and Goffman (1961) helped me stay afloat, and find my way, at a time when I was entering perhaps the harshest stage of my imprisoned life. That stage came when I was sent to Pāremoremo Maximum-Security Prison. As with so many moments, that one will be forever etched into my soul. I carry the memoires of it as vividly as if they were scars on my skin...

I'm going to share a few of those memories, now. Doing so may feel like something of an interruption of our journey into unpacking the SOC thesis. However, my relationship with the SOC thesis would likely not be what it is had I not been sent to, no, *propelled* into, Pāremoremo. Indeed, during the time I would go on to spend in that prison, I would be subjected to the full weight of many of the risk-based measures that, as I would later learn, are discussed within the SOC thesis. And, during that subsequent discovery and unpacking of the thesis, I would work to connect its theorisations to my experiences. This not only helped me to understand the system that was producing my scars, but to make sense of the SOC thesis, to witness its theory in action and so to move from academic to embodied contemplation. So yeah, the story of my movement to the maximum-security jail is part of the story of my relationship with the SOC thesis. Further, it is illustrative of what can happen when the sharp edge of the system is brought to bear against a person... Undoubtedly, there have been many experiences through which I have endured the system's retributive wrath. But none

more so than when I was, for the first time, transferred to our nation's most restrictive, and, most dangerous, prison. That experience contorted my body like no other...

Putting my body on the line...

There were several occasions during my sentence where my childhood interest in locks and keys brought me into conflict with the system. We'll delve into that, in detail, in Chapter Six. For the purposes of this occasion, though, it is enough to say that, having been found with keys I was not meant to have I was, despite trying to explain any absence of ill-intention, immediately categorised as a 'dangerous' prisoner, and classified as requiring, henceforth, Maximum-Security confinement.

With that assignation of risk came the inescapable fact that I would be transferred to Pāremoremo. I became really scared. Upon being told I was 'heading North,' I pleaded for mercy. Pretty much begged, actually. I tried explaining, again and again, that I had no ill intention. Gosh, had I then been aware of the society of captives, I would not have been so naïve as to believe the system would step out of its risk paradigms so it could see either me or my interests: it thus was that, for reasons I'll explore in our later discussion of locks and keys, my pleas fell on deaf ears. Indeed, my reasonings and person were too different, too incomprehensible when viewed within the correctional, risk-averse mindset, to amount to anything other than deviance, deficiency, and dangerousness. With the failure of my pleas, I resorted to the last avenue available to a desperate, unheard human – physical resistance.

Inter-prison transfers generally occur early in the morning. This gives each prison time to get any transferring prisoners to the main drop-off points for the transfer bus. The bus follows a set route down the middle of the North Island. It travels from

Auckland Prison, to Springhill Correctional Facility, then down to Linton Prison and, finally, Rimutaka in Wellington. The night before my transfer I prayed for some kind of miracle, that it wouldn't happen. And I think I was becoming so desperate and delusional that I actually willed myself to believe it wouldn't happen. When, however, I heard keys and boots at 6.00am the following morning, reality rapidly descended. Lying in bed, very still but tense, I wondered what to do. And I decided, as do so, so many other unheard, unseen prisoners, that violence was the only form of communication left. An officer unlocked the food hatch and passed through a 'breakfast bag.' I made a last-ditch plea to not have to go. It was feeble, and offered with little conviction. As he slammed the steel hatch shut and walked off, calling that they'd be back in half an hour to "uplift" me, I resolved that I was not going anywhere. The thought of inflicting pain on myself, and of causing a scene, a fuss, did not sit at all well with me. Indeed, I disdained the notion of what was coming. But come it must because, to my mind, it paled in comparison with what would come should I go to Parry. I sat there, fumbled with my Weetbix, trying to force myself into a place I didn't want to be, to bury the morals and humanity that would prevent what I needed to do. I was successful in that, at least, because, as the staff returned, keys jangling, corridor lights flickering on, I got down on the floor, wrapped my arms and legs tightly around the solid wooden stool that protruded rigidly from it, and declared, "I'm not going anywhere."

An officer unlocked the door, pulled it open, and they all stood there, filling the doorway. At first, the junior staff tried to reason with me. I don't recall what they said, but it would have been reasonable: they'd just turned up for their shift and, as captive as me, were just following orders. After a minute or so, however, the head officer, a much older, burly veteran of the service, became impatient and told them to "Get him

up.” Wanting to show my determination, I began driving my head, hard, into the stool. Those stools are two foot wide at the base, made of solid timber and fixed to the concrete floor lest they be removed and used as weapons. The officers lunged forward and, each grabbing hold, worked to free me from it. But, being the height I am, my lanky, limbs were firmly tightened around the stool. Those limbs being fueled by a fearful, strong heart and lungs, the officers struggled. I wasn’t going anywhere. Or so I thought. The fight grew more desperate. What I wasn’t appreciating is that prison officers are veterans at this sort of stuff. They have carefully developed Control and Restraint procedures, much based on Martial Arts tactics, for dealing with prisoners like me. Eventually they got an arm (or was it a leg?) free and, from there, I was history. Before I knew it I had been dragged out of the cell and onto the floor in the corridor. Several staff held my torso to the floor whilst others pinned down my arms and legs. “Cuff him, cuff him,” I heard as I fought to free myself. As they tried, I looked up, and met the eyes of one of the junior staff. He was a little guy. I didn’t know him well, but had seen him around. He was a kind person and, as he struggled to hold my arm to the ground, his eyes were pleading for me to stop. Such are the strange positions and relationships the custodial process forces upon people locked within it. My keeper’s pain was too much for my heart to bear and my humanity, failing me, broke through. I stopped resisting, and was still. For a moment, anyhow. Perceiving my stillness as forced physical submission, other staff snapped the cuffs on. If only they knew...

As is usually the case when force is used on a prisoner, a Manager soon appeared. He asked what the problem was. Between breaths I pleaded that this was my home, and that I didn’t want to go. He responded with firm instructions, to his officers, that I was to be removed to the waiting transfer van, immediately. With that, the fight instantly resumed. “This is my home,” I repeated as the team of officers worked to lift

me up and get me moving. I refused to walk, so they carried me, horizontally, out the rear-access door of the unit. As we entered the long, concrete walkway that led to the Receiving Office and waiting van, the senior officer gave a stern instruction to let my feet go. "Make him walk," he growled. I was barefoot and, knowing full-well that I'd have no choice but to walk lest my skin and toenails be ground off by dragging along the concrete, they dropped my legs. And, indeed, I had to walk. Or bound, I should say, as I did my best to move in the most awkward way possible. It took a few minutes to get to the van and I knew that, when we did, I'd be able to make one last, final stand as they'd have a job getting a resisting prisoner turned around and into the small cage. Upon reaching the end of the 200m walkway, all that was left to the staff was to get me in; the other two prisoners heading north had already been loaded. Seizing the moment, I went into as strong a frenzy as I could muster, flailing my arms and legs wildly. Now having the assistance of the RO staff, the officers worked to get a waist restraint belt on me. With that on, they'd be able to lock my cuffed wrists to my waist, greatly hindering any ability to resist. I fought for agency as hard as I could but, with the reinforcements to hand, the outcome was inevitable, and quick. I remember the moment well, the feeling of utter defeat as some tall officer with a glass-looking eye yanked home the strap of the wide leather belt, and snapped the padlock shut, locking my cuffs to it. Arms now disabled, I directed all the extra energy to my legs. "Watch for kicks, watch for kicks," the glass-eyed man called as they hoisted me up in the air and proceeded to ram me rearward, into the cage. Another, holding the door, began to thrust it shut as soon as I was part way in. With one last shove, the staff quickly let me go and whipped their arms out so their colleague could slam the door closed. With that, my fate was sealed. Truth be told, it was probably sealed many months or years before, but the chaos of life, and ingrained human desire for freedom, perhaps protected me

from any such hope-sapping realisation? For a time, I sat there and rhythmically drove my head forward into the steel plate door, a foot in front of me. But it was the act of a withering resolve. Within several minutes I'd lapsed into a silence and, as we rolled out the prison gates, my thoughts turned to the new resolve that was shortly going to be needed to endure the place towards which my life was now headed.

Parry is our nation's only Maximum-Security Prison. It has a fearsome reputation, and staff often attempt to deter prisoners perceived to be unruly by threatening to send them there. I first heard of the place very soon after entering the prison system. Indeed, some in the Justice system had hoped I would be sent there following the imposition of my sentence. However, my young age saved me from such an experience. Many are not so fortunate: during the years I would go on to spend there, a number of teenagers came through. They were easy to spot, filled with a youthful energy and innocence that Parry was never built to cater for. The prison was known, during my imprisonment, as the place where life was extremely harsh: you got very little, endured long hours of lock-up and, when not locked in your cell, would be locked in tiny 'bird-cage' concrete exercise yards where combat-training and 'crash' (a rugby-league like game played on concrete) were compulsory activities. The institution had a well-earned reputation as a place of extreme violence and unpredictability where, as we saw with 'The C,' in the Prologue, anything is possible. It is with these understandings in mind that I received the news, some ten years into my sentence, that I was being sent 'North.' And it is largely because of that awareness that I resisted the move so intensely. I consider myself to be of relatively stout character but I knew that, even so, what Parry would demand of me might very well be far beyond what I could muster...

When I first entered the maximum-security prison, I did not have the hopes and goals I do now. Indeed, that undergraduate course through which I would meet Arrigo, and begin a transformational turn, was still a few years ahead of me. My immediate objective, upon landing in Parry, was to try and survive. And such was the intensity and other-worldly character of the environment, and total lack of information and guidance from within it, that I sought outside sources. One of these was a man who, with time, has become a good friend. Back then Greg was just someone I'd read of, and seen in the news. But I anticipated there could be considerable value in communicating with him because, besides being a Professor in Anthropology, he also had the (in my eyes) distinction of having served time in Pāremoremo. The latter mattered to me as it meant I could rely on his guidance. It wouldn't just be knowledge from someone who'd read about Parry, or taught about it. Rather, Greg's views would be lived, embodied, offered by a person who'd *felt*, and so who *knew*. Very few in the academic world, from where I hoped to find ethical, humane guidance that didn't involve advocacy of violent survival tactics, know Parry's insides... Alas it was Greg who, upon my request for knowledge that would help me understand, and better navigate my world, suggested Clemmer (1940), and Goffman (1961). Through the help of both a university library interloan scheme, and my ever-loyal Nan, a month or so later I had well-worn copies of both books in my cell.

It seemed a little surreal, reading in-depth studies of life in old American Penitentiaries whilst myself sitting in the cell of a prison modelled on that very

system.¹⁵ In the complete absence of other information, it felt kind of like I was sitting, listening to the wisdom of an elderly ex-convict. Through those studies that old convict said, and my lived experiences in Parry certainly suggest, that the process of being incarcerated forces upon a person an urgent necessity to adopt certain mores, cultural ideals and practices, not only in order to survive amongst ones fellow incarcerates but also to be able to withstand the psychological harms of imprisonment. And, in doing so, the person develops, and is forced to embody, a particular set of institutional attitudes and behaviours (Clemmer, 1940; Goffman, 1961). These outcomes, often very harmful to the person, constitute ‘prisonisation’ (Clemmer, 1940). When a person becomes either docile or rebellious in response to their conditions of confinement, we might reasonably say they have become prisonised (Clemmer, 1940; Paterline & Peterson, 1999; Sykes, 1958/2007). I now see this in my past self, understanding, for instance, that as my previously positive outlook on life gradually descended into a decades-long deep seated bitterness and tension, I was becoming prisonised...

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...the gradual, suffocating pressure of jail dramatically exacerbates the stress and distortion in one’s mind. The unending negativity of jail – prisonisation and all the toxic shit it encompasses – is like the drip of a tap. Drip, drip, dripping, it slowly erodes you away over the years. In my experience, at least, one doesn’t notice it. So accumulative and constant is the pressure and negativity that it

¹⁵ Pāremoremo was designed, both architecturally and with regard to operational policy, firmly in line with models then prevalent in North America (Newbold, 2007).

seems normal. It reveals itself in subtle ways at first – an increase in baseline frustration levels, inappropriate jokes... I reckon I did about fifteen years before I noticed the damage for real. Things like greatly diminished ability to concentrate, a seething disdain for certain staff, a growing intolerance for the prisoners around me, an inability to cope with even the slightest of noises, and an overall realisation that I am not at all happy. Oh, and also a feeling of unshakable exhaustion. Destructive behaviour and poor decisions become so much more likely when a person reaches these states. And once one realises they are there, life gets a lot harder; you know you are slowly withering and spend many an hour wondering at what point you will snap, give up, take the exhausted desperation out on others, or on yourself. Just yesterday, for instance, I was talking to an officer about all the delays and stops and starts with my reintegration and muttered, "At what point do you give up?" Such a thought regarding my hitherto total desire to get out of prison is highly unusual for me and it alarmed me that I even had it. But that is what prison does: it slowly crushes the life out of you, the positivity. It extinguishes, in the dreariness, stress, negativity and 'Nos' experienced for thousands of days, all hope and faith. I can see it happening in the 'apparently' bizarre behaviour I witnessed today. I can see it happening in myself. I have to hold on, to keep hoping. As the officer I spoke to said, I'm nearly there.

Prisonisation, then, is an embodied process and refers to all that is harmful in the experience of incarceration. Since its emergence, much work has been done to develop the concept. Importantly, Arrigo (2013) has sought to identify the

structural/societal links, relationships and particular social and cultural mechanisms, used within correctional systems, that produce it. Of particular salience, too, is Davis' (2003) work, focusing on drawing attention to the ways in which economic and political issues and agendas are contributing to an industrialisation of correctional systems and so to the totality of the carceral experience.

Assuming a poststructural perspective, the SOC thesis approaches these harms of prisonisation as emerging, ultimately, from a societal preoccupation with risk. To understand how this risk-focus is producing harm within the “everyday world of corrections” (Brown, 2013, p. 695), the thesis begins with an examination of socio-structural processes beyond prison walls. The public, Arrigo (2013) contends, are increasingly being told to fear the ‘criminal threat’. Through the power of digital and globalised media this threat is dramatised, with visceral depictions of violent crime and alarmist narratives giving the impression that there is a crisis of criminal dangerousness. Such discourse is often combined with statistics presenting crime rates as ballooning. This ‘infotainment’, Arrigo (2013) argues, is increasingly being consumed as fact and, indeed, there is considerable research substantiating the strong impact of such narratives not only on public opinion but also on legislation and criminal justice policy (i.e., Austin & Irwin, 2012; Gluckman, 2018; Pratt, 2005, 2008; Riches, 2014).

The SOC framework argues that risk of criminal dangerousness is therefore being commodified and searches for ways in which individual bodies are being harmed through this process. It also contends that the harm is occurring at all levels of society, and that there are specific consequences for both the public, the guardians, and the guarded. In regards to the former, the watcher/observer, the commodification of criminal dangerousness is held to be resulting in an intense social dis-ease,

characterised by anger toward, and fear of, criminal possibility (Arrigo, 2013). The observer is rendered captive to their fear which, relentless and insatiable in its demands for safety and control, is translating into calls for greater correctional governance in order to curb the apparent threat (Arrigo, 2013; Brown, 2013; Ward, 2013). Politicians and correctional systems are in turn, the thesis argues, becoming captive to these calls, having little choice but to develop tighter policies and control measures. These include stricter parole and sentencing laws and practices, with the prison being the institution responsible for enforcing all; it is positioned as having become the ultimate symbol of control and appeasement (Arrigo, 2013).

The socio-political-cultural forces implicated in the commodification and escalation of risk are argued to be producing the harm and dysfunctionality occurring behind prison walls (Arrigo, 2013). Central to this position is Arrigo's (2013) contention that the social dis-ease and hypervigilant concern with the threat of dangerousness is resulting in a fear of human difference. This difference, defined as “the social person being human and doing humanness differently” (p. 673) is considered to increase criminal possibility/risk and so is pathologised. It is to be eliminated and, as Brown (2013) notes, SOC theory envisions this intolerance of difference as having infiltrated all elements of the correctional system, from treatment to reintegration. Indeed, Brown contends it “spans the universe of penalty” (p. 695), affecting all fields involved in the management of criminal risk including psychiatry/psychology, social work, law, and corrections.

Within the prison, therefore, the focus is on the minimisation of risk through the reduction/denial of difference. Desperation-driven management of risk is described as comprising of a range of regulatory forces that operate symbolically, linguistically, materially and/or culturally, both beyond and within prison walls (Arrigo, 2013).

Linguistic forces include the meta-narratives of dangerousness and the narrow epistemological boundaries that reductionism and intolerance discursively creates, in which alternative narratives and identities become inexpressible (Brown, 2013). With regard to symbolism, the prison itself is perhaps the clearest example, with its walls, razor wire and gun-towers brought to life through the news media and reality television (Arrigo, 2013). The institution's architecture serves as a powerful material and cultural indicator of the threat contained within, thereby feeding the public's dis-ease whilst simultaneously responding to it by creating a perception/illusion of control. Other material and cultural forces include various techniques of risk management (such as assessment instruments) as well as the attitudes of indifference and totality that culturalise the prison (Brown, 2013).

The prison's obsession with risk-reduction is held to be producing harmful outcomes in several ways. One, the SOC thesis argues, is that the reification of possibility/difference is resulting in an overwhelming desire to produce sameness, to produce 'docile bodies'. Offenders are seen as "bearers of risk, as problems to be managed, controlled, or even quarantined..." (Ward, 2013, p. 704). A focus on idealised docility can be seen in things like the strongly deficit-based clinical modes of offender 'treatment' and assessment measures used in risk management (Brown, 2013).¹⁶ It can also be seen in... Fuck, it can be seen in my entire imprisoned life. Man, discussing these issues is drawing me to painful memories... My body is so full of such memories.

¹⁶ The term 'treatment' is used, within the clinical literature, to define rehabilitation. But it irks me. It makes me feel inherently 'less than', somehow broken. In line with the SOC thesis' contention, it makes me feel as though I have no potential, no strengths.

I know that I need to offer you a look inside, here. But, when it comes to sharing stories of the risk assessment of my body, I struggle to know which to choose.

There are just so many...

And that is no great surprise because, as the SOC thesis suggests, and as our movement through my life thus far has illustrated, every aspect of my imprisonment was saturated with risk assessment. Sadly but, again, unsurprisingly, the assessment has not ended with my release. Indeed, recent experiences have reminded me that, as the SOC thesis contends, the risk assessment of bodies that have had contact with the criminal justice system persists no matter what part of that system they're in. Post-release, the watchful eye is continuing to watch. It makes me feel gross, heavy, and worried, worried about the system's intentions. Worried about what might happen to me... Because, for sure, it sometimes seems, such is the subtle (but constant) surveillance, that they are just waiting for me to fuck up in order that they can put me back. Some in the system would call me paranoid for thinking, and feeling, this way. I would respond that such suspicion and cynicism is what is produced when years of suppressive assessment damages you, and the memories of it continue to haunt you. And my current fears, it would appear, are not merely a product of paranoia. I recently got pulled over for speeding, and the experience has reinforced my awareness that I cannot afford to make the same mistakes, in society, as others. I had my partner and her son in the car, it was the weekend, and we were heading to a holiday. We were travelling through a rural area when, in error, I failed to reduce speed sufficiently as we entered a small village. It is an area that, I have subsequently been told, frequently catches drivers unaware. Evidently, the undercover vehicle that stopped me is regularly parked there,

waiting for those who miss the speed limit signs located in paddocks just before the village. For them, a speeding ticket is passed off as ‘something that happens to everyone,’ and sometimes even as unjustified. For me, however, being pulled over and booked led to a very different outcome. It didn’t matter that I was following the line of cars in front of me, that I was in a known revenue-gathering location, or that I’d never before had a driving infringement. Instinctively, I knew the incident was going to be viewed as that, an *incident*. I knew that, somewhere, it was going to set off alarms, was going to be viewed not in a ‘these things happen’ context, but as indicative of deviance, maybe even dangerousness. Even as I very slowly pulled away, I wondered what the cop was doing, who he may be ringing... The anxiety was intense: it plagued me the rest of the day, overshadowed dinner. It stressed me severely, and I recall my attitude with my partner being less than ideal that evening.

The large fine was the least of my worries...

I rang a close friend, whom had been a prison officer many years and whose understanding of the suspicious machinations of the system I could trust to guide me through my panic. Did I need to ring my Probation Officer there and then, I asked? He counselled that, no, I didn’t. He also made clear, though, that I certainly should text and inform her, first thing Monday morning. I did, and it turns out I was not the only one to do so. The *incident* triggered emails and phone calls, all of which have resulted in increased surveillance. The keepers perceived the speeding infringement as a sign I could be ‘escalating,’ that my criminal risk was increasing. Part of the system’s response was that the Department’s High Risk Team reviewed my progress since release, and ordered that my partner be spoken to regarding our relationship. My Probation Officer was good about it all, understanding that mistakes happen. I was, however, cautioned by a different keeper to not allow such a thing to happen again. The

underlying message in this was clear: there were officials concerned enough about my risk that they would not tolerate another such event. This knowledge has particular meaning for me. I am, after all, on life parole: I was released under strict conditions and my ongoing freedom depends upon my not being perceived, in any way, as in breach of them. If such a perception does emerge, I can be recalled to prison. The thought of that scared me long before I set foot outside of prison walls...

09/07/2020

...Mere contemplation of being recalled, after getting out of this fucken place, causes my blood to run cold. I cannot even imagine what it must be like for Troy, and other lifers, to be recalled. Especially when it is over incidents that, were it anyone else, would only result (at worst) in a community sentence or short prison sentence. But lifers serve years of recall time, time that extends well beyond the term they would have received for the charge that got them recalled. Indeed, in some cases the charge/s that triggered the recall are dropped but the offender continues to remain in prison anyway, serving their life sentence. It is so brutal and soul-destroying. The only way to be okay (I hope) is to remain absolutely squeaky clean and above board, even with respect to things that completely straight, law-abiding people can, and do, get away with on a regular basis: things like raising my voice, having an argument, telling someone they're an idiot when/if they abuse me, having a beer... These are all things that could easily see a lifer recalled.

13/06/19

...to recall a prisoner, there is no need for an arrest, just an indication that the offender now poses an undue risk to the community. That is a very loose, easily

implementable rule. It enables recalls to be made on the basis of very subjective, discretionary decisions.

And that's perhaps the strongest reason behind my fear – I do not need to commit an offence, or even be charged, to be recalled. Rather, Corrections – one's Probation Officer, a psychologist or some other designated watcher – merely need to consider that my situation has become such that I present an 'undue risk.' If such an opinion is formed, a recall application will quickly be submitted to the Parole Board. It, in turn, will just as quickly make a decision on the application. The vast majority of life-recall applications are approved (New Zealand Parole Board, 2019) and, when one is, an arrest warrant is issued, the police execute it and the person concerned, the *lifer*, is returned to custody.

Entrapped by this culture of risk, I live within an ever-present feeling of worry, and anxiety. It is not always intense, but it is there, lurking in the background and emerging to harrass me whenever I pass a cop, hear sirens, realise I am following the car in front of me, doing 85 when we, I, should be doing 80. Man, I don't even need to be doing *anything* for the fear to grip me. Just the other day I commented to a mate, "Yeah bro, we'll do that in the New Year for sure." As the words came out, my throat began to tighten, and body stiffen. Involuntarily. A tension surged through me, caused, I understood a moment later, by a fear that anything could happen in the three months between now and January. I can be quite superstitious when I get nervous and, hoping he wouldn't notice, I casually reached out and touched the wooden desk in front of me, hoping to ward off, as best I could, both bad luck and thoughts of being returned to prison.

These are some of the consequences, then, of being a bearer of risk. As the SOC thesis argues, there are many unjust outcomes. I'm free, but not in the sense in which most of those around me are. It's like, I'm allowed in the room, but I must occupy it in a different way. It deprives me of the peace and sense of resilience from punishment that a 'normal' (non-assessed) person may feel. Within myself, the sense of my assessment makes me feel not only vulnerable and scared, but also like an other, an outsider. It sucks to know that, mostly, I am the only one in the room in 'my world,' the only one who could be returned to jail for life if they get into an argument with a co-worker, speed, or even be accused of any such thing. I need to keep my head down, to make no mistakes. I need to avoid transcending the boundaries of my place within the society of captives. For me, the ex-con, the life-parolee, that means remaining docile.

I am so vulnerable.

Knowing this sometimes makes life feel really heavy...

We begin to see, here, the SOC thesis' argument that, in pursuing docility the risk-focused correctional approach is marginalising identities (Arrigo, 2013), rendering the prisoner's identity and body "unimaginable, unspeakable, and uninhabitable" (p. 674). Personal strengths and human potential are silenced and ignored (Brown, 2013). Self-determination becomes impossible as the body is taken over, territorialised by the prison. This "utter destruction of agency and possibility" (Brown, 2013, p. 696) is held to be the most damaging element of the society-of-captives, leading to "the most painful of lived experiences" (p. 695) for those behind prison walls. And, as has just been

illustrated, it produces harm not only within those walls but beyond them because further experiences of pain await a person once they're released.

In considering the harm and suppression of agency enacted by prisonisation, it is important to look not just to the experiences of the kept. Certainly, a loss of autonomy is suffered by their keepers too, and even by the prison institution at a structural level. Within the hypervigilance of the SOC, Arrigo (2013) contends, there is constant surveillance for those not complying with the focus on reduction and containment of risk. Consequently, the guardians/keepers have become captive to a strong risk culture and environment of accountability in which deviation/agency is not possible (Arrigo; Szmukler & Rose, 2013). They are “denied the ability to reason through institutional problems and, instead, are forced to follow blindly procedures and policies that dictate their behaviour” (Arrigo, 2006, p. 232). It thus becomes as difficult for prison staff to ‘do humanness differently’, to exercise potential, as it is for prisoners.

Engaging with this theory leads to contemplation of the practices of numerous correctional professionals I have encountered, from guards to nurses to therapists. To what extent might this risk culture and need to control impact on their ability to exercise agency in their work? To what extent might the seemingly mad/counter-productive decisions they make and bureaucracy they engage in be beyond their control? And, significantly, what might it mean for my embodiment of their decisions, both past and future, were I to be able to discover that they are perhaps acting out of obligation/captivity/coercion rather than spite and/or carelessness? I'm imagining the possibility of an ethical response, where such awareness might bring a sense of

liberation from the toxic negativity and paranoia in which correctional decision-making often envelops me...

The potential of the prison institution is also constrained in ways that limit its ability to rehabilitate. A significant way this is occurring is through the captivity of the people, and policy, operating the prison. I have already discussed, for instance, that the focus on risk management is contributing to increasingly retributive policy and a reductive correctional focus in which staff are unable to move outside of the stringent risk-focused control policies that govern the institution. Its rehabilitative potential is also reduced, however, in other ways. These stem from the institution's use in popular culture as an image of strength and social regulation. In positioning the prison as the primary defense against an apparently rampant criminal dangerousness, society comes to expect/demand that it will constrain and contain (Arrigo, 2013). This perception, the SOC thesis argues, has consequences for what the prison can be, limiting its ability to function as anything other than a form of totalising governance.

I'm thinking here of efforts with our new maximum-security prison. Unlike Pāremoremo, its American-designed predecessor, it has no gun-towers, no steel bars... Its otherwise-stark concrete buildings are clad with weatherboards. These architectural features are said to be a deliberate effort to reduce its institutional feel and to shift perceptions of what the maximum-security prison is about (McLeod, 2017). To what extent, I wonder, might these be efforts to reduce the prison's captivity?

15/03/19

My plan for today was to do two or three hours of study after the 4.30 pm 'evening' lock-down. However, I have now been watching the news for four and a half hours, since six o'clock. The news normally only goes for an hour, but not today. Today our little country suffered the worst mass killing in its history. At around 1.40 pm a gunman entered several mosques and killed 49 people. As of writing, at 10.42 pm, another 48 are in hospital, 20 in critical condition. In the days leading up to the massacre the shooter posted photos on Twitter, of his AR-15 assault rifles. And he streamed his actions live via Facebook. It is said that hundreds cheered him on, including Kiwis. The Prime Minister has correctly called today "one of our darkest" and the incident "an unprecedented terrorist attack." Unsurprisingly, Aotearoa/New Zealand's National Security Threat Level has been escalated from low to high – another sad first for us.

The TV chatters away in the background; I'm hypervigilantly aware that I, a challenger of the captive power of infotainment, am in this moment thoroughly captive to it.

As I write this entry I'm not really sure what I want its point to be. I cannot think clearly enough so I'm just writing. I feel jumbled up, trying to write about something academically whilst it is affecting me really, really personally. It's not helping that some of the personal, embodied reactions I'm having are occurring through an academic approach to the events. My PhD Confirmation Report is due in five days. There is a lot to get done. Too much to get done. I had a plan – to pull threads out of the vast draft of my methodology in order to provide a succinct

summary for the report. But, yeah, madness is once again getting in the way. My plan is gone. So I'm just in an autoethnographic stream of consciousness now. It is all I can do.

As for what I'll call my embodied academic reactions, I worry about what today means for the society of captives that our society is becoming. For instance, news coverage is already turning critical, with both the Prime Minister and Police Commissioner being intensely questioned as to why the social-media oriented gunman was not on any 'security watchlist'. Indeed, the Prime Minister has told Police she wants answers around this. So, even as people are still undergoing surgery for callously inflicted gunshot wounds the calls for accountability have begun.

Reflecting on this situation through the SOC thesis, I feel worry and fear... In his address to the nation, the Police Commissioner repeatedly spoke of the need for "vigilance" – understandably. And he informed us that they (Police and intelligence services) will be looking back to ensure that "no opportunity was missed to prevent today's horrendous events." I worry because this vigilance and surveillance, necessary as it is, can only contribute to our collective hypervigilance/paranoia, and so increase our captivity. And with this, fear of risk and of criminal dangerousness will surely intensify. I'm feeling that this is inescapable. I'm feeling the need for us to manage the risk TOTALLY right now. To crush it in order to prevent future incidents of such horrible violence (when, really, such crushing will achieve nothing good). This is leading into feelings of hopelessness, to a moment in which I'm really struggling to see how a society of

captives can ever be overcome given the realness of the threat. It is thus that I'm fighting bloody hard to hold onto the hope and better world imagined within/by the SOC thesis.

Sitting at an intersection where hypervigilant fear, real criminal dangerousness and the SOC thesis meet, I'm feeling suffocated and helpless. Many questions weigh me down... To what extent, for instance, is this massacre going to increase public fear, public susceptibility to sensationalist meta-narratives, and public demand for punishment, governance, and retribution? Just an hour ago former CIA analyst and Aotearoa/New Zealand resident, Paul Buchanan, said (speaking on Newshub) that us Kiwis need to "wake up" and need to increase the [surveillance] powers of our intelligence agencies. "This may necessarily need to impinge on our civil rights," he commented. Scary stuff. I am also concerned with how the calls for accountability and efficiency are going to restrict the agency of our governmental institutions, including Police and Corrections. Indeed, what will all this mean for Corrections? It surely has to increase tensions and to affect the prison containing the gunman? For example, will the rising pressure alter public perceptions of the prison once images of it begin being splashed across the public's consciousness every time the gunman it contains is referred to? I fear the prison will become the personification of evil – even more intensely than it may already be. Such an outcome must surely adversely affect peoples' views of others locked in prisons? I really do think that today's tragic events are going to have terrible long-term consequences of the kind theorised within the SOC thesis, particularly with respect to fear of risk, and the need for control.

Through its discussion of hypervigilant fear, risk and politicisation of the criminal justice system, the SOC thesis can help us understand why, and how, the prison is failing to rehabilitate. In doing this, it discusses that not only is the prison not meeting its stated obligations to society, it is actually doing the opposite, producing counter-rehabilitative, socially unjust outcomes. Arrigo (2013) argues that, through the processes of captivity described above, whereby the public, government, prison and all its inhabitants are imprisoned by fear of risk, we constitute a society-of-captives. And, within this agency-reducing culture of control society represses and harms bodies, thereby increasing risk and producing the very outcomes/conditions it fears. Such a destructive and counter-productive process, the SOC thesis contends, equates to totalising madness (Arrigo, 2013; Arrigo & Sellers, 2018). Sitting in my cell, enduring the risk-obsessed correctional system of which Arrigo (2013) discusses, it sure felt both totalising and mad. I mean, prior to embracing the SOC thesis I just could not fathom why a system that purports to be focused on the positive growth and rehabilitation of those sent into it could function in the intensely harmful ways it does. And, of course, it is largely in that that the SOC thesis has enabled my research, enabled me to write a thesis of my own that attempts to make sense of, and provide some reasons for, that seemingly non-sensical disparity. Especially important to this work is the relationship I have been able to form between the SOC thesis and autoethnography. I will go into autoethnography, in depth, in the following chapter. It is nonetheless important, given how closely it and the SOC thesis work together to form my methodology, that I now discuss the relationship between the two, and what it is enabling me to do.

There are particular aspects of the SOC thesis that render it especially well-suited to a critical autoethnographic project. For one, the SOC thesis is, like

autoethnography, political. It draws attention to the ways that captivity and its associated harms are not inevitable but are instead constructed in pursuit of both political and economic agendas. Developed at governmental/political/industrial levels through a digitised, global media and maintained by a captive, hypervigilant public, fear of crime has become a commodity to be traded, particularly at election times (Arrigo, 2006, 2013; Pratt, 2005, 2008); political parties often ascend to power upon promises to address the criminal threat (Pratt, 2005). Just recently, for instance, we have seen that very process playing out across the nation, with ‘tough on crime’ narratives being the backbone of the campaigns of both the National and Act parties. Such rhetoric as **“No place is immune from the youth crime wave,”** (Luxon, as cited in New Zealand Herald [NZH], 2023, p. 1), and **"Labour has delivered a crime wave the country has never been inflicted with before,"** (Mitchell, as cited in Hewett, 2023, p. 1) dominated the airwaves and billboards for months. These narratives enabled the political machine to manufacture the conditions necessary to render the public, the watchers, receptive to its agenda. By capitalising on youth ‘ram raid’ style burglaries, they were able to manufacture a hysteria of sorts, wherein wider society was led to believe that crime was out of control. These narratives perpetrating notions of high risk also provide a powerful defense to critical questioning of sensitive issues such as rising prison populations and correctional budgets (Arrigo, 2006).

In terms of economic agenda, the retributive sentencing and parole practices that stem from fear-driven risk-adversity, and the resultant rising prison muster, are economically beneficial to a select few – primarily those in government, prison

communities, and industry. To understand this structure, the SOC thesis draws on a concept known as the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC; Arrigo, 2006, 2013; Brown, 2013; Davis, 2003). It was originally developed through the work of Davis (2003) to bring into view the structures and agendas fueling mass-incarceration in North America (see also, Schlosser, 1998). Through investigating the relationships between industry profit and rising prison numbers, she was able to identify how the neoliberal, free-market has a vested interest in the continual growth of the prison population. And, consequently, that market has an interest in advocating and implementing harsh sentencing and parole measures, all of which fill prisons quicker, and keep them full longer.

The SOC thesis draws on the notion of the PIC to help us identify the complex structure that locates the prison, and life within it. Whilst we may not experience mass-incarceration to the extent seen in the U.S, the PIC theory is nonetheless especially useful in helping to show us the ways in which conditions behind the walls of our prisons are very much impacted by structures beyond them. In our local Aotearoa New Zealand context, we see this relationship in issues such as the increasingly punitive sentencing policies being enforced. These are, inevitably, leading to increasing prison numbers. An unavoidable consequence of this is that prisons are being filled beyond capacity. Certainly, during the second decade of my incarceration, double-bunking became the norm. Many cells, designed specifically for single-occupancy, were fitted with bunks. And the cell-blocks those cells are in were never designed, either in terms of living space or facilities, for that many people. They have, in my experience, been

reduced to sardine cans, with the prisoners being crammed in at essentially any cost.¹⁷ A further consequence has been that there are not enough staff to cope with the higher staff-prisoner ratio that the ballooning population requires. I discussed this staffing issue in the Prologue, and also noted how a particular harm that is being produced through it is that the amount of time prisoners can spend out of their cells is being drastically reduced. Indeed, in most of our jails, lock-up now occurs at 3.30pm. It's a long wait, until un-lock at 8.00 or 9.00am the following morning. Man, I can remember when we didn't used to get locked up until 8.00pm, even in high-security. Those days, and the social benefits of them, are long gone, destroyed largely by punitive sentencing and parole policies, and finance-driven agendas.

The PIC theory also helps us better understand the ethnic disparity prevalent amongst prison populations, and emphasises the extent to which the prison, as an institution, is captive. Drawing attention to the economic benefits of the industrialisation of the criminal justice system, Davis (2003) contends that there are also significant cultural and social advantages for the Western, majority sector of society. Being a mechanism of Westernism, she reasons, the prison is able to be used, directly, to reinforce the maintenance of dominant western social norms. For instance, through policies and sentence structures that discriminate against non-European groups, indigenous groups in particular, criminal justice systems are able to incarcerate disproportionately higher numbers from those groups. In this, the prison is used to contribute to ongoing processes of colonisation (Davis, 2003; Martin, 2023). Such

¹⁷ And the costs are incredibly high. Remember the Waikeria Prison protest, mentioned in the Prologue? One of the main complaints of the men was cramped living conditions...

practice is seen, worldwide, amongst nations with histories of colonial conquest. Aotearoa New Zealand is no exception: Māori make up 50 percent of the prison population whilst constituting only 15 percent of the population nationally (Gluckman, 2018). We see, in this, consequences for prison staff because, despite what those in the prison hierarchy may want, the institutions they play roles in operating – maybe even that they manage – are captive. Indeed, the prisons themselves are constrained by policies and practices geared to both maintaining and reinforcing the position of the dominant social class, whilst also contributing to profitable returns for the businesses of that dominant majority. These issues are of saliency here in our system, and much research has highlighted the extent of the systemic racial and ethnic inequalities to be found within the halls of justice (i.e., Aotearoa Justice Watch, 2024; Deckert et al., 2023; Fernando, 2018; Martin, 2023; Tuiburelevu et al., 2023).

I found it hard, when first traversing these issues. And that's because, to put it simply, there was work I needed to do regarding my ethnicity, regarding where I fit in. Davis' arguments confronted the un-reflexive, shaky sense of self I'd established. I recall that, when first being urged to give greater consideration to the PIC theory, and to its relevance in my world, I argued that it wasn't relevant to me at all. Although my father is (...was. He died in a homeless shelter a week before my release) Māori, for most of my life I felt no connection to his ancestry. In fact, I quite strongly embraced European culture and worldviews. I did that, I think, largely due to his absence. My father and I only ever met several times, the last being when he called out to me, across the yard, on my second day in prison. So, yeah, combined with the serious heroin addiction he led my mum into, there was a lot of resentment there. An outcome of this, I have come to learn through this journey, is that my fractured, supposedly European

identity/ethnicity felt challenged when engaging with arguments regarding the prison's role in processes of ongoing colonial harm. Part of me, the part wounded by the stuff with my father, felt triggered and thought, 'Nah, that's not true. 'They' just do more crime...' Then, almost alongside that entrapped, culturally embedded thought, another comes. And it goes something like, 'They is you, bro. They is your father (Looking down at the ground, now). They is the three quarters of the cell-block you're in. And it is in that, and through being able to unpack the issues, through the SOC thesis, in this autoethnography, that I am able to find a coherent, ethical, stable location, a place wherein I can become connected enough with the rest of my self to participate in the PIC arguments. Because there is no denying what I saw around me all those years. And most of what I saw wasn't white.

In addition to its politicality, the SOC thesis connects powerfully with the autoethnographic approach in other important ways. It compliments both autoethnography's methodological and theoretical aspects. Beginning with method, the poststructural perspective of the SOC theory is especially important, enabling my research in several ways. For one, in focusing on correctional harm/prisonisation as involving the machinations of society that occur beyond prison walls, it enables me to contextualise my experiences, to explore the ways in which these interweave with important socio-structural processes beyond my prison world. This is central to the ethnographic potential of my methodology as it is allowing me to access the social, cultural and political forces/relationships implicitly embodied and embedded in my institutional pains. As discussed earlier,¹⁸ these power relationships that structuralise

¹⁸ See Prologue, pp. xxiii-xxv.

lived experience are usually concealed beyond the reach of consciousness. Accordingly, becoming aware of the power-base of correctional harm, through the SOC thesis, is especially notable; it is empowering me to think and see beyond/through my captivity. It has also become possible for my narratives to transcend from autobiographical excerpts of my prison life to the autoethnographic analyses we are traversing of ways in which various socio-cultural issues structure and shape that life.

A further significance of the SOC thesis is its emphasis on risk and dangerousness as discursively constructed. Such emphasis enables me not only to access the political power relationships implicated in risk narratives but to question them and in so doing to question elements of my identity constructed by that discourse. An interrogative approach is fundamental to the criticality of autoethnography and to my ability to analyse my pains. And there is something to be said here, about how having that ability makes me feel. Because, oh, jeez, it feels good, and affirming, to be able to... Well, to just *move*, and move in ways that feel affirming rather than crushing... In opening spaces for critical analysis of my pains, the SOC thesis also enables me to problematise important regulatory forces involved in the production of that pain including risk assessment, deficit-based treatment approaches and the risk-averse practices that control both and all... Indeed, it becomes possible to see much of correctional practice as informed by anxious meta-narratives of risk rather than scientific evidence (Arrigo, 2013). In pursuit of this the SOC thesis asks such questions as who benefits from assessments of risk, and “for whom is dignity affirmed, stigma averted, and healing advanced” (Arrigo, 2013, p. 687) when risk-management legislation is implemented? This poststructural criticality enables me to challenge both the supposed inevitability and legitimacy of my pains, and thus captivity.

Also indicative of the close relationship of the SOC thesis and my methodological aims is the former's focus on solutions. Whilst undoubtedly a "sharply critical" (Brown, 2013, p. 695) approach to the study of correctional practice and prisonisation, the SOC thesis makes its argument in pursuit of reform to both policy and correctional programming (Arrigo, 2013). Certainly, in criticising and emphasising specific harms and problems with risk-based, control-oriented approaches, the SOC thesis envisions a carceral experience in which a person's difference is celebrated and their pains are witnessed and recognised. It discusses such a therapeutic approach through the concept of Psychological Jurisprudence (PJ; Arrigo, 2013; Arrigo & Sellers, 2018; Sellers & Arrigo, 2022). PJ, as a way of pursuing rehabilitative healing, focuses on relational ethics, a search for/recognition of virtue and potential rather than deficit, and on the problematisation and deconstruction of socio-structural mechanisms harming the body (Sellers & Arrigo, 2022). These are principles that, it is argued, must guide therapeutic (and, notably, clinical) practice if human well-being and flourishing is to be realised (Arrigo, 2013; Arrigo & Sellers, 2018; Sellers & Arrigo, 2022). Indeed, development of such an approach to rehabilitation is at the heart of the SOC thesis.

Significantly, this psychological jurisprudence is also at the center of my heart; having endured so much correctional harm, my research lives and breathes through an indescribably intense concern with seeing our correctional system heal. Accordingly, my autoethnographic analyses of experiences of imprisonment and rehabilitation are deeply in tune with the heartfelt goals and hopes of the SOC theory. Indeed, I want to work not merely to illustrate what is wrong with the system but also to develop knowledge regarding what is needed for approaches that will enable genuine rehabilitative growth and becoming to occur. It is such that the stories of harm that are shared are not told simply to criticise, or 'hate on,' the system. Rather, when I'm telling

stories that show how dominant control-based approaches are problematic and damaging, I'm wanting to strengthen the argument that there are issues behind prison walls by putting a human face to them. And, crucially, I am wanting to do this in order to contribute to the calls for work to be done to address the issues. I am much inspired, here by the work of Amy Johnson (2013). I met Amy through the thesis. She is very much a part of the collective, having published a visceral, powerfully embodied account of her painful experiences of carceral harm. Such stories, of the felt experience of the pains of confinement are rarely found in the literature. Imagine my surprise, then, when I picked up a *'Clinical Anecdote: I should Be Dead,'* and read...

Besides the name-calling and condescending tone, other things were strangely similar when you compare my wildly dysfunctional family to the treatment I received inside the mental hospitals. The hospital engaged in the practice of restraining patients. A typical scene would go like this: A person becomes agitated, or afraid. (I would be in the middle of a flashback, in the middle of remembering a specific thing my dad would do, sexually, and for me, it was scary, because back then I didn't know or understand that I was afraid, that is was just a memory, because my senses would remember everything in such detail. I literally thought I was being raped in the now rather than in the past.) A code would be called, code red or code green, and staff would come running from all directions...

Hmm. Yes, Amy, they do that here, in prison, too.

...Running, literally.

Yes, thundering down the corridor, keys jangling loudly.

...A group of six or so, all men, would bum rush me, and then jump on me. They'd grab my arms and legs and push me down...

Yeah, and that.

...Now, you remember, my dad, a man, raped me when I was a small child, about 3 years. In my mind I was already being physically threatened by my dad, and then I would look up and it would be happening all over again; here came six big burly guys grabbing at me, ripping at my clothes and twisting my arms. They would rip my clothes off saying they had to give me a shot in the ass "to calm me down." It was exactly like my dad, exactly how he raped me. He jumped on me, crushing me. He pinned me down so I couldn't move. He ripped my clothes off, or hiked them up. And he forced himself on me. It was a horrible re-creation of the very thing I was trying to get away from, from what I was trying to get help for. I went into the hospital looking for understanding support and what I got was rape and abuse. Out of the frying pan, into the fire. (Johnson, 2013, p. 669)

Amy's pain, honesty and bravery moved me. What moved me even more, though, was the academic, and therefore powerful, location in which I found her voice. That she was able to speak from such a seemingly inaccessible place spoke of possibility, that all I knew, and had welled up inside me, hidden, may not need to stay there. Already awash amidst the awakenings of discursive agency through the SOC thesis, Amy's voice and movement contributed to what has become, with time,

lots of time,

a decade of time,

my own telling, and movement. And so it is that I seek to add to Amy's efforts, and to the calls of the thesis, to provide another *real* human face/body to the harms that the SOC not only *theorises* as real but that Amy and I (and many, many others) *know* are real.

Thus far, we have encountered stories that show only the pains of imprisonment. And, certainly, there are more to come. Moving forward, however, I am also going to include stories of positive engagements I had with my prison keepers. There are few but, perhaps in part because of that rarity, they strongly illustrate what can happen when a relational approach and jurisprudence, as advocated by the SOC thesis, is able to flourish. Indeed, we will see how being celebrated, loved and heard "for real" (Johnson, 2013, p. 667) can be deeply healing, for both the kept and their keepers. In sharing those stories, of becoming and the privileging of human difference, I hope to make contributions to the work being done in the SOC thesis, and by others (i.e., Brown,

2013; Johnson, 2013; Polizzi & Braswell, 2009; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Ward, 2013), to develop approaches to working with people in the criminal justice system that involve growth and potential, rather than risk and reduction.

In addition to its relevance to the methodological aspect of autoethnography, the SOC thesis connects fundamentally to its theoretical aims. Indeed, for me, perhaps the strongest aspect of the relationship between autoethnographic theory and the SOC thesis is that they both involve an ethical praxis. As we will see can also be the case with autoethnography, the SOC thesis is reform/solution-focused; it pursues a way out of harm and captivity (Brown, 2013). Certainly, in deep harmony with critical performative autoethnography's focus on becoming, it imagines "a people-yet-to-come" (Arrigo, 2013, p. 687). The SOC thesis enables this imagining and pursuit of bodily movement in several ways. I turn, firstly, to its ability to not only increase my awareness of the machinations of prisonisation/captivity but to then empower me to question them and to speak for myself. Consideration of this critical praxis not only exemplifies a way in which my research may contribute to addressing my (and society's) captivity but also allows me to provide yet another illustration of our captivity and harm in action.

The questioning enabled by the SOC thesis is powerfully liberating, leading to a narrative in which I can participate in the re-representation of my experiences and identities. Certainly, Brown (2013) writes that:

The first step in overturning the "society-of-captives"...is simply allowing a statement to begin...in the realm of structural

violence [amidst one's captivity/pain] **without the inevitable follow-up therapeutic, correctional response** (emphasis added; p. 697)

Imaginings emerge here. I wonder what it would be like to be able to talk about a lock without the prison having a risk response? Without a fear of being assessed, and transferred to Maximum-Security? How might it make me feel toward the system and, importantly, what might it enable for my keepers? Could they harness and grow my potential rather than work to crush it? And, what might it mean if they did?

Unfortunately, sadly, those imaginings were never realised, for either Corrections or me. I can't say I was surprised. As Brown contends, the usual Correctional response involves denying the possibility of a person's statement/narrative, of their person. Despite the seeming impossibility of possibility, I felt strangely satisfied and hopeful as I engaged with Brown's discussion of a way out. Maybe, just maybe, I could believe that the statements my thesis is able to make will actually contribute to the 'first step' out of captivity Brown envisions? Buried in the bowels of the prison system, it was a welcome feeling. But, in the midst of this empowering reaction I realised there is a need to be very cautious, that I was being a little short-sighted...

Consider the evidence, Dan. You cannot just believe...

Unfortunately, there is some rather concerning evidence. A rather strong example of it presented itself right around the time I was beginning to feel real hope in the possibility of, well, possibility/becoming. The story begins with an interview with a

Corrections' clinical psychologist, in which I was being assessed for admittance into an intensive twelve-month treatment programme. It is told from the place I then wrote it, sitting amidst the experience. Not all prisoners are required to go through such a rigorous pre-treatment evaluation process but, due to my 'profile' and academic pursuits, it has been deemed necessary. During the course of this meeting, the psychologist became very curious about my research and there are early signs of a reduction to sameness, of the type of follow-up correctional response which would suffocate my narrative's dynamic potential. I was informed by the person assessing me that my research could be a 'barrier'.¹⁹ Indeed, I was told that she needs to seek 'clarity' regarding whether I have 'authority' to continue to write of my prison experiences whilst on the programme and, in particular, of my engagement with the psychologists/facilitators. Such is their interest in my research that, as part of the background assessment of 'me', a request was made for a copy of my Honours dissertation. I duly supplied it, and it had been read prior to the interview. It became clear during our interview that this dissertation has not been well received. Desperate to be admitted to the programme, I stressed that I write 'only of my growth' and that, as in my Honours research, no facilitator would be identifiable, nor defamed. The clinician's only response was to say she would not even want to be alluded to, whether in a negative or positive light. Accordingly, the mere act of narrating this present moment is one of resistance, of defiance even. Am I brave, stupid, or both? Whatever

¹⁹ A key element of any assessment of criminogenic risk within the Risk-Need-Responsivity model of offender treatment (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) is consideration of any issue which may present as a barrier to treatment. Notably, within the clinical model the assessor, not the prisoner, decides whether any particular factor constitutes a 'barrier.'

the case, I am okay with 'possible' defiance. It is an ethical stand, informed by an awareness that "revolution from within...institutions and world systems that are fundamentally dysfunctional is something of a hornet's nest of problems" (Brown, 2013, p. 700).

Indicative of the immense power and madness of the reductive, control-focus culturalising the Society of Captives (Arrigo, 2013), the psychologist advised that a condition of my acceptance on the programme may be that I sign an agreement to not work on my doctorate for the year I am undergoing 'treatment'.²⁰

I know I opened this section saying I would be addressing the relatedness of autoethnography and SOC theory... But the story in which we are immersed is so relevant to both, and to illustrating the SOC thesis' arguments, that I must keep us here a moment longer...

The notion of this agreement raises several serious issues. One, how could it ever be adequately enforced? Doing so would require intensive cell searching and monitoring of everything I write. This, in turn, would surely create significant suspicion and panoptic surveillance (Foucault, 1977): conditions hardly conducive to a therapeutic connection between my keepers and I. Secondly, how is such a position ethical? I suspect it may constitute a breach of my human rights and/or right to academic freedom (though I don't know much about what my rights actually are)... Also, the mere suggestion of such an agreement is deeply coercive. It is, for instance, loudly emphasised that prisoners have a choice, that the programme for which I have

²⁰ Ahhh...(sighing). That *treatment* word again...

been assessed is ‘completely voluntary’ (DOC, 2011). Perhaps it is, on paper. But there is another side to this policy.

If I do not complete the programme I will never be released from prison.²¹

Indicative of the sadness of this situation, of the madness of it, the psychologist’s gaze extends even to my field-note journal. Consequently, if a ‘no research’ condition is imposed upon me I will not even be able to make entries in that reflexive journal – a journal focused on my rehabilitation. This makes me mad. Why? Because, besides making me feel oppressed, their actions are contradictory and ignorant of my deep commitment to using the reflexivity of my research to contribute to positive change within myself. Having read the information leaflet about the programme, replete with

²¹ When a prisoner goes for a parole hearing, there is usually a buzz in the Unit. Upon returning the person will be bombarded with questions – how did it go, who was on the Board? And, most important of all, if parole was denied, why? Seeking to gather any insights I could into how the decision-making process worked, and what the Board would be looking for when my turn eventually came, I was often the asker of such questions. The answers I received from one particular long-termer, Reg, stood out to me. Reg explained that the Board made it very clear to him that their job is to assess risk. And that their (the Board’s) overarching concern is the psychology-based rehabilitation programmes the prisoner has completed. Reg went on to tell me that, despite having completed numerous education/trade courses, having a clean disciplinary record and strong community support, he was declined parole. For the ninth time. And it was declined because, despite the abundance of rehabilitative work he’d done, he’d not completed one of the psychology-based treatment programmes (‘Reg,’ personal communication, February 1, 2019). Reg will be okay, though, because his statutory release date is only twelve months away. But I’m a lifer. I don’t have a statutory release date...

community-oriented photos, I see there is a huge steel and brick sign near the therapy room. It is clearly a symbol that takes pride of place. Do you know what it says?

REFLECTION

(DOC, n.d.)

The hypocrisy and madness of it – being told I may not be allowed to engage in personal research that involves deep self-reflection whilst I am on a rehabilitation programme that will require that same deep self-reflection... Nonsensical as it may have been, not long after the assessment interview with the psychologist, the proposed hypocrisy and madness became definite: I was notified that, to be eligible to attend the programme, I would need to step away from my studies. Worried at the prospect of having to stop studying, and perhaps buoyed by the sense of agency I was beginning to enjoy in and through it, I decided to be brave and speak up. In a letter to the Prison Manager, I asked to be allowed to continue, and explained, as I had to the psychologist, the personal focus of my research. I emphasised that the bodily place it required of me, one of honest reflexivity and openness to growth, was strikingly in tune with what the rehabilitation programme would demand of its participants.

Sadly, it didn't matter how much my research could contribute to my growth because, from the system's perspective, a situation wherein a prisoner doing a psychology-based program was also engaged in a psychology-related PhD presented as a transgression of a plethora of knowledge and power boundaries. And so, despite much attempted negotiation from supportive prison staff, their bosses remained steadfast in the decision to suspend my study. They said it was the best thing for me, so that I could focus all of my efforts on the rehabilitation programme. The 'negotiations' went on for over a month, with everyone involved in advocating for me becoming increasingly saddened and frustrated at the needlessness of it all. We all recognised, and knew that Management recognised, that I was quite capable of undertaking both the course and my study simultaneously. Not wanting to have to step away from my doctorate for a year, I made a desperate, last-ditch attempt at being allowed to carry on: I submitted another letter to Prison Management. The response was a stern, total one, and it came

not from local Management but from the executive, high above. Certainly, I received a letter from the Regional Commissioner²² directing me to suspend my studies. The letter was a mix of political rhetoric and thinly-veiled dissatisfaction.

Figure 1

Excerpt From Letter From Regional Commissioner

Your success at university has demonstrated an aptitude and enthusiasm for academic study and I applaud your success and encourage you to continue on this path. As a result of your work you will know how imperative it is to focus on your study for it to be a success.

While I understand the importance of your academic study to you and also the importance it has in your overall rehabilitation, what is most important is successfully addressing your violent offending. I firmly believe this concern will be echoed by the New Zealand Parole Board.

To ensure the best chance for you to re-enter society safely, I am directing that you undertake the STURP and that your PhD studies are put on hold. This will mean that Corrections will not be supplying you with the material, devices or phone access you have required for your study while you are undertaking the STURP.

As Figure 1 indicates, the Commissioner's reasoning was contradictory and a poor attempt at being seen working in pursuit of rehabilitative ideals. I mean, to encourage me to continue on my educational pathway whilst at the same time denying me the ability to do so just makes no sense. And to say that the directive was being made to give my rehabilitation and return to the community the best chance possible... Really? I don't want to sound sarcastic by stating the obvious but, generally, you do not increase someone's chances of a successful reintegration into society by forbidding their educational growth. In short, the system's reasoning was madness. Nonetheless,

²² A Regional Commissioner oversees all operations across all prisons within their geographical region. The New Zealand Prison system, comprising eighteen prisons, is divided into four geographical regions.

the decision was final. To challenge it further would have been to risk being refused a place on the rehabilitation programme. And that, as just mentioned a page or so back, was not an option: with me being a Lifer and that programme being pivotal to any chance of parole, to not demonstrate compliance by suspending my study would have been, in effect, to throw away any possibility of release. Following a path of complicity, in the full awareness of what was going on, of the needlessness, felt soul-destroying. Furthermore, in addition to the sense of injustice and principle of the issue, I worried at how I would find my place again. Because, man, the stage I'd gotten to with my research had been hard fought for. Thoughts of losing that... I felt robbed. Even now, several years after that dreadful experience, it makes me so sad to think of how hard they tried to extinguish this research. I mean, why? What did all their strenuous efforts to reduce achieve? For them? For me? Little other, it would seem, than frustration and pain...

I wanted to put a field note here, of the pain that being forced to suspend imposed. And not just for me, but for all the people – in Corrections, academia, and amongst my family, who were supporting me. But when I went to my journal looking for one I discovered that, from the time I received the Commissioner's crushing letter, I did not write a single entry for three months. With regard to the impact of the experience, I guess that speaks for itself...

Autoethnography and the SOC thesis closely relate with respect to a shared emphasis on the questioning, challenging, and, ultimately, overcoming, of the structures that harm and imprison us. The other significant way in which the SOC thesis relates to my autoethnography's theoretical focus concerns language. Through producing an awareness of a society of captives, the SOC thesis allows me to access alternative

discourses regarding my prison experiences. Such awareness opens up possibility for me to know both my captive environment and self in different ways, and so creates further potential for positive movement and healing. Consider, for instance, the heavily confined, isolated nether-world of the total institution. Within it, outside, alternative cultures and discourses rarely breach prison walls in any meaningful way (Johnson, 2005; Larson, 2010). This leaves institutional and convict discursive frameworks to reign, dominating the carceral world. And, as noted by Sparkes and Smith (2011), such frameworks can be very powerful, providing people “with a menu of narrative forms and content from which they...draw in an effort to line up their lived experience with the kinds of stories available...” (p. 357). Consequently, prisoners’ opportunities for thinking outside of prison culture are severely restricted and, without access to alternative narrative menus, correctional practices and the pains of imprisonment can become accepted as normal and, of even more concern, inevitable. Even I, as discussed in introducing this chapter, became captive to these beliefs.

The SOC thesis challenges this epistemological colonisation of my consciousness. For example, in drawing attention to the fear-driven, risk-based reductive nature of the correctional system it becomes possible for me to see that the practices and pains I endure are not inevitable. They are not *‘just jail’*, as so many prisoners and staff believe. Illustrative of this possibility, an emerging awareness of the captivity of correctional staff is already helping me to re-interpret some of my experiences. Indeed, I am beginning to feel that some of the harmful behaviour I’ve encountered from my keepers is more likely a symptom of their imprisonment to a stringent risk-reduction culture than a product of personal whims or vindictive intentions. I am thinking, for example, of several instances in which I have been denied study support. I have long struggled with these, seeing them as thoroughly anti-

rehabilitative and so surely emerging from nothing other than a Prison Manager's dislike for me. Comments by staff that such managers have become reluctant to approve anything in the wake of the 2014 escape, to Brazil, of a high profile prisoner, have made little sense to me and done little to alter my assumptions. I'm not the escapee and, after all, wouldn't allowing other prisoners to engage in such rehabilitative activities as tertiary education *reduce* the risk of similar escapes, of the very criminality they are worried about?^{23 24}

With only a narrow, prisonised cultural framework to draw on I was, for years chained to interpretations of counter-productive (mad) correctional behaviour as intensely personal and maliciously dismissive of my humanity and efforts to become. This is a toxic captivity that, as my stories illustrate, strongly undermines the possibility of a therapeutic relationship between the correctional system and prisoner. Within such captivity mistrust, paranoia, frustration and desperation reign.

Given the deep emotional trauma this negativity produces it has been, and continues to be, of significant value that I am able, through the SOC thesis, to move

²³ Decades of research around prisoner re-entry has firmly established a clear relationship between education, particularly tertiary education, and lower rates of recidivism (i.e., Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; O'Neil, 1990; Page, 2004; Rose et al., 2010; Thorpe et al., 1984; Williams, 2017).

²⁴ Important questions arise here. Why, for instance, would the system react to a rare instance of criminal behaviour (in this case an abscondment overseas from a home-leave) by creating conditions likely to do no other than increase the risk of such behaviour in future? In the wake of the Smith 'escape' Corrections cancelled all home-leaves and community work-programmes, nationally. Furthermore, numerous Lifers were removed from low-security Self-Care units. This situation lasted four long years. Alas, our correctional system's reintegrative component was essentially destroyed. Why does such risk-adversity occur, and who does it really serve?

into different understandings. Indeed, the above example is indicative of a shift from an antagonistic to empathetic attitude, one in which I see my keepers' person – their “biography and history [and so captivity]” (Brown, 2013, p. 697) – for real. Such an outcome has significant benefits not only in that it enables me to potentially recover from past harms but also, henceforth, to have some agency to respond to future pains in less destructive ways. And, as will be discussed, in depth, in Chapter Four, by seeing people rather than just ‘psychs,’ ‘screws,’ and fellow ‘crims,’ it becomes possible for me to engage with them relationally, and so to have ethical, rather than violent, encounters. Bearing in mind the degree to which both the SOC thesis and autoethnography are concerned with pursuit of personal becoming, healing, and social justice, ethical praxis is of fundamental importance.

In considering the relationship of the SOC thesis to autoethnography, and to my research, there is one last thing I want to mention. Such has the impact of the SOC thesis been that, for a time, I lost myself to it. What I mean by this is that, quite without realising it, I became so connected to the SOC thesis that my focus shifted to one wherein I thought that, without it, my stories could not stand. In that, I lost sight of myself and, quite against the SOC thesis’ purposes, I began to surrender my sense of legitimacy, individuality and self to it. Through both the soft coaching of my supervisors, and the wisdom and maturity that years of engagement with poststructural theory have provided, I have been able to re-orient. I now understand that it is my lived experiences of incarceration that are authoritative. Sure, I can contribute to the arguments the SOC theory makes, but I do not depend on it for validity. My experiences, lived in *my* body, through decades of confinement in dozens of prison cells, stand, by virtue of that embodiment, all on their own.

I have had to be careful, therefore, to not lean on the SOC thesis as some sort of guide to deciding which stories of pain to work with. Rather than searching for experiences that ‘fit’ the SOC argument, I select them based on their impact on my body. Certainly, a person does not need to apply theory to themselves in order to know which experiences have been harmful for them; as a site of incarceration and rehabilitation, their/my body has the authority to tell them/me that (Spry, 1995). So, I must work to remain aware of my body as a place of knowledge in order to avoid descending into a disembodied and structuralising interpretation of its movements through rigid application of theory (Ellingson, 2006; Gannon, 2006). To do this, I find it helpful to remind myself that, in enabling me to research and understand the production and meaning of those experiences I recognise to be harmful, the SOC theory actually contributes to me as much as what I will contribute to it. Like I said when introducing it, such is the relationship I have formed with the SOC theory that we are a collective, speaking with, not for, one another.

You know, something else I wrote, earlier, is that encountering the SOC thesis has been life-changing. But, looking back, it has been more than that. When I think back to the time at which I took that undergraduate forensic psych course, I was not living in the sense I am now. For one, I had only recently been moved out of Maximum-Security. We had had to fight Prison Management, for months, to make the move happen. I was thus fatigued, and just surviving, rather than living. And, as said earlier, I was lacking any meaningful awareness of my captivity, of the needlessness, and thus injustice, of the pains of my incarceration. Consequently, I was not free to be myself. Rather, I was a prisoner, both to an ignorance of the deeper epistemological, social, cultural and political mechanisms producing the conditions of my confinement and to the self-concept that those conditions contributed to producing within me. And so it

was that, in bringing an awareness of these issues, my encountering of the SOC thesis began what would become a transformation in the way I understood not only the system and its issues, but my own place within it. Indeed, the SOC thesis has empowered me to think well beyond the ‘that’s how it is’ narrative, to see that the treatment of me is not some kind of larger than life inevitability but, actually, is a mode of operation that is being produced very deliberately and systematically, using specifically developed tools and practices, employed in pursuit of particular agendas and outcomes. Through that enabling I have, gradually, grown into a process less of rolling, more resisting. This doctorate forms a significant part of that awakening. It has come at a cost, both psychologically and maybe even with regard to how long I would serve in prison. Whatever the cost, however, that movement, from docile, repressed subject to a place of reflexivity, critical self-awareness and ethical resistance is nothing less than transformative. Indeed, through the SOC thesis I have been able to recognise my captivity, to find autoethnography, and so to reach a place within my body wherein I not only want to move, but have the means of doing so. I’d like to now share with you what I found. I’ll show you how it is that I developed my autoethnographic voice, and have learnt to speak and re-narrate myself, and my experiences, in ways that provide me the sense of accountability, agency and justice that, for so long, our captive system denied.

Chapter Three - On Autoethnography...

12/11/17

Just been locked up. It's 2:18pm and I should be down in the laundry, but an incident has popped off over in B Block. I got downstairs nice and early, at 1:00 pm on the dot. Put some laundry on then got into my routine. I had planned to do 45 minutes exercise, then study until 3.00pm. But about fifteen minutes into that a 'Code Red' went off and a whole bunch of staff took off out of the Block. I could hear a big commotion over in B Block, on the middle landing by the sounds of it. Could hear prisoners screaming and the sound of broomsticks breaking, or maybe bashing against the officers' shields. Several minutes later I heard an officer I know yelling out, "Get down the back." She'd have responded from A Block. I heard inmates yelling "C's up!" It sounded like absolute chaos. After three or four minutes it quietened down and then I heard inmates at the end of B Block screaming out, "Yo Fuck Yo My Nigger!"²⁵ "Yo Fuck Yo Gangsta!" And, "I got that asshole!" Most likely, I thought, the screws had secured the inmates at the back of the landing, behind the middle grill. I resumed work but, within seven or so minutes, the Block staff arrived downstairs, told me it was a Code-Red lock-up of the whole site and that I had to go up and be locked up. I asked to stay locked in the laundry but no, site-wide lock-down. As I was coming up the stairs I asked how long this "overreaction" would last. I was being sarcastic, pissed off at having my afternoon

²⁵ I have used this term in full here because of its centrality to gang discourse.

fucked up. The staff said it is serious. Not long after I was locked up, at about 2:20 pm, the Westpac Rescue helicopter flew over and landed inside the perimeter fence, near the main entry sally-port. I've never seen that before and, indeed, it indicates that the incident is serious. I was initially just frustrated that the routine had been disrupted, but now I'm feeling pretty bad for whoever was involved. People have obviously been hurt, which is not cool. I wouldn't want it to be me. The chopper just left, at about 2:50pm. And looking across to B Block, about thirty metres away, I can just make out, through the layers of mesh screens, glass and bars, staff walking down the landings. No doubt police forensics will be coming in to investigate, so perhaps the staff are shifting the inmates from the landings, securing them downstairs?²⁶

Yet another dramatic, unpredictable day in maxi. Just yesterday morning there was an incident in here, when a fight broke out in Yard 4. The staff were almost finishing running the yards when suddenly I saw heaps of screws charge down the stairs and into the sally port. Over the next ten minutes a whole lot more turned up, in ones, twos and threes, making their way from various areas of the prison. In total, around 34 responded, including the on-call manager and two nurses.

²⁶ The incident was the talk of the Block for a few weeks, and pushed the prison even closer to the edge. Turns out the attack was part of an ongoing gang war between Blue and Red (Red broadly encompassing Mongrel Mob and Bloods, Blue the Black Power and Crips. Bearing in mind, of course, that allegiances are ever-shifting, lines forever blurring). In this instance, several Crips and Black Power attacked a high-ranking Mongrel Mob member. The latter was beaten, and stabbed 34 times. He nearly died. Numerous retaliatory attacks followed in later months.

Each of the inmates in 'Yard 4' was handcuffed behind the back and escorted back inside. As with the first incident, I was down in the laundry so got to see the whole thing up close.

Fumbling to understand...

This research is an autoethnography.

Hmmm....

What to say next...

Numerous starts and stops...

...keys jangling

...that autoethnography is about telling stories?

...gates crashing

...that it is aimed at pursuit of social justice?

...shanks flying

...that it is all (just) about the researcher?

...boots rushing.

It was amidst such ponderings that I began this chapter. And it was deep within the bowels of C Block, Pāremoremo Prison, that those ponderings occurred. Hmmm, I remember exactly where I was. The oddness of that time has never left me: on the one

hand, an A4 Refill pad lay on the table, Short et al.'s (2013) *Contemporary British Autoethnography* open beside it. On the other, I, *we* – me and Short et al. – were not where such engagements would *normally* be, at a place of learning and positivity such as a University Campus. Rather, we were locked in the cellblock's basement, in the laundry room to be exact. You see, I was the Block's laundryman, responsible for washing the clothes of 47 gangsters and convicts, each of whom wanted theirs done first. Locked in the little concrete room, wondering which person it would be who would shout through the gate at me that day, I'd try to study. Try, because it was from that room that incidents such as the one shared above were witnessed, were felt and absorbed into my bodily memories. And happenings such as this were regular – most days, officers would be running somewhere. Consequently, many days, the pad remained blank. Other days, I'd fight to produce some notes, some understanding. And so, sitting there trying to begin this chapter I felt, lost? Incapable even? It was a struggle to muster any more than the above few points/questions. As will be discussed, they are, in part, appropriate...in the right places...and spaces... There can be considerable tension around them, and they'll be more applicable in some areas than others; the use of each will depend upon what the autoethnography aims to do. Gosh, I'm straining against the chains of academic rigor here; I want to dive straight into *my* autoethnography, into how *I'm* going to draw on the methodology to develop a critical, performative study. But it is a complex (Wall, 2008) and “unusually rigorous” (Grant et al., 2013, p.1) methodology so, before I do, I need to present autoethnography broadly, attending to both its methodological and theoretical characteristics (*And I needed to do this, I now see, in order to try and figure out how on earth Autoethnography is practised*). Yet even in contemplating this work, I am getting anxious about the continuing debate amongst autoethnographers (Grant et al., 2013;

Neumann, 1996) regarding those characteristics, and am mindful of autoethnography's diversity.

My anxiety has been, was, exacerbated by the place I was in at the time I started studying autoethnography for this project. Looking to the way in which knowledge is produced locally, and is shaped by that location, I can now see the extent to which mine constrained my potential. I had literature, though a limited amount. But who was there to talk to about it? No-one. To even email or text about it? No-one: no prisoner is allowed access to electronic communications. These deprivations led me to thinking of the authors of my textbooks as next to me: I'd have conversations with them. Beyond what I could conjure within the confines of my mind, there was nothing. It led to me second-guessing everything. I struggled to make sense of the differences I encountered: what I now recognise as diversity seemed to me, then, as illogical, contradictory, unfathomable. Along with this, as the stories shared thus far illustrate, the space in which I began to engage with the literature to formulate this chapter was not one of openness, democracy and meaningful connectedness but of noise; violent noise and tension. A consequence of this is that, because of the never-ending assault to my senses, I was only capable of retaining a small amount of space within myself for study. It was hard fought for, believe me. Nonetheless, the limitations of my conditions have, I now see, showed: my discussion of autoethnography leaned toward an expose of the mechanics of the method. When I got stuck, got caught up in my head, all I had to run with were the definitions and understandings my textbooks offered. Those definitions were, for sure, like oasis of clarity amidst the nothingness. But they were not enough. The context of the emergence of my autoethnographic self – this story – was missing. My understanding of the methodology, what it enables and means for me, and why, was

missing. And so, the deep, embodied connection with autoethnography upon which its use depends, was missing.

In re-visiting this chapter several years after starting it, I have had to work to reconcile who, and where, I was then, with who, and where, I am now. It has required a re-development, the weaving together of multiple voices, voices spoken in very different places. Producing a harmony between my often disembodied, incarcerated, and free, voices has not been easy: it was tempting to just incise the former altogether and tell the story of my engagement with autoethnography from my present location. But those early writings serve an important purpose. Indeed, they are part of the story of my becoming. Further, they serve as perhaps the clearest evidence of what happens when we isolate those in our prisons from the social and academic support that would enable them to truly flourish. And so it is that the following discussion of autoethnography, as research method and theory, has been as much about developing my autoethnographic self as it is about helping you engage with this most complex of research approaches. We will weave through different tunes as we go, each representative of the time and place from which it emerged. Bear with me...

So, what iiiissssssss autoethnography?

In my first foray into an autoethnographic moment, I described it as a “research process [that] involves the description and systemic analysis (graphy) of self (auto) and of social-cultural context (ethno)” (Luff, 2016, p. 17.). The Honours project that emerged from this understanding “barely got there” (L. Coombes, personal

communication, May 10, 2018), one of my doctoral supervisors later told me. This surprised me as I produced considerable ethnographic insight, combining critical theories of prisonisation (i.e., Arrigo, 2013; Foucault, 1977) with lived experience of incarceration to show how Correctional practice is producing harmful outcomes. I even spoke in the first person!

“You barely got there,” she said.

Through considerable reflection and re-engagement with the literature, I have come to realise that my understanding of autoethnography was limited as my focus did not really move beyond socio-cultural analysis of my experiences of prison. It should also have involved consideration of how that analysis affected me, and of how I moved/changed through the research. I failed to embrace this theoretical, active process, which would explain why my Honours project was more ethnography than *autoethnography*. One study in particular has, through its intensity and strong illustration of how the methodology can work, greatly enhanced my understanding. In that study, Lisa Tillmann-Healy (1996) writes of her experiences of living within the reductive constraints of pathologising medical conceptualisations of bulimia. Lisa’s at-times-hard-to-read turn inward, to what was going on inside her, left me guiltily aware of the shortcomings of my last (first) autoethnographic journey. Through consideration of what sharing and analysing her stories has done for *her*, Lisa’s research is deeply reflexive:

At last, my stomach tumbles and churns, twisting, sloshing.
In a mass eruption, the words rush out of my mouth – a symbolic
purge. On the page, my insides lay bare for everyone to read. Perhaps
I should be ashamed, but somehow, I feel only relief. (p. 86)

Sitting within Lisa's pain, listening and being one of the ones to 'see her insides' has helped me understand that autoethnography is not only about researching cultural and social issues but is also about studying how this research involves, and affects, oneself. Indeed, given my connection with Lisa's narrative I expect that, whilst the following discussion will weave through numerous sources, Lisa might remain near me the whole way (*Jeez, thinking about it now, Lisa's work was something of a sanctuary for me, a place I could go to feel less lost amidst the lostness*).

To begin unpacking autoethnography I turn, firstly, to definitions (*of course I do. Where else could I turn?*). I'm wary of definitions, though, so my turning is done uneasily. Used without awareness of their reductive potential, definitive explanations can be constraining, overlooking both diversity and possibility (*and yet I still used them, such was my need to understand, to grasp at something*). Indeed, this potential danger of such explanations has the postmodernist hairs bristling on the back of my neck (*well, that's a good thing, at least!*). I employ them here with caution, only as guides to both summarising autoethnography's purposes and drawing out its core themes.

“Autoethnography can be defined as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts.”
(Spry, 2001, p. 710)

“...highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural.” (Richardson, 2000, p. 11)

“...autoethnographic texts consciously confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim – through a self-conscious, individual, political response – representational spaces that marginalize individuals and others.” (Neumann, 2009, p. 189)

“as both a methodology and method of diverse interdisciplinary practices, autoethnography is concerned with producing creatively written, detailed, local and evocative first person accounts of the relationship between personal autobiography and culture.” (Grant et al., 2013, p. 2)

In considering these descriptions several themes emerge (*and I'm actually happy with what follows, and am proud I was able to make sense of, and draw out, important threads amidst the chaos*). Clearly, autoethnography centers around discourse, involving the narration of personal experience. Secondly, it is evident that through this storying the methodology is ethnographical, analysing personal-social-cultural interactions to increase understanding regarding a particular phenomenon or

socio-cultural issue. And, thirdly, it is apparent that autoethnographic narrative involves moving across boundaries with the intention of doing something, for both the narrator/researcher and their audience. As the above definitions suggest, the ‘doing’ is often critical, involving such issues as the problematisation of marginality. It is in this sense that, as Grant et al.’s definition indicates, autoethnography is both methodological and theoretical. Whilst it will shortly be discussed that there is extensive variety in how autoethnography can be approached, it feels (kind of) reasonable to at this point claim that autoethnography, generally, will involve personal narrative, analysis, and a connection to social justice issues. As I say this I am conscious that I risk speaking reductively, and risk attempting to position an inherently fluid, flexible (Grant et al., 2013; Wall, 2008) postmodern method on ‘solid ground.’ Certainly, it is only Grant et al.’s (2013) assertion that there is general consensus around the above themes, combined with the commonalities between the definitions from which they emerge, that has me joining this positioning of the themes as characteristic of autoethnography.

Postmodern hairs continuing to bristle, I am now going to take us into the depths of autoethnography. I will begin with discussion of its uses, showing how, beyond the themes, the method is creative, pliable and can be used in a wide variety of ways. From there, attention will be drawn to its emphasis on personal experience, and use of storying. I will discuss how the methodology makes use of particular literary strategies in order to access the connections between personal experience and culture in ways that enable the production of knowledge. Using examples from the autoethnography I am creating I will show how, and why, the methodology works as it does, and why those workings are so important to enabling my research. Notably, this will involve consideration of some of the criticisms that are made of the method. By chapter’s end it is my hope that you will have an understanding of the particular methodological

process I am engaging in, and what I hope to achieve through it. *(And, by chapter's end I hope that there is no longer a need for these italicised voice-overs. That is, I hope that, by then, I'm singing from the heart rather than the songsheet).*

Contemplating my autoethnography...

Autoethnography is a diverse, flexible methodology that can be used to pursue a range of aims. A key strength of the method is that it can be tinkered with, adjusted/molded to fit one's specific goals and purposes (Douglas, 2013). The composition of any particular autoethnographic project will depend on both the researcher's purpose and style (Grant, 2013). Goode (2007), for example, uses analyses of personal experience of divorce to develop knowledge that stands to contribute to peoples' ability to live improved everyday lives. Whilst her narrative explores issues of gender and marital inequality it is not dominated by a critical or radical tone. Instead, her narrative focuses on developing insights into peoples' relationships with material objects, particularly with respect to the significance of those items to a healthy identity. Other instances of autoethnography focus much more on the experience of harm. These narratives tend to be critical and to give considerable attention to the narrator's pain. Even within particular categories, however, there is considerable variation. Some critical autoethnography is content to sit within the pain, thereby producing an account that focuses on developing knowledge regarding the embodied affect/consequences of harmful issues (i.e., Denzin, 2003b; Smith, 2017; Ralston, 2017; Rambo Ronai, 1996). Others may go further, such as looking for ways out of the pain and harm. These approaches often use a destructuralising narrative whereby the narrator searches for, exposes, problematises, and so contributes to undoing dominant narratives, processes

and myths that have hitherto held them in painful positions (Cuellar, 2017; Ergas & Ritter, 2021; Lapadat, 2017; Tillman-Healy, 1996; Visse & Niemeijer, 2016; Wall, 2016).

It is these aspects that, for me, make autoethnography so enabling. For one, it is through that recognition of the importance and value of experiential knowledge, and analyses of self, that my personal stories of prisonisation are able to enter the academic institution, and so attain the legitimacy required to become part of the wider professional, national conversation regarding criminal justice reform. And to go even further than that, in doing this work, joining the literature and being heard, I am able to engage in a process wherein I have some agency to, as one of my ‘oasis of clarity’ moments noted earlier, “consciously confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim...” (Neuman, 2009, p. 189)...well, perhaps reclaim myself.

Navigating this literature – the songsheet – and its potentials has me thinking back to when I first encountered autoethnography, and began to develop some sort of consciousness as to what might be possible. It was an immensely powerful beginning, one that, in combination with a long-held desire to do doctoral-level research relating to my experience of prison, would lead, years later, to this project. I’d long daydreamed of the possibilities of a PhD but had thought, and been told by many, that such an undertaking would be impossible within the confines of prison. However, my meeting of the SOC thesis and autoethnography helped me realise that being locked in prison, and so unable to go out into the world to access data, did not extinguish all possibility. Rather, through autoethnography I became aware that much of my field of study, much of what I needed, was right there with me, in me, looking at me in the mirror. Of course, it has taken extensive literature reviewing, soul work, and mistakes, to reach a point

wherein I can properly see my reflection. And, too, see deep within it to the “situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, 2001, p. 710) that enables me to study the relationships between myself and the system. But in the beginning, just to know that my reflection was there was empowering, and transformative, in and of itself.

In thinking of these transformative, active, critical aspects of autoethnography, it is important to note that the context of its emergence involved it being a response to the harmful, marginalising affects of dominant Western epistemologies and social scientific research methodologies (Ellis et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2013; Richards, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Spry, 2001; Whitinui, 2014). Accordingly, much autoethnography is indeed critical and focuses on problematising and speaking back to marginalising discourse and practice. Such is the extent of this focus that autoethnography is often described as being, primarily, about the resistance of social injustice (i.e., Adams et al., 2017; Denzin, 2000; Denzin, 2003a; Gannon, 2017; Lapadat, 2017; Naidu, 2014; Spry, 2001; Van Katwyk & Guzik, 2022; Whitinui, 2014). It has certainly been used to do this in a range of areas... *(Ah, yes, this is me in the early days, still feeling defensive and unsure of the legitimacy of my position. I felt incredibly vulnerable both in terms of the strength of my methodology and, perhaps more importantly, with respect to how the establishment, Corrections, would react. Because, as will later be explored, one thing I knew for sure is that Corrections would HATE that a prisoner was speaking, much less about them, and in ways that they perceived as ‘negative.’ Even now, a year following my release from prison and well advanced with my research, I’m still scared of how it (and thus I) may be viewed by the institution. And so I felt, and at times still do feel, an intense need to justify, to firmly locate myself amongst other critical studies as if to say, ‘See, it’s not just me critiquing dominant social norms and institutions,*

these other people are doing it too! Now, where were we? Oh, yes...)... For example, a brief search of the autoethnographic literature yields studies of discrimination, oppression and inequality relating to gender and sexuality (i.e., Adams, 2011; Carless, 2013; Ettorre, 2010), ethnicity and colonisation (i.e., Tamanui, 2012), physical and mental illness (i.e., Richards, 2008; Ronai, 1996; Tillman-Healy, 1996), medical care (i.e., Kolker, 1996), education (i.e., Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, & Leathers, 2009), incarceration (i.e., Luff, 2016), and employment (i.e., Payne, 1996; Vickers, 2007). Given its focus on these issues, autoethnography usually involves “stories of pain and suffering” (Moriarty, 2013, p. 63). Bochner and Ellis (1996) advise that, whilst not *always* having such a focus, readers would be best to steer clear of autoethnography if they only want to read of pleasurable experiences. And, certainly, most of the stories I share, of experiences of imprisonment, will not be pleasurable to read. I make no apologies for this as it is because those experiences have happened that stories of them need to be told, that research needs to be done that questions and challenges a system capable of the production of such happenings.

Whatever focus an autoethnography takes, at the heart of the methodology is story-telling (Grant & Zeeman, 2012; Wall, 2008). Importantly, though, it is about telling particular kinds of stories. For a story to be *autoethnographical* rather than *autobiographical* requires that the narrative have a particular structure, tune and aim. This necessitates several things. Firstly, it must be embodied, bringing the researcher’s lived experiences, and thus body, onto the page. Secondly, it needs to be reflexive. One of the meanings of this is that the story must include reflections regarding its telling in which the narrator considers the meaning (for themselves) of telling their story (*One meaning for me, right now, as I read back through this material, is joy, and pride, that I was able to find the capacity to produce these discussions whilst buried in the little*

laundry room. I wish I could have seen, then, the progress I was making. Instead, I felt stupid, unaware, lonely, tense. And scared, not only of my environment but of the prospect of writing this story of my methodology. That I can see it now is indicative, to me, of my growth since then. It is so important to engage in this process in autoethnography: to pause, take a breath, and look back. Because I'm quite certain that the person sitting back there was looking, dreaming, hoping, to one day be sitting here). And, thirdly, the story must *do* something, it must *perform*. A narrative struggles to be autoethnographic if it tells a story only for entertainment, without wider analytical, reflexive ethnographic purpose (Ellis et al., 2011; Holt, 2003; Spry, 2001).

Importantly, an autoethnography is not just one story. Rather, it is made up of little stories/moments all over the place (Grant, 2013). And this collection of storied moments (which any autoethnography is) is itself part of a wider story/issue. For example, my research is comprised of a range of stories of life within the criminal justice system. And those stories will (I hope), through contributing to the efforts being made to improve the system, become part of the wider national, and international, literature on prison reform. A further notable aspect of the stories within an autoethnography is that they can vary in length from entire chapters to single sentences. It took me awhile to get this, and to understand that the significance of any story depends not on its length but on its contribution to the narrative surrounding it. I found the following story, from within Lisa's autoethnography, a really helpful example in breaking through the traditional, structured epistemological framework through which I was seeing autoethnography. Prior to encountering it, I reacted to short, and 'strangely' laid out stories as nonsense, as devoid of research value. How misguided I was...

They Lied

When I was

a

lit

tle

girl

they said that getting

B I G

was a good thing.

In this tiny single-sentence story, Tillman-Healy (1996, p. 81) connects her experience of bulimia to dominant societal/cultural values and norms regarding the female body. And in doing so, the story is tiny only in terms of word-count. Far from being insignificant, it is strongly embodied and exercises vast performative power; in just one fleeting moment Lisa was able to connect me to the confusion, pressure and pain of her experience. Additionally, she is able to chart her physical change whilst also connecting it to socio-cultural power structures that dictate/d where womens' bodies are expected to go. It is such embodiment, power and personal-societal connection that moves a story from being autobiography to autoethnography. Through hers, Lisa moved me. And, through mine, I hope to move you too.

It is not only in length that the stories within an autoethnography can vary. They can also, I have come to learn, be composed in any number of ways. Certainly, the stories can range from non-traditional poetic and dialogic expression to traditional ethnographic writing (Gannon, 2017; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Richardson, 2000). I used to struggle with this, subscribing to some sort of binaristic either/or paradigm wherein the tune of a project needed to be consistent. However, autoethnography does not pursue such sameness: when one moves from an evocative first-person voice to that of a more traditional literature-review, for instance, one is not moving in or out of autoethnography; rather, one is moving from one story to another. The interweave of past and present voices, in this chapter, is a good illustration. Through the ability to move in such ways, I am able to bring into the narrative voices from various locations. And, crucially, I am able to do so without having to sever those voices from their locations, a severance which would produce some sort of disconnected, objective narrative. In places, multiple voices even work alongside one another, helping me to show you (and myself) my movements, and progression. In doing this I am able to tie places and spaces together that would otherwise remain distant and largely invisible to the reader. They are often not, however, distant in my body, with connections to those long ago stories remaining strong, and influencing life in the present. Being able to ebb and flow, through autoethnography, enables me to attend to those places, my connections with them, and so to develop deeper understandings of what has happened, and is happening, within me. Lisa's story of bulimia, above, also demonstrates the diversity and shift possible in autoethnographic tune. Following graphic, poetic presentation of her bulimic movements, Tillman-Healy (1996) transitions directly into a citation-laden, traditional review of the medical literature. This shift is made with nothing other than the sentence, "Here is their story." (p. 78). Consequently, to be

autoethnographic a narrative need not be long, but must constitute a story from cover-to-cover, from the first word uttered to the last (and I'm conscious here that narrative journeys, academic or otherwise, never end; Grant et al., 2013; Tamanui, 2012).

A reflexive turn, and the embodiment it enables...

In consideration of the storied, performative character of autoethnography, I come back to the story of my Honours project. Reflecting on both my supervisor's comments and the importance of embodiment to autoethnography, I now recognise there were times when, albeit unwittingly, I hit the pause button, distancing myself from my narrative. How did I do this? Primarily, by not being reflexive enough. By failing to 'story the story.' I did not, for instance, do justice to the reactions my body was having as I wrote: those reactions should have been interwoven through my literature-reviewing, but were instead rendered invisible. Importantly, I was not understanding that autoethnography is a *process*. Unlike other approaches, it is not a method wherein one writes up their methodology from a detached perspective, then subsequently engages in it and becomes visible through an 'analysis phase.' As discussed in Chapter Two, the poststructural epistemological position informing autoethnography does not recognise the possibility of such distancing between self and world, or disconnection between past, present, and future. Therefore, production and performance begins not when one completes the formation and presentation of their methodology and reaches the point of analysis of their experiences, but from the moment the first word of the research project is penned, or even thought of. Certainly, there can be no separation of researcher and their autoethnographic project (Grant et al., 2013; Holt, 2003; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Rather, the auto and ethno aspects of autoethnography necessitate the

presence of the narrator – a strong level of embodiment – throughout. Accordingly, in writing from a largely objective location, I removed (again, unwittingly) my body (and thus self) from my narrative for extended periods (entire chapters). Further, I paid scant attention to the affects engaging in my research was having for me. Indeed, I told plenty of stories about incidents in prison, but I did not analyse enough, reflect enough. I should have been moving, then, as I am in this project: present, visible, and reflexive from the outset. That reflexive analysis would have led my research (and thus me) to where I am now, into deeply *auto* territory. It would have taken me into the depths of both my prison self and my present self. And reaching those places is how both theoretical and embodied insights into correctional harm can be produced because it is in those places that embodied, rich, experiential knowledge regarding the system, and its impacts, can be found.

That I am where I am now is, of course, largely a product of where I was and, more importantly, failed to go, then. In harmony with the reflexive consciousness that autoethnography pursues (Ryan, 2017), I failed to delve into what it all meant for me. I should have looked more closely at how experiences of prison changed me and at how studying these was affecting me. What impacts, for instance, did my work have on my location as a prisoner? And on my movement as a free-person-yet-to-be? Had such questions been asked and answered, I'd have gone down those little rabbit holes of subjectivity warned against by mainstream methodologies: those little crevices where emotion bubbles over and we sit with it, embrace it and consider what it means. I'd have talked about the places I was writing from, places like the laundry room. I would have opened chapters with stories of my locations, and of how it felt, and what it meant, to be in those spaces... But I didn't. And, consequently, my (*barely*) autoethnography lacked reflexivity, embodiment and performance. It has been very important, coming

into this project, that I find a way to properly attend to those characteristics. The ethics and authenticity of my research, and personal growth, depend upon it. Fortunately, there are a range of techniques and practices that are enabling me to breathe the life into the present autoethnography that was so sorely lacking in the last (*Well, these voice-overs are lessening... My connection to my methodology, and presence, must be increasing* ☺).

An important way in which one can contribute to the embodiment and performance of a narrative is to bring depth into one's storying. One approach through which I work toward this is to, as well-illustrated throughout our journey thus far, take time to include my surroundings as I write. Take, for instance, the story involving 'The C,' in Chapter One. Or, more recently, my mention of keys, boots, and shanks. Such stories are not included in pursuit of some sort of sensationalist value. Instead, their purpose is to provide a visual, sensory aspect to the wider narrative. In this, that detail can produce a level of depth and connection not as achievable were it either absent, or presented from a third-person position. To embody writing consider, also, the way in which I thread stories of my past, Honours research, into the present narrative. Inclusion of those past moments infuses the present story with bodily dimension, providing a temporal richness and depth representative of life (Park-Fuller, 2000). They speak of my movement and development as an autoethnographer, serving as a marker of somewhere I've been whilst I present my methodology here, in the now. And, as illustrated earlier, in addition to contributing to embodiment, use of this practice prompts reflective analysis and, by drawing attention to possible connections between seemingly distant periods, consideration of how historic events may be influencing current ones.

A further, powerful approach through which to embody a narrative is to make it evocative. The aim here is to produce emotional reactions, and connections, between narrator and audience. To work toward this, autoethnography blends traditional social scientific writing with the arts (Grant et al., 2013; Richardson, 2000). That once forbidden interdisciplinarity has opened ethnography to many evocative literary conventions whose use can help the researcher to not only get their body onto the page but to ensure that it becomes a site of meaning-making (Spry, 1995, 2001). These include poetry (Carp, 2021; Giorgio, 2009; Lee, 2023), photography (Goode, 2007; Tamanui, 2012), and creative use of page layout (Richardson, 2000). With regard to the latter, cast your thoughts back to the various paragraphs and pages that seem messy, disordered. The ones with sentences and ellipses spread sporadically all over the pages, the ones with sentences that are backwards... The writing looks this way because I *felt* that way whilst doing it. The long spaces, the apparent emptiness between sentences, paragraphs, the pages upon which only a single word is written... These are me not knowing, torn between ideas, struggling with what I'm saying, being ripped back to a place I don't want to go to... I might even be crying during those long, barren moments...

Those empty white spaces are not empty...

They are telling you something.

What that something is depends on what is going on around/through the moment. For example, what was I saying as the page went blank, and what do I say once the words start flowing again? Use of such conventions weaves further layers into the narrative, ones which may prompt the reader to think *beyond* the text. Certainly, the at times disordered layout I use may distract you, and make you wonder what else could be going on. If so, I am succeeding, because it is that sort of reflection and connection autoethnography hopes to foster (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Gannon, 2017; Spry, 2001). And as well as taking your thoughts further, I hope to establish the sort of meaningful connection with you that your body may come too. It is my hope that poetry may help with this. In addition to helping me ensure that my stories do justice to how I was feeling in the moment, and in the later moment of their re-production, poems also help me take you with me: Amidst the many stories to be told, I want to enable you to understand what I saw/see, and feel what I felt/feel.

Another very useful practice, and one upon which I draw extensively, involves the use of field notes. Indeed, field notes form a significant aspect of my research. There are a number of reasons for this. The year prior to the commencement of my doctorate, 2017, I began keeping a detailed journal. The decision to do this was motivated, somewhat ironically, not so much by a realisation that a PhD was on the horizon, but by some poor decisions I made during the winter of that year. Those decisions led to my being re-classified as a Maximum-Security prisoner and, accordingly, I was returned to Pāremoremo Prison. Although much was to come from that experience with

regard to knowledge for my research²⁷ it was, undoubtedly, a terribly stressful time: I was near suicidal in my first months back in a place I thought I'd never see again. Alas, both wanting to figure out why I did what I did and also as a way of processing and releasing my hurt given the lack of other means, I started the journal. In the years since, that journal has blossomed, initially quite without intention, into a deeply reflexive recording of the last (and perhaps hardest) years of my incarcerated life, and first year of life beyond prison walls. Guided by both the literature, public conversations around our prison system, and my own personal awareness of the most salient issues, I draw stories from my journal for this research. Indeed, they form the basis of many of the arguments made here. Actually, no, such a statement minimises their significance. Many of those stories are, in and of themselves, the reasons for the arguments I make in this research. Importantly, field notes are not usually enough, on their own: They provide the raw emotion, events, destruction, damage and, notably, positivity (on occasion) that I have experienced as a prisoner of the correctional system. However, it is the literature, primarily the SOC thesis and supporting theories regarding prisonisation, that helps me to make sense of those journalled stories. Through that sense-making, it becomes possible to identify and discuss the connections, and relationships producing them, in such ways that we can identify problems in order to work towards realisation of the sorts of improved rehabilitative practices envisioned in the SOC thesis.

A further value of field notes is that they enable me to do the sorts of literary work discussed a little earlier, wherein I can bring in past voices and moments in ways

²⁷ Experience and knowledge that will be explored, in depth, in Chapter Six.

that reproduce an account as richly, and authentically, as possible. It is, of course, not feasible to fully capture an experience (Ellis et al., 2011; Hokkanen, 2017). But there is still much an autoethnographer can do to pursue depth and authenticity. Having field notes, written during, or soon after, an experience, greatly aids that work (Farrell, Bourgeois-Law, Regehr, & Ajjawi, 2015). Indeed, my involvement with autoethnography suggests that, try as we might, it is very difficult to write of a past account, long after its happening, in ways that achieve the same degree of feeling, connectedness and representation as does writing produced amidst the experience. By writing, in my cell at night, as the experience I was writing about swirled all around me, and coursed through me, I was able to record unique and highly emotive aspects of what I was living through. And, significantly, I was able to record a particular part of myself that otherwise might have been lost to time. Because, for sure, as I re-engage with some of those past stories I can see that such was the depravation and chaos of my conditions, then, that I could never have gotten myself back there, from here, to find the me that is in my field notes, the incarcerated me who was sitting amidst all that pain. Another especially valuable outcome of doing that deeply embedded field-note writing is that I have a treasure trove of stories of my incarcerated self and life from which I have, subsequently, been able to reflect on, and contrast with, the later (*non-incarcerated*) self that has been re-engaging with them. This reflexive process helps me understand how I've shifted and moved, and so can only add to the richness of my narrative (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Boll, 2024). And, in that sense, in their emotionality and rawness, my field notes are perhaps the most intensely felt embodied writing to be found amongst these pages. I did not have to work and use strategies to embody them, they just are: the viscerality and captivity of the experiences ensured, quite beyond any choice on my part, that I would be present. Considering their centrality

to my work you can, as you'll likely already have gathered this far in, expect that field notes will, whether as excerpts or full stories, appear regularly throughout our journey.

You'll know them when you see them as they are the only writing to appear in 'Ink Free' font.

I probably don't really need to point that out actually as, trust me, you'll know them when you encounter them: most were written in a very, very different place to where I am now, and so will take you to a very, very different place than you are now...

A stab of pain hits me and tears come into my eyes.

I've shifted from 'distanced' discussion/presentation of auto-ethnography to sitting in a place deep within it and have become more aware that, like Lisa, I am doing that sitting within catastrophically powerful institutions. Tears of joy that I am feeling (and thus knowing) what it is I need to do and tears of sadness... that it needs doing at all.

I'm noticing, now, that I'm no longer feeling a need to write myself into the chapter. I'm here now, aren't I? Present, deep, reflexive, singing from the heart... As a final nod to my earlier, songsheet self, I'll acknowledge the general literature by noting that not all autoethnography draws on the array of artistic/unconventional literary strategies we have just worked through. But, as discussed, for me they are crucial to a desire, and ability, to embody my work, to make it evocative and therefore performative by showing you (rather than just telling you about) my body's movement across the pages and throughout the research. In doing this – bearing my soul, its trauma and innermost vulnerabilities – I hope to help you/the audience come to trust me. Indeed, I want to build a strong, ethical connection with you through my narrative because, as Richardson (2000) notes, “evocative writing touches us where we live, in our bodies” (p. 11).

In addition to being able to acknowledge and represent my bodily reactions, and work toward meaningful relations with my audience, there is another very important reason why I strive to infuse my narrative with creative flair and ‘disorder.’ In accordance with both the performativity of autoethnography and my poststructural agenda, I aim to use the method to continue challenging realist, disciplinary rigidity. Informing these aims is a postmodern desire to re-write, and so re-create, the narrative space. My desire emanates from a refusal to allow traditional scientific structures, in the form of rigid, disembodied writing practices, to impose themselves on the page (Grant et al., 2013; Richardson, 2000). I am mindful here of Grant et al's (2013) assertion that qualitative writing should “pursue a politics of difference rather than sameness” (p. 9). Accordingly, were I to remain within conventional literary boundaries, I would fail to attend to a key theoretical purpose of autoethnography.

Autoethnography as theoretical praxis...

Whilst autoethnography, as research methodology, is very much about the development of ethnographic knowledge, of insights that are of use to better understanding socio-cultural issues, of equal importance is its theoretical praxis. We see this in its use of the creative, embodied literary strategies discussed above. For example, by infusing techniques traditionally confined to the arts into ethnographic prose, autoethnography actively, and intentionally, challenges the hegemony of traditional social-scientific writing practices. In this way the very process of writing autoethnographically is, irrespective of its ethnographic focus, active. It works theoretically, making an argument for doing research differently whilst, in the very same breath, doing it differently. In terms of its advocacy of alternative, embodied postmodern methods of social scientific writing, autoethnography thus performs in support of its own argument.

In addition to the active resistance discussed above, autoethnography functions as theory/practice in other important ways. Perhaps the most significant involves the method's particular theoretical focus on human 'becoming.' In this, it hopes that the researcher emerges out the other side better in some way. This 'better' is not, and cannot, be tightly defined as it is a subjective notion; it will differ from one project to the next, depending upon the narrator's research focus and their interpretation of what movement/better is for them. Examples include liberation/empowerment (Park-Fuller, 2000; Tillman-Healy, 1996), healing (Ettorre, 2010, Giorgio, 2009), and reconstruction of identity/self-renewal (Ettorre, 2010; Richards, 2008). For me, all of these are important aims of this research. Indeed, as discussed when introducing this journey, hopes of reducing my captivity and being 'heard for real' were, and remain, important

reasons for my embarking on it. Encountering Lisa's work, in particular, helped me to see just how powerful autoethnography's methodological process can be in helping us shift ourselves away from harm. And it helped me see that many do autoethnography in pursuit of such goals. Lisa, for example, navigated an autoethnographic journey that enabled "movement toward a new and better place, a place of self-acceptance and empowerment" (Tillman-Healy, 1996, p. 104). Similarly, Wright (2009) feels that writing of her migratory transition has "been an *active* and creative form of therapy" (p. 636). Whatever the case, some form of movement should occur within the researcher during their autoethnographic journey. For, as Bochner and Ellis (1996) contend, what can we have learned if we emerge from our research as the same people who went into it?

As theoretical method, autoethnography can help the narrator move and become in several ways. One of these emerges from autoethnography's narrative process, another involves use of the method to shift one's self/identities (Richardson, 2000). With respect to the former, the stories told through autoethnography are often those that cannot be told anywhere else (Richards, 2008; Turner, 2013). Whether because of social taboos, discrimination against difference or fear of condemnation, stories of marginalisation, abuse, oppression and other injustices are often buried deep within the bodies of their sufferers (Park-Fuller, 2000). My own experiences are an example of this. Within the Correctional system, and wider society generally, there are few outlets through which the voices of those who are, or have been, behind prison walls, can be heard (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Brown, n.d.; Buck et al., 2024; Martin, 2023; Ross & Vianello, 2020). And, as I'm sure stories to come will discuss, any instance in which a prisoner does find some sort of legitimate avenue through which to speak out (including a PhD) usually attracts the condemnation and wrath of the system. Consequently, very

rarely are those in our jails able to speak, and so their experiences, and the stories of those experiences, remain trapped within their bodies. It is in this sense, then, that through empowering people to tell their long (and painfully) hidden tales, autoethnography as theoretical method can make room for them to exercise agency. This process of being able to speak, irrespective of one's research agenda, promises to contribute to emancipatory and therapeutic movement (Custer, 2014; Richards, 2008; Spry, 2001). The journey you are on, with me, wherein much of my speaking and moving was done while entombed in prison cells, is rather indicative of that ☺

The other important aspect of autoethnography as praxis is that it can be used to shift, and assert, one's identities and locations. Such reconstruction/self-renewal can occur through the researcher becoming able to shift their understanding of past experiences of harm in ways that improve wellbeing (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). It can also occur through a direct use of the discursive agency enabled by autoethnography to explicitly challenge and write back to harmful, identity-constraining structures (Richards, 2008). Certainly, as critical, performative praxis, autoethnography enables one to ask problematising questions and to speak about issues in tones held by dominant Western social norms to be unutterable (Richards, 2008; Tamanui, 2012). Through this, autoethnography not only enables but facilitates movement across boundaries, into spaces previously/usually inaccessible. Illustrative of this is my engagement with Lisa. It is hard to imagine, for instance, in what other way an incarcerated offender and a 'bulimic' academic could ever connect to publicly discuss their long-hidden sufferings. Societal norms keep such positions apart, with the 'bulimic' 'over there' and the criminal other in another closet, further 'over there.' Such are the defining structures society inscribes upon these different subject positions that it is very unusual for any connection to be made between them. Autoethnography, however, enables them to

meet. And, in allowing such strangeness, it challenges and transcends stereotypes, helping people to move into new dialogic realms and places of becoming. Within these, alternative narratives and knowledge can emerge. The benefits of such movement could include anything from having one's trauma recognised by others, to being able to reclaim authority over one's body (Richards, 2008; Upshaw, 2017).

Through this research, I intend to draw on these theoretical aspects of autoethnography to not only develop understanding of the context of my pains, but also to disrupt dominant categorisations of myself. Indeed, I have been engaging in such a process, to claw back some right as to how I am known, since the first page of this thesis. However, there is a long way to go. To properly understand and deconstruct the complex, insidious narratives long utilised to cast/hold me in particular ways will require close analysis of them. Whether through media narratives, the online chat those narratives spawn, or via the correctional assessment and rehabilitation process, I have long been known, and largely forced to know myself, as “high-profile,” “high-risk,” and “dangerous.” We’ve already encountered some examples of these captive positions and, as we progress, I will continue to share, and unpack, those narratives with respect to the wider political and risk agenda informing them. That work is not only helping me reclaim myself but is, through the SOC thesis, enabling us to see examples of the ways in which risk discourse and adversity produces captivity and harm within people. Notably, we can see, here, an instance of how the society of captives theory and autoethnography work closely together. Certainly, it is through an interweave of the criticality of both, and of their shared theoretical emphasis on the challenge of institutional power, and their pursuit of healing, that I am able to not only imagine, but do, autoethnographic work. Thinking of this is humbling: I will forever be grateful for

the SOC thesis, both in the imaginings it has made possible, and in the role it has played in my finding autoethnography and, through them both, an opportunity for a better life.

You may recall that I opened this chapter with several questions. One involved pondering whether autoethnography is all (just) about the researcher... As has been discussed, it is not. However, some argue it is, and use this as a basis to criticise autoethnography. For a long time, I found myself agreeing with much of the criticism: it seemed logical. Developing a response to those challenges has been a central part of the growth of my autoethnographic self, and it is thus important to consider those issues before closing. A primary criticism made is that in its inward, introspective focus, autoethnography is self-indulgent, and so does not produce findings representative of anyone other than the researcher themselves. It is argued that by focusing on the researcher's personal life the methodology fails to produce ethnographic data that contributes to understanding the social world. Delamont (2009), for instance, contends that "autoethnography is all experience, and is noticeably lacking in *analytic* outcome" (p. 59).

Such arguments misunderstand autoethnography and can be challenged in several ways. For example, whilst the methodology undoubtedly focuses on the self, it does this in the knowledge that we cannot properly understand sociological, psychological and cultural processes unless we attend to how these manifest within those who experience them (Spry, 2001). Autoethnography's inward turn is, therefore, not self-serving but, through "study [of] the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual" (Spry, p. 711), aims to contribute an important layer of knowledge to our understanding of that world. And, in opening the ethnographic space to an inward turn, the methodology allows us to study ourselves as located and

produced, and so makes it possible to develop understanding of that production. Further indicative of the impossibility of its introspection negating ethnographic value, autoethnography is deeply concerned with studying how people are represented and positioned through culture and language (Grant et al., 2013; Richards, 2008; Spry, 2011; Whitinui, 2014). Given this focus, autoethnographic research involves extensive analysis of the world/s in which the writer moves: the two cannot be separated (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Spry, 2011). It is through consideration of intertwined processes that we see how autoethnography works not only as theory, but as ethnographic methodology, whereby the researcher draws on personal experiences in order to produce ethnographical knowledge of wider socio-cultural experience. As Sparkes (2000) contends, “it involves highly personalised accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (p. 21). That position is echoed by Bochner and Ellis (1996), who note that autoethnography “extend[s] outward from the self to others and culture” (p. 33).

To illustrate these points I turn, once again, to Lisa’s autoethnography. In line with the criticism of self-indulgence, Delamont (2007) dismisses Lisa’s research on the grounds that it is all about “*her*” (p. 2). Given the connection I feel with Lisa’s work, and understanding of the pain, bravery and movement that is woven through it, that criticism hurt me. Pondering our shared pains, and the criticism of self-indulgence my work, too, may attract, I felt compelled to stand up for Lisa – for us. Indeed, we are fellow travellers, wandering, sometimes charging, along paths that, hopefully, lead out of trauma. However, as I have discussed with regard to my journey, it does much more than just help me. And so does Lisa’s. Whilst her ever-shifting narrative is deeply personal, focusing on both her pains as a woman with bulimia as well as her hopes of movement to a better place, the research also has ethnographic value. For instance,

through problematising dominant medical understandings of bulimia, Lisa's narrative plugs into an important contemporary health issue. Indeed, her research provides new ways of knowing bulimia, helps "maintain a critical attitude toward many of our culture's stories of body and food" (Tillman-Healy, 1996, p. 105) and so contributes to our experiential and academic understanding of an often debilitating disorder that affects many people. This graphy takes her narrative beyond being only about her in multiple ways. For one, through tying her pain to dominant medical 'positionings' and practices, Lisa makes an argument for structural and cultural change in how society understands and responds to bulimia. Further, in speaking back to dominant narratives, her research creates possibilities for readers with similar experiences to also embark on processes of healing and liberation.

These arguments do not deny that much autoethnography originates in a personal/*auto* desire to be heard, to challenge one's pain and marginality in order to, above all else, help oneself heal/develop and feel better (Ettorre, 2010; Giorgio, 2009). However, what they indicate is that auto/ethno/graphy – as the name suggests – has multiple purposes and does multiple things. Accordingly, claims that it is self-indulgent are not well-founded. As has been described, in those examples that traverse pain and suffering, it promises to have therapeutic benefits at both personal and social levels, within *and* beyond the narrator, whilst also contributing ethnographical insight into the discursive, cultural, and political structures producing the pain (Ettorre, 2010). In this sense, then, it can make a valuable contribution to society through not only adding to the lives of individual members but also by working to improve the socio-cultural structures within which lives tend to be lived (Bochner & Ellis, 1996).

It has only been through a process of several years, grappling with and forming the above arguments that I have come to understand the extent to which

autoethnography's use of personal experience is done in pursuit of social justice, of better for one and all. And so, as important as the process of personal healing and becoming that I am navigating through my research is to me, it is but one of the reasons I am on this journey. Indeed, thinking back to Pāremoremo Prison, the place wherein I did much of my postgraduate research and began to develop an awareness of the severe dysfunction, harm and injustice characterising the machine within which I was living, there was little desire for personal healing. Rather, as awareness developed, and my engagement with the likes of Arrigo (2013), Davis (2003), Santos (2012), and local reform advocates (i.e., JustSpeak, 2014; Workman, 2018) grew, so developed a sense of injustice and desire to somehow contribute to the reforms so desperately needed. Quite apart, then, from being a methodology that produces knowledge only really relevant to the researcher, autoethnography is enabling me to use my personal stories in pursuit of reforms to one of the most important components of governance, and producers of harm, in our country. I hope to contribute in several ways. For one, through the sharing of particular stories of lived experience behind prison walls I intend to develop arguments that, presently, the prison experience is one of harm rather than healing or rehabilitation. This, as has already been occurring, requires me to illustrate (through storying) the harms, and then analyse them, drawing on the literature to understand the conditions producing them. From there, it will become possible to not only make arguments for the need for change but also to, through awareness of the harmful conditions, discuss what that change may look like. I am under no illusions as to the difficulty of shifting penal policy and practice. Located within longstanding cultural, political and economic institutions, there are immensely powerful structures to be negotiated for any meaningful change to be had. And it is for that reason that, like Lisa's, my autoethnography aims to move its audience, to establish the kind of

relationships with people that encourage them, through concerning them with the conditions within our prison system, to become advocates for change. Like Lisa, I hope that through my research I can not only become better within myself but can also provide understandings and illustrations that both speak for themselves as well as being able to be drawn on to substantiate and strengthen the arguments of others.

Notably, the pursuit of such connection with one's audience is an aim common to much autoethnography (Giorgio, 2009). Through the use of the sort of conventions discussed earlier, it strives to bring readers in from the distanced position of passivity/docility within which realist epistemologies have long held them (Grant et al., 2013; Spry, 2001; Witkin, 2022). There are several reasons for this. One is to provide the kind of self-healing motivation that Lisa works towards. As Bochner and Ellis (1996) note, for example, a core value of autoethnography is that, through enabling readers to connect with other people's suffering, they may be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of pain, reinterpret them, and in doing so perhaps discover better ways of coping. Another important reason some autoethnography seeks to close the gap between narrator and audience is that it works to shock and upset a reader in order to provoke critical reflection on their taken for granted positions (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). And, as mentioned above with regard to my research and the relationships I hope to have with you, this is often done in the hope of moving people to advocate for change (Hernandez et al., 2022; Park-Fuller, 2000; Richardson, 2000). I am aware, however, that in working to have a relationship with my audience, and in sharing stories of tense, complex, often-negative relations with others, a potential minefield of ethical issues emerges. Indeed, as will shortly be discussed, it was with regard to my relations with others that my last autoethnographic journey received its strongest criticism. And it is with regard to its ethics that perhaps some of the strongest criticisms of

autoethnography, generally, are made. So significant is the issue of ethics, and so challenging has it been for me to navigate as I move through this research that, with time, my discussion of the ethics of autoethnography has metamorphosed from what I thought would be just a section of this chapter, to an entire chapter of its own. For sure, it has been through my navigation of the ethics of autoethnography that I have perhaps learnt, and grown, the most within this complex, yet most enabling, of research methodologies. With the laundry room now far behind us, may I tell you that story?

Chapter Four - On ethics ...

“But they said nothing about the ethics of my autoethnographic storytelling,” writes Tamas (2011, p. 261), reflecting on the process of gaining ethics review board approval for her doctoral research. “Only research on others is subject to review,” she adds, “which leaves it up to me.” (p. 261). Tamas then goes on to write of the myriad ethical challenges her doctoral journey involved. These included confronting the potential impact, for her children, of telling her (their) story of spousal abuse and divorce. And, the even more complex issue of whether recounting a history of trauma may produce further pain, rather than the intended healing (Tamas, 2015). Her experience clearly communicated that having it ‘left up to her’ was not the unconstrained utopia that freedom to decide might sound like. I wish I’d encountered her doctoral story before beginning mine. I wish I’d been more aware of the ethical complexities of autoethnography when beginning mine. But I didn’t, and I wasn’t. In presenting my doctoral project for consideration I did not need to apply for ethical approval as I was not engaging in such things as human participant interviews, or experiments.²⁸ Like Tamas, then, the issue of ethics was left up to me. Initially, that seemed great: so much work I wouldn’t have to do, I thought: no creating consent forms, enticing people to consent, reporting back... A logistical nightmare avoided, for sure. I could just go hard...

I shake my head wistfully, thinking back, several years, to that naivety. I now realise that, in blissful ignorance, I’d applied for, and been granted permission, to

²⁸ See Massey University’s (2017) Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants.

wander into a minefield (Edwards, 2021; Lee, 2018). Embracing a feeling of entitlement that I believed years of pain and my autoethnographic methodology, allowed me, I entered that field and ‘went hard,’ telling stories. I wrote of unjust decisions of prison staff, of psychologists’ trying to force me to stop studying. Unbeknownst to me, however, my ethical naivety showed in my thinking and, unsurprisingly, my writing. Twelve months into my time in the field, I was confronted with my extensive lack of appreciation of the ethical requirements of my methodology when one of the mines in it blew up – right in my face. The explosion took place during the Confirmation of my PhD.

03/04/19

Once finished I sat down and they began the questioning. The most senior member of the Confirmation Panel did most of this [I’ll call him ‘The Professor’]. The first fundamental (and perhaps the most important) issue raised was the ethics of representing others. The Professor said that I appear to “trample over” the psychologist in my CR (Confirmation Report). “Do you have the right to do this in autoethnography,” he asked? “And, if so, how and why is it okay?”

I distinctly recall the reaction I felt, in that moment, listening to the Professor’s questioning. Or *interrogation*, as I viewed it at the time. Listening to him speak, I felt myself becoming angry. The ethical requirement of having to defend and/or justify my presentation of others who have harmed me pissed me off. It pissed me off because I believed that the only people I presented critically are those who have fucked me over. They are presented in a critical light because their conduct warrants criticism! ‘This is

why I chose autoethnography!', I thought. 'So that I have a voice and can expose the shit that happens in here.' I felt incredulous and, in my frustration, wondered what there was to justify. I mean, I was merely stating what the psychologist said and did - the lovely clinical opinions she formed that negatively impacted me in numerous ways. Nonetheless, feeling it may not be prudent to argue with the senior academic I hoped would confirm my doctoral enrolment, I did not voice any of that. I simply uttered, "I do not have a sufficient answer at this stage." The Professor was okay with that, but said I need to go into the literature and find one. He made the point that whilst it may be legitimate to write, so critically, about people in one's stories, the ethical tensions of doing so are such that I must explain why/how such writing can be legitimate. And, as if the bomb crater I was falling into wasn't already deep enough, the Professor went even further, problematising what ethical practice I had engaged in as prescriptive and disconnected. Attempting to defend myself, I had mentioned to him the creative/fictional license autoethnography provides (i.e., Campbell, 2017; Richardson, 2000) and how I'd used that, extensively, to reconstruct stories in ways that would help to render characters confidential. He critiqued it as "individualistic," explaining that, as an autoethnographer, I needed to start thinking collectively, in recognition of myself as a social being, as a part of others (Field note, 03/04/19). Referring to my apparent 'trampling' of the psychologist he said that what I need to do, when writing of those who have caused me pain, is to "see the humanity behind the role" (Field note, 03/04/19).

Sitting within the Professor's advice regarding the need to think of ethics as the responsibilities that emerge from one's location as a socially embedded being, I began to recognise that to be ethical, to not do harm, I must seek to have caring relationships with those my research connects to. To explore this notion I turn, firstly, to Bresnahan

(2015). She approaches the issue of ethics in autoethnography as relational: “I practice relational ethics as lived through caring, compassionate relationships, which emerge and change with my participants...” (p. 246). Bochner (2012) echoes this, noting that “our ethical relation to the other...is paramount” (p. 224). This emphasis on relationships provides a central principle for understanding and approaching ethics in autoethnography. Ultimately, amidst the various practices that can be used to produce ethical accounts, it is about the care of those we have relationships with. And, in a variety of ways, a researcher creates relationships with everyone their stories touch. This includes relationships with those one writes about, with oneself as the creator of the stories, with one’s research and, through that, one’s audience (Adams et al., 2017; Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Custer, 2014; Gannon, 2017; Ploder & Stadlbauer, 2016; Sparkes, 2024; Winkler, 2018). A focus on ethical practice as stemming from a basic obligation to humanity requires that these relationships be recognised and cared for. Accordingly, in discussing the ways in which it is possible to produce socially just, ethical accounts it is important to consider those various relationships. It will become clear, as we move through this discussion, that they are inextricably interwoven. We cannot, for instance, have an ethical relationship with our subject/s without also doing justice to, and caring for, ourselves and our research. Within that interconnection, however, there are aspects unique to each. Framing the discussion around the various threads making up our ethical relations thus allows for attendance to their diversity, and for greater insight into the ways that the various relationships move with, and sometimes against, one another. There is much to consider, I think to myself as, contemplating the complex discussion ahead, I take these first steps toward climbing out of the bomb crater *I* put myself in.

Trying to understand how it is I can come to see, and write of, the ‘humanity behind the role,’ I’m going to begin with a focus on the relationship a researcher needs to pursue with those in their stories. In that, I’m drawn to the form of autoethnographic practice that has enabled me to produce those relationships. Certainly, autoethnography’s emphasis on reflexive analysis of one’s own subject position has contributed, significantly, to my ability to attend to the various relationships my research produces. Contemplating that work, I’m feeling a desire to hold my breath, to confine myself to providing a traditional literature review. But, largely due to the journey the Professor’s questioning has taken me on, I know better, now. I’m also hearing another wise voice, here – “And part of the ethics...is more than just what you can find in journal articles. It is also about how you reflexively are moving in and through auto-ethno-graphy. And accounting for oneself” (Coombes, as cited in Field Note 15.07.2021). For reasons to be discussed, ethical practice in autoethnography requires holding myself to account – to my subjects, to my research, to myself. And, so, I recognised that I had before me an encounter/experience whose telling could provide a more comprehensive discussion of autoethnographic reflexivity than any disembodied literature review could ever hope to. Quite by chance, I endured a very difficult experience, with another prisoner, the day before beginning this foray into ethics as being relational. Beginning with the story of that encounter will allow the exploration/analysis of the necessary ethical practices in ways that enable us to witness them in action. It will show how those practices work, what happens when they are engaged in and, significantly, not engaged in. Further, through illustration of my responses, the ‘Eddie story’ will provide an illustration of the ethical accountability and relationships envisioned in autoethnography and of the practices required from a researcher who wishes to engage as a socially responsible citizen. Ah, yes,

accountability... In beginning I would like to take a breath, just a short one, and note that it has been through my foray into the importance of showing care in one's relations with one's subjects that the following story has become what it is, and not the co-production of violence it otherwise would have been.

The Eddie story – a production of violence...

26/08/2021

Unusually, my curtain is open. It is open because, sitting at my desk, room barely lit by the warm glow of my lamp, I'm enjoying looking out at the night sky. Lights twinkle in the distance, punctuating the darkness. They could almost be mistaken for stars. It is an indication of my calmness that I can see the dozens of security lights adorning the 30-foot-high perimeter fences as anything other than what they are. I sit and gaze at them. It is blissfully quiet. It is 7.15PM, and has been quiet since lock-up, three and a half hours earlier. Not one radio, or TV, blasting. A stark contrast to last night, and to the last four or five months. Last night I expected peace as the noisy guy (I caught myself thinking, CUNT) just down from me got released yesterday morning. I was thus rudely shocked and brutally disappointed when a stereo blasted, intermittently, between 4.00PM and 7.30PM. It was a big, tall guy called Eddie Kelly. At one point I got so stressed and angry I stood up on my chair, face at the window, fighting myself not to yell out. I got that close. I could see Maria in the guardroom, directly across from me, fifty metres away. I willed her to come out, knowing she'd tell him to turn it down if she heard it. And she would have heard it had she come outside. I willed him to

turn it down of his own accord. He didn't. Eventually, I lay back down and seethed until it stopped: an hour later. I resolved to make a polite approach either this morning or tomorrow morning if he blasted it again tonight. Calling out from my cell last night would have increased the risk of an aggressive response as it would have become an ego issue. A lot of people would've heard me call out, so he may have felt a need to refuse. That would've created a minefield of issues for both of us.

Once up, I didn't anticipate talking to him today but a random opportunity came up, in passing, and I took it. "Bro Kelly, was that your radio playing last night?" I asked. "Yeah bro," he said. "Bro, would it be possible to not play it loud after, like, 6.00PM? I know it's boring but, yeah..." I said in as friendly a manner as possible. "Could you hear it?" he asked, seemingly genuinely surprised. "Yeah bro, it was loud as," I replied, with emphasis. "Oh yeah, all good," he said, raising his eyebrows in the affirmative. It didn't seem a big issue to him whatsoever and that is certainly borne out by the blissful quiet I'm experiencing now. I can actually think. For the first time in months, I've not been on my bed once since being locked up, and I've been engaged in study since 4.30PM.

In the peace I'm experiencing, I'm feeling empathy for Eddie. In the sort of consideration of subject position that an autoethnographer's relationship to their subjects requires, I'm pondering the person, seeing more, which is a stark contrast to last night. Then, amidst my pain, I was seeing Kelly (not Eddie, because when angry I tend to see the PRISONER, not the person with a first name). I was seeing a tall (6" 5'), wide (130-odd kilograms), arrogant, wannabe gangster

with no concern for others. I assigned him to that category, thus writing him off. Had that writing been on paper he would have been constructed as defiant, thoughtless, arrogant, violent, criminal, no hoper – brown – and destined to come back. He would have been thoroughly condemned and I, his judge and jury, would have felt my verdict justified. And that is why continual ethical consciousness is crucial when thinking about, and writing, of those we are connected to. Because my construction would have been wrong. Indeed, my present perception of him confronts me with the extent to which last night's construction was only a partial truth, a sliver of who Eddie is. His friendliness in this morning's exchange shows that. His obvious willingness to respect my request illustrates it further (it's still quiet, by the way). So, yes, the difference between my constructions of Eddie renders it clear in my mind, stronger than anything else, that it is fundamentally important we do not allow our pain to overwhelm or control our representations of those in our stories, particularly when those subjects are involved in the production of our pain. Had I done that – had I written an account of Kelly that was captive to my anger, pain and the myriad distorted thoughts those emotive conditions produced, I would never have allowed for the rest of Eddie to be seen or heard. Shit, I wouldn't have seen it myself. I would not have attended to his soft heart or to how he is easily led and has been used by gangs as a 'lackey.' I would not have been told the story I heard, this morning, of how he has often been bullied, and assaulted. I would not have tempered my vengeful construction of his physicality by noting that he doesn't swagger, always walks with his head down and finds eye contact difficult. Heck, a mere mention of that fact alongside an angry relaying of

his height and width would have done some justice to him, allowed the reader to know more of him, to form their own view of him rather than be constrained by mine. When I wrote the story in my mind, however, I didn't do any of that. I created an arrogant thug and that is all, therefore, I'd have allowed the reader to see, [because that is all I could see]. In placing such constraints on my subject, deliberately or otherwise, my narrative would've created conditions that left the audience to draw on stereotypical constructions of 'arrogant thugs' commodified in mainstream media to form their opinions of Eddie.

Accounting for myself in pursuit of ethical non-violence...

I shudder in thinking about who I saw that night...an arrogant – brown – thug...and feel very uncomfortable, revisiting my construction of Eddie. Sitting in a very different place to when I produced it, I feel uncomfortable with the possibility that such an unethical account is possible. For instance, knowing I am not racist, and that the thoughts enabling the construction were contradicting one another, it alarms me to know I was thinking, and producing knowledge, unrepresentative not only of my subject (Eddie), but of myself. What I really want, right now, is to dive back into the story and rewrite it. But I cannot do that – the thoughts were thought: they cannot be denied.

Yes, Professor, I know: I must hold myself to account.

But how?

By being honest with myself, by looking at what was happening within me, acknowledging it, and unpacking it.

Indeed, what I must now do is reflect, analyse, explore why I was creating unrepresentative, harmful constructions of Eddie and I, and how to not allow myself to produce such harm throughout the research to come. To do that work it is necessary to discuss the approach/practice that enables such analysis and accountability. Contemplating the fundamental shift in my position, and the ethical relationships it has produced, I'm thinking of the practices that enabled the shift. Why, for instance, did/would consideration of my own position alter who I saw/see Eddie to be? What did that reflexive consideration involve? And, significantly, how was I even able to get to that reflexive place? Discussion of these issues will help us to see how it is that our inclusion of others in autoethnography is able to be ethical, how it is that we are able to establish caring relationships with our subjects, how it is that we are able to hold ourselves to account.

To be able to get reflexive, and unpack my position, has required tuning in to Chapter Three, to autoethnography's subjectivity and epistemology, to its relationality. These remind me that I am not separate from my own context – that my body, and mind, and therefore its constructions, are being moved in and through its, my, context, relationships, and life. They remind me that I must work, tirelessly, to resist the entrapment of the positivist epistemologies that have long sought to somehow disembody, and sterilise, research. I've also sought guidance from Bresnahan (2015), who has helped me see how a relational approach helps one break free of the disembodied (separated from oneself) and detached (separated, emotionally and relationally, from others) researcher position dominant in science. Certainly, by enabling one to bring the researcher role part of one's identity in to the various roles of one's life as a sibling, daughter/son, colleague, friend and so on, we are able to become

a subject involved in what we are researching. Indeed, the relational approach allowed Bresnahan to acknowledge/render present, and thus access, the emotions, relationships and processes therein, all of which enabled a significantly richer study of her mother's divorce. We see the inextricable connection/relationships between autoethnographer and their research in Bresnahan's statement that, "Being a sister cannot be separated from my study..." (p. 253). Similarly, being a prisoner, neighbour, friend, foe and so on cannot be separated from mine, and thus must be considered as informing the knowledge I produce. This awareness has been fraught with tensions, not least of which is the ever-present conditioning of traditional positivist epistemologies and literary conventions. As discussed in Chapter Two, these tend to eschew the presence of subjectivity, and humanity, within research. By firmly ensconcing myself within the relative freedoms of my methodology, I have been able to move to a more connected, aware position wherein I recognise that my 'stuff', me, is informing my knowledge creations. And given this, I have thus been able to ask, 'Well, what *is* that stuff?'

In addition to the various family and social, relational roles we move through, there is an infinite mix of conditions that, comprising the richness, complexity and depth of life, also swirl through our production of knowledge. These can include anything from one's ethnicity to wealth (or lack thereof), cultural and life experiences, sexuality, professional standing, political and religious views. I think of these conditions as various 'hats' that we wear, in any given situation. We see yet more of this in Bresnahan (2015), who speaks directly to how our self/identity, and hence subject position, contribute directly to how we do research and engage in relationships: "Now "I," *researcher, sister, daughter, and child of divorce*, realize that multiple aspects of my identity shape how I negotiate my relationships; I am many persons within, and performing through, this same body" (p. 258). Clearly, it is fundamentally

important to explore our identity – our self – when seeking to have caring, compassionate relations with others. Exploration of our self enables us to ask those various questions, and to attend to each aspect of our self, to the influence each is having. Accordingly, to do this caring, and to better understand the knowledge we are producing, requires understanding ourselves, who we are in any particular moment. And, to do that work requires reflexivity, interrogation of my subject position, wherein I turn the analytical lens upon myself and begin to understand who I am, and thus how this stuff of life is influencing my meaning-making.

Analysis of self is at the heart of autoethnography. However, as considered in the previous chapter, it involves more than just a leisurely sojourn into our being. Rather, we go into ourselves through a desire to hold ourselves to account, and to learn; indeed, the inward turn often emanates from an obligation to interrogate one's views, to problematise problematic knowledge/views. The work I am doing in relation to Eddie is an example of this. And so, reflexive movement is often a struggle, hard work wherein we have to confront aspects of ourselves we do not like and that, indeed, we may not have even known were there. My body twitches in anticipation of what I might discover about myself as I unravel the – my – damaging representation of Eddie. I contemplate not opening that reflexive door. I'm tempted to think, 'Well, what I wrote is my opinion, my perspective, and I am thereby entitled to let it stand.' But I now know better than that; the Professor's questions about showing humanity echo within me, and I know what I must do. As Bresnahan writes, "I am determined not to free myself from ethical issues but rather to make my ethical relation to others paramount – to search, to question, to confront my self and others directly, dynamically, with heart, with care" (p. 259; See also: Bochner, 2012). And so too must I, in pursuing an ethical telling of

the story of my encounter with Eddie, confront myself, hold myself to account, and care.

In exploring what is involved in considering subject position and pursuit of self-accountability, it has also been important for me to understand that, as a researcher, one assumes narrative privilege. Part of that privilege can be seen in the power we have to choose who is included in our stories, and the ways in which we include/present them. Bresnahan (2015) draws my attention, here, to the importance of always examining any instance of discursive power. Demonstrating engagement in such process, part of her process of interrogation of self involved asking:

- Who am I becoming in the process?
- Am I writing myself as the...saviour?
- Am I protecting myself with the role of researcher?

These questions illustrate important parts of the reflexive process, wherein we question our agenda. A strong value of such inquiry is that it enables us to get at the conditions of power informing our accounts. And, through the interrogation of the motives behind our accounts, it becomes possible to look for ways that narrative agency is influencing them. Why, for instance, do I include certain persons and not others? What does it enable me to do? And, with those who are presented, why do I show some aspects of them, but not others? Why did I (re)present the person, Eddie, in this case, in that particular way? Again, what is achieved by the particular representations I weave? Central to exploring these questions will be consideration of what parts of myself wrote the account. Who was I when I thought the thoughts, and held the pen? What 'masks' or parts of me are present in the encounter/story? That is, *who* am I in the relationship?

And, significantly, why are certain parts of me present in the account of the encounter, but not others? *Why* was I that person?

Guided by these reflexive questions, we can engage in self-analysis such that the links between our subjectivities and constructions can be understood and, where necessary, challenged. I'll now look more closely at my construction of Eddie. Doing so will show the extent to which our personal subjectivities, and conditions of life around us, can lead to the production of unfair, harmful representations, and thus to potentially damaging and unethical, accounts - of both others and ourselves. It will also be shown how, by engaging in this reflexive process, we can work to re/produce accounts that do not conceal or marginalise aspects of people's identities and contexts, and thus that show their humanity. I'd also like to claim, here, that reflexivity can help us produce accounts that are free of bias, that are wholeheartedly accurate. Such desires are, however, as discussed in Chapter Two, the stuff of dreams: knowledge and reality being local and thus only ever partial means that our accounts can never be single/whole truths. Certainly, there will always be those who, having a different understanding and experience, disagree with our accounting, our representations. And, as I will later discuss, our accounts can, therefore, never be entirely free of risk. For now, however, I must confront the task at hand, which is to confront myself, and my account of Eddie. In other words, a process of accountability...

In the week following my interaction with Eddie, wherein I stood at my window and fumed over the loud music he was playing, I thought long and hard about the account I created. I felt ashamed, and alarmed, at the way I constructed him, as a thug, a bully, a cognitively incapable ethnic minority, underserving of repute within the

prison underworld. Feeling a strong need to trouble my account, I wrote. Those reflections form the basis of this critical discussion of my account.

In the encounter with Eddie, I'm a prisoner, a convict (with higher values and status, and thus the resultant thinking), his neighbour, on segregation, and am European. With over a week having passed since the encounter I have been able to move past its pain, the murkiness that pain created for me, and can now see the degree to which each of those parts of me was contributing to my representation of Eddie. For instance, that I brought my 'prisoner' identity into my thinking regarding his music brought strong cultural values into my response. The presence of that identity made it highly likely I would perceive his noisiness as disrespect and therefore have a reactionary, aggressive response. I became captive to central tenets of prison culture, including that any slight, perceived or otherwise, must be met with force. That I was thinking of myself not merely as a prisoner but as an accomplished, well-known and respected one – a convict²⁹ – only deepened the disdain brewing within me. Firmly ensconced within the cultural frameworks of that identity, I became even more incensed that I was encountering loud music-playing considering the Unit we were in. It was a harmony-focused Unit, intended for prisoners who want to keep away from the violence, tension and criminal culture that pervades mainstream cell blocks. Experienced, veteran prisoners and convicts tend to hold scathingly critical beliefs regarding those who transfer to the quieter, less-criminalised Units only to become the loud, gangster-

²⁹ For further discussion of the various prisoner statuses and associated meanings see Abbott (1981), Einat and Einat (2000), Irwin and Cressey (1962).

types they didn't have the confidence to be on mainstream. They are seen as frauds, as weak. Although having been in harmony Units several years, now, I've brought my deeply-ingrained convict identity with me. In adopting the mantle of superiority it enables, the door was opened for me to see Eddie not merely as a lowly prisoner but, in accordance with the status convict culture assigns to physically imposing prisoners who behave arrogantly when in low-security, harmony-type Units, as a 'wannabe,' a 'try hard'. Assigning him to those various categories, I walked through that door. Shit, standing at my window, fuming, I sprinted through it, the righteousness instilled in me through nineteen years of upstanding convict behaviour, and prisonisation, coursing through my veins.

Significantly, my convict identity was but one of the 'hats' I donned in that interaction, yet we can see how extensively it influenced my construction of Eddie. Further indicative of the complexity that our subjectivity brings to our accounts of those with whom we relate, other important aspects of my subject position were fusing with, bouncing off and in some cases directly contradicting, the convict aspect. It is with difficulty that I acknowledge that one of those was a sense of ethnic superiority. I'm feeling a strong urge to justify it by saying the thoughts were fleeting, though I know their briefness doesn't justify anything. Contradictory as they were given that I am not fully European, I nonetheless found myself thinking that it isn't surprising a brown guy is being arrogant. Fueled by the 'wannabe gangster' categories/frameworks/schema that my convict-ness provided, I thought, 'It's just what they do.' They...? Hmmm... Um... 'Come on, Dan,' I say to myself as, sitting in a very different place to when I thought the thoughts I'm now thinking, and writing, about, I challenge myself: 'What do you mean by 'they'?' I'm getting there! At some point amidst his music-blasting I was no

longer angry at just the music. Rather, I was angry not at the construction I'd created, but at what I thought I was seeing as fact, as separate from any subjective lens. Feeling that feeling of stinkiness again as I confront admitting what I saw – what I'd produced in my mind – I saw a 'N*****' (*deep exhale and sense of shame as I write that*), an individual without class or standards, a person as morally bankrupt and unempathetic as the 'N*****' rap lyrics assaulting my senses. I saw someone who, in accordance with stereotypes of the type, was surely aware of his arrogance and so was dismissing me as a chump, as weak due to my apparent whiteness and smaller (slightly!) stature.

Man, we see here, so clearly, just how intensely the encounters we have, and accounts we weave, can be overtaken by emotion, and shaped by the social and cultural frameworks within which we live. And also the almost total lack of critical thought. I mean, to lean on historical, racist colonial perspectives of indigenous ancestry as responsible for arrogant, bullying behavior when I myself am not only part Māori but have also been the victim of *white* arrogance, is, quite frankly, ridiculous. However, as can be seen, absurd as that thinking may have been, it heavily influenced the representations, and thus knowledge, I produced. Along with the 'Dan as convict, Eddie as prisoner,' binary I formed, my assignation of Eddie to an ethnic group often held in dominant aspects of both Western, and prison, culture as reprehensible, made it more possible for me to justify my anger and condemning thoughts, and so to demonise his person as other. And, the further I was able to get his otherness from the status I felt I occupied, the easier it became to dehumanise him, to polarise his person. Indeed, from the moment I confined him to those binaristic inferiorities, and subjectivities, any possibility of compassion, of humanity, of seeing Eddie as anything other, was lost. And, within those conditions, any possibility of a caring relationship was also lost. As the thoughts I was having of Eddie amidst my pain demonstrate, the *mis*-representation

of him I produced was dangerously biased, misleading, aggressive and, therefore, wholly unethical. Yet, I would not have become aware of any of that had I not engaged in this reflexive process of interrogating my subject position. That analysis is enabling me to discover connections between my emotions (pain), dominant cultural frameworks, and subsequent constructions, such that I can take steps to move beyond their power, to write-back to them and so to see more of Eddie. It is through this that it has become possible to tell a story involving a person inflicting pain on me in a manner that, through consideration of his humanity, does not seek to produce further harm. And, importantly, through engagement in this process of accountability, I have found that I am not only able to work toward an ethical relationship with Eddie, but also to do myself, and my research, justice.

Prior to commencement of this doctorate, I never considered that doing justice to oneself, as a researcher, is a central part of ethical practice. I think that, intoxicated by the discursive power and agency I'd finally found, through autoethnography, I never gave thought to the need to care for myself. Heck, I thought that in finally having a voice and using it – 'going hard' – I *was* caring for myself! It has previously been discussed that, blinded by my newfound ability to speak back, I was not properly aware of the care for others' I needed to exercise. What I was totally naïve to is that I also needed to account, ethically, for *myself*, and that where I failed to, I put myself at risk of harm. Approaching ethics from a relational perspective has helped me understand why it is that it is not only those in our stories who can be harmed through partial, misleading accounts. Certainly, analysis of my thoughts of Eddie clearly illustrate the extent to which a researcher can also cause themselves significant harm through unethical practice. Writing of my thoughts about Eddie, breaths had to be taken. For example, in writing of my demonisation of his ethnicity, I became very uncomfortable

because I knew not only that those thoughts were totally inaccurate but that I did not believe them. I am not a racist person, yet I presented myself as one. Thinking of the ways that our various aspects of self often contradict and ‘bounce off’ one another, I also knew that my racist moment clashed with the convict identity I prided myself in occupying. Certainly, there are many ways in which a person can fall short of a convict’s high standards but, at least in the New Zealand prison system, rarely is ethnicity one of them. In fact, to be seen as racially discriminating against others would, given our nation’s brutal history of colonisation, generally be seen as unbecoming of a convict. Accordingly, in claiming convict status on one hand, whilst behaving in ways that transcended the values of such status on another, I was harming my identity. And, through these outcomes, I was involved in the reproduction of violence. Doing this undermined the social justice aspirations of my research in numerous ways. For one, any violent movement utterly violates my pursuit of personal healing and growth, and thus contradicts the epistemological and methodological principles of my research. Further, in producing harmful accounts, accounts that contradict the arguments surrounding them, I would risk presenting as hypocritical, as fraudulent, and so would risk alienating the very audience with whom I am hoping to inspire work for change. Clearly, the extent to which a researcher can inflict damage through the production of harmful accounts cannot be underestimated. I want to sit with this a little longer, and to continue exploring those consequences using the example of Eddie and I. Such analysis is perhaps the most powerful way in which I can know, and *feel*, the extent of the damage that can be produced if I fail to attend to the humanity of the people I write into my accounts.

Beginning with respect to damage to oneself, an important impact for me would be that, in failing to see, and attend to more of Eddie than only the pain he caused me,

I would (and, initially, did) deprive myself of the ability to empathise, to understand. Captivity is produced here because, in depriving myself of understanding of my subject's behaviour as anything other than the deliberate arrogance of a self-autonomous individual, I would be unable to respond to future instances of seemingly arrogant 'thug' behaviour as anything other than what my imprisoned perspective would permit. Consequently, in not allowing myself to see, and feel, the pain/violence contributing to my subject's violent behaviour, I chain myself to feelings of stress, anger and the potential co-production of further violence, every time I encounter it. A further way I damage myself by not attending to the situation surrounding Eddie and I, to its influence on our thoughts and actions, is my contribution to his misrepresentation and marginalisation. And I stay locked into a toxic vortex of negativity, attributing his behaviour to some innate deficit rather than to the external pressures influencing, imprisoning, him. And, in creating accounts that overlook my subject's humanity, I deprive myself of the ability to change, to grow in order that I can see, and care for, more. Indeed, I would deprive myself, Eddie, and the reader, of my ability to be telling the present story. With respect to Eddie, my account would not only contribute to the marginalisation of him but to the wider category I'm assigning him to. There are yet more consequences here because, in taking such an approach, whereby harmful cultural and institutional norms would be reified, and violence perpetuated through engagement in ongoing processes of colonisation (Coombes & Te Hiwi, 2007), I would be wholeheartedly undermining the principles, aspirations and goals of my research. Certainly, a primary goal is to problematise and contribute to the undoing of correctional harms. And, significantly, through autoethnography I aim not only to problematise those harms but, through my own practice and movement within this research, to demonstrate ways in which we can move ethically, relationally and with

care as we navigate tension, process and life within our criminal justice system. I am arguing for a correctional approach wherein we see and hear for real (Arrigo, 2013; Johnson, 2013). Part of that argument is, necessarily, that I myself engage in a praxis of seeing and hearing, for real. I offer the following field note, written only hours after my fraught encounter with Eddie, as an illustration...

26/08/2021

Phil [a senior Prison Officer] came over for a chat, today. I've been waiting to see him for a while. He got here at 12.00PM and didn't leave until 3.00PM! I mentioned Eddie and he said, "I'll tell you something about that boy. He's got a soft heart." I feel proud, and relieved. Proud that I've done justice to the ethical obligations that both my methodology and humanity require; and relieved that through that ethical practice/movement, I did Eddie justice. That is even more special to me given that there are thousands of Eddies in the system. By that I mean there are thousands of misunderstood, bullied, wandering souls. It is without doubt - without question - that many of them have inflicted pain on me. And, certainly, there have been occasions where I have returned that violence with violence, whether by pen or fist. There are also times, such as right now, where I have not. In these times, severing myself from the injustice and harm wracking my soul (whether through allowing time to pass or otherwise) has gained me enough space, enough breath, to be able to pause and see. Sometimes all that is seen is genuine arrogance. And that is okay; I can be at peace knowing I didn't return it. Oftentimes, however, pausing and breathing rather than attacking -

narratively or otherwise – enables me to see my perpetrator's pain/to see that which is antagonising my antagonist/traumatising my traumatiser/attacking my attacker. In the case of Eddie, the endless boredom that numbs and attacks the soul. And the neglectful, fucked up upbringing that, combined with the learnings learnt through years of incarcerated indoctrination by gangsters, deprived him of an awareness that his behaviour can really impact others. Hurt people hurt people, right?

I want to talk to Eddie, one day soon. We've only ever had one conversation in the four or so months he's been here. And, barely a conversation, it strongly indicated to me the extent to which the above attacking forces have distorted and shaped his values. The 'conversation' occurred one day when I was in the shower. The small privacy door to the shower was closed, but I'd left the main door open so I could talk with a mate, who was standing outside. Eddie approached and, without deliberation, asked if I'd been in for ages. When I confirmed that I had been, he asked if it was true I'd killed a cop. Again, I confirmed I had. His queries make clear the values – destructive, toxic values – he has been taught. He also once asked me if I held any of Parry's records for training – such as pull-up and weightlifting records: further indication of the value he places on the central tenets of criminal and convict culture, which include physical prowess and respect for violence. I want to contribute to redirecting Eddie. If he likes my crimes, the time I've served in prison, and the number of pull-ups I can do, maybe he'll like my opinions? I'm not sure exactly what I'll say. Shit, I have to work out where to

start, first, and whether he is even ready for deep thought. But I see potential in him, to become his own person, to become more than his life's conditions have permitted. I see the capacity to get a good, steady job, live quietly, make his own way. We'll see.

It becomes clear, then, why it was so important for me, for us all, to engage in ethical practice. The above example demonstrates why it is critical to pause, to not react to one's pain, to not respond to violence with violence. Certainly, it illustrates how critical reflection can enable one to travel to a place, in their body, whereby the pain can be rationalised and disdain, or even hate, of the perpetrator suspended, perhaps even escaped from. From that it becomes possible, both emotionally and cognitively, to practice the suspension of judgement necessary to seeing not only more of the person, but of the conditions structuring, informing and/or constraining the movements of all involved. That is, of the experience itself. And, given that deep analysis of experience and exposure of the conditions of its emergence is at the core of much autoethnography, the present research in particular, there is thus an ethical obligation to compel myself to identify, and resist, whatever forces could hold captive, and so constrain, my accounts. Wanting to illustrate the extent to which liberation from those forces can lead to personal healing and becoming I am drawn, again, to the reflexive space I moved through following my encounter with Eddie. Certainly, the following excerpt further demonstrates the movement that can occur when we pursue strong ethical relationships.

26/08/2021

Sitting amidst consideration of a researcher's (my) ethical obligations to those represented in their research, and pondering my unanticipated desire to talk to Eddie, I'm feeling, and wondering, if ethical practice should extend not only to what we write about people but to what we do beyond that, once the pen is down? Is the sense of accountability I'm feeling, to the subject in my story, not the personal change and growth/movement that can occur in oneself through autoethnography when we engage in the ethical practice of accounting for oneself? And, is the desire to help Eddie not indicative of the transformative aspirations of my research/autoethnography, of its hope of contributing to change? It has to be because it is highly unlikely that, sitting amidst the world of prison, I'd be engaging in such an embodied connection to another prisoner – one notably free of the constraints of the criminal values surrounding me – were I not in this responsible, self-accounting – ethical – place that autoethnography has brought me to. In that it can be seen that such is the power, and therefore importance, of ethically sound autoethnography that it can free people from the prisons they are in without their jailers having ever unlocked the doors.

Bearing in mind this discussion of my encounter with Eddie, it is fair to say that the forces impinging directly on those with whom we relate can clearly have a significant influence on our encounters. Importantly, then, consideration of subject position will not always be confined to oneself; the traversal of some encounters will also involve considering the positions of those we meet within them. There are several

important reasons for this. For one, to be able to properly attend to the conditions from which our encounters emerge requires looking at as much of what could be informing them as possible. Accordingly, consideration of the situation of the person, people and/or institutions in our stories allows for a richer understanding of the experience/encounter being analysed. For instance, considering the positions of those with whom I'm interacting helps me to see what may be influencing them and, crucially, how I may have been influencing them. Such knowledge is important to my sense-making, particularly in cases wherein one is working to understand people's behavior and decisions.

Paying attention to our subject's location is also necessary in that it enables one to emphasise the partiality of the account being produced. Discussing the importance of the need to consider our subjects' positions, Bresnahan (2015) asks of one of hers, "How could I forget Mom is more than just a mom?" (p. 255). Her question highlights that the person we know and see in our relationship with them is not necessarily who they perceive themselves to be. And the person we see, even if they did agree with that part of who we see, is certainly not all of who they are. Accordingly, lest we force them in to a construction/identity that severs them from their sense of self, we must attend to that difference. Just acknowledgement of the difference – that there is more than what we are showing or can see, and that our account is thus partial, can be enough to avoid the 'severing,' or misrepresentation that a totalising account risks imposing. Significantly, then, when others are included in my accounts I am not offering them, their person, for interrogation or critique. Rather, I am saying, 'Here's an encounter I have had with this person, and here is my experience of it. In no way am I claiming that my experience is also theirs.' It is important I remember, here, that in autoethnography the stories we write can only ever be our own; we include others in our writing only as

part of *our* story. Indeed, they are only present due to their having been a part of an experience we are narrating. The account is of oneself, it is not an account of the subject/s included in our stories. Those who appear in our stories only ever do so as our creations. And, as discussed, the researcher must acknowledge this, and never seek to claim that their creations in any way capture a person's view of themselves. And, we – I – must never attempt to tell their story, or to in any way speak for them. To do so would, through appropriation of voice/agency, and misrepresentation, risk imposing harm, violence, and so would step well beyond ethical representation. Mindful of the ethical violence inherent in such an act, there is no way I can seek to offer views of people as if they were their own. It is one thing to balance inclusion of a person in order that their harmful actions can be seen in a context that allows their humanity to be rendered visible. It would be quite another to then shift the focus of the narrative to anything that is, or even implies, description, evaluation and/or analysis of that person. They are not, and must not, be the story.

Man, I wish I'd known this back when the Professor questioned me about my account of the interaction with the psychologist. If I had, I'd have discussed it with him – that I was not attempting to tell her story, and so was not aiming to hijack her agency/voice in the way it may have seemed. Of course, the primary reason it largely seemed that way is that I failed to balance the inclusion of the psychologist with information about her context that would have enabled her person, her situation, and thus humanity, to be seen. Inclusion of those details, much as with inclusion of the details above, about Eddie, did not need to tell her/his story, but to provide balance and to show that I am not passing judgment or seeking to draw criticism. I did not include them then. And, for that, I apologise. I can only hope that the growth I have made, since,

in learning not to trample over others, and to write with care, goes some way toward compensating for my past mistakes.

A further reason for the importance of giving consideration to our story's subjects is that when we begin to see their situation, and position, we are not only able to better manage, and analyse, our own reactions to them but, crucially, we may also be able to develop some understanding of the life stuff, in their situation, that is informing our interaction with them. I can feel Arrigo (2013) moving through here, reminding me of the importance of considering the pain, and captivity, of those with whom we move. Through the SOC thesis, he advocates for the need for an empathetic praxis, wherein our engagement with others is informed by a sense of shared humanity. Indeed, such practice is fundamentally necessary because there will be times, in autoethnography, where the actions of those in our stories are so traumatic that it will only be through empathy for our fellow humans that we are able to show any recognition of, or compassion to, the humanity of those inflicting our pain. Indeed, I recently discussed autoethnography's ethical practices with one of my Supervisors, confidently explaining the approach I am taking. Her response was, "Okay, I get all that. But how are you going to care for people who have fucked you over?" (Confidential source, personal communication, May 18, 2023). Hmmm, very good question. No matter how long ago some of those encounters were, re-visiting them will cause me pain in the present. Recognising there will be a need to respond, ethically, to that heartache, my supervisor went on to say that storying such encounters will raise particular tensions for me. And they do. How, for example, do I write with care and humanity whilst also ensuring the damage a person has inflicted is not minimised or justified? Is it even possible to show the humanity of my aggressor whilst also ensuring my account does justice to the harm I experienced? And if so, how? Only through a relational approach, wherein I engage

with the person as located in a particular situation, and captivity, will it be possible to address these issues ethically. Because, certainly, I must take time to consider the situation they may be in, the captivity and pain they may be being subjected to, in order to better understand them and develop empathy. The encounter with Eddie allowed us to see a little of my response to these issues, to someone whose behaviour has negatively impacted me. However, we're barely through the prison's doors yet, and there are going to be other stories wherein I am writing of encounters with people who have inflicted serious pain – life-threatening pain – and damage, upon me. I expect that, amidst those tellings, it is going to take all that my methodology offers, and all of my empathy, my humanity, to avoid meeting violence with violence.

I feel that I'm nearing the end of this chapter. Why do I feel that way, I wonder? Is it because I feel I've discussed, and demonstrated, all that is needed to produce ethical accounts, to show humanity? Part of me believes that I have, sure. Even as I think these thoughts, however, they're being interrogated. By me. Because, undoubtedly, if one thing has become clear to me it is that an ethically watertight account is not possible. How, then, can we know when it is okay to share an account, an account that can never be risk-free? It seems that any decision will be ethically fraught, and will involve a struggle to just do our absolute best, working, through a process of accountability and reflexivity, to balance the importance of telling the story with the need to do so with empathy, and care. In this process, the researcher must ask themselves if they have done all they can to address the risks – to themselves, their subjects, and the research/audience? Rarely, it has been discussed, will the various ethical practices have removed all risk. The issue becomes, therefore, a matter of whether the good outweighs the remaining risk. There is no formula for traversing this evaluation (Lee, 2018). There

is no quantitative assessment that can be applied to instruct us on whether or not we can proceed (Winkler, 2018). The conditions to be considered, such as the issues, relationships and institutions involved, are deeply contextual and so will differ from one research project to the next (Edwards, 2021). As with the entire process of engaging in ethical practice, our most effective guide when the time comes to make that final ‘to tell or not to tell’ decision, is that fundamental principle that should infuse every step we take: are we showing humanity? Does the account pursue an ethical relationship with those in it? Are they looked after with respect to the ethical practices available for such things as showing their perspective, their humanity? Are we meeting violence with violence? And are we providing the account as part of our pursuit of ‘better,’ of positive change, social justice? In making the final decision it is useful to look at what one’s subjects stand to lose, and gain. And to explore these questions it is, of course, fundamentally necessary to explore the subject positions of both ourselves, and our subjects.

As in so many areas of my journey into ethics, I have found engagement with Bresnahan (2015) to be very helpful and so turn, once again, to her guidance. It may be recalled that she wrote an account of her experience of her parent’s divorce. In doing so, a key ethical concern was that her mother would feel hurt in reading of her daughter’s perspective of the divorce. Building ethical justifications to support the decision to tell that story, Bresnahan reasons that the pain it will cause her mother may be balanced by the good it could do her. The potential for that good, considered highly likely by Bresnahan, is enough for her to take the risk (always a risk) of sharing the story. She reasons that, whilst the story will cause her mum pain, its telling will also provide her mother an opportunity to see her children’s’ feelings in ways she otherwise never would. In that, Bresnahan argues, her mother is gaining and, through the sharing

of perspectives within the family, opportunities for understanding, and healing, are created. For Bresnahan, that possibility mitigates the risk of pain that telling her story may tell.

The reasoning behind Bresnahan's decision to tell her story resonates strongly with me. My own situation is also one in which the insights my accounts offer may compensate for the discomfort their telling produces. For instance, in offering my subjects/those I may cause discomfort perspectives they couldn't otherwise get – my research offers perspectives that, I hope, may help them improve/alter the harmful practices occurring within our correctional system. Part of my thinking here is that although it may be stressful for a person/institution to hear their practices are harmful, establishing an awareness is necessary if they are to be able to (hopefully) see a need to make changes. Of course, an account challenging someone's practices can be extremely confronting/stressful. For instance, it is without doubt that most of the criminal justice system personnel whose practices I have found harmful believe they are not operating harmfully, but are contributing to a system that helps people. Additionally, their approach is likely to be a culmination of a lifetime's work and so be central to their identity. Not all cases are like this, but many will be and it is thus no insignificant thing to turn around and say – *'You are not doing what you think you are: rather, you are hurting me.'* For such an account to be shared ethically, its telling must be guided by the practices discussed in this chapter. That is, it needs to focus on the encounter and the conditions of its emergence, not the person. Secondly, it must not meet violence with violence – it cannot be retributive or in any way seek to demonise the person. In doing these things, it must work to ensure that the person's humanity is attended to, and that acknowledgement is made that the account is only the perspective of the narrator. Thirdly, it must connect to the goals of the research, including contributing to an

awareness that can lead to change such that future instances of the harm problematised in the account are less likely.

Crucially, though, even when we have navigated all of these processes, turned in agony and decided it is ethically justifiable to produce an account, we are unlikely to feel peace (Tamas, 2011; Winkler, 2018). And that is because, despite our best intentions, in the messiness of life, and of its telling, there can be no guarantee people won't be hurt by our accounts (Edwards, 2021). Beyond ensuring we do not set out to produce accounts that are violent and seek to produce harm, there will always be risk. We see an indication of the ever-present ethical tension when, even after all the reasoning, balancing, and belief that it will, ultimately, help her family to tell her story, Bresnahan (2015) never stops worrying, never stops questioning the decision and its potential impacts. "With clenched hands and crossed ankles," she writes, "comfort is impossible." (p. 259). We see here that, even in the telling itself, the concern for ethics is there. Even once we have decided the risk is justified, we don't get to know for sure. Some will argue that that is not okay, that all ethical issues must be identified and eliminated prior to the research being possible. That is however, not possible, nor desirable, because it is not how life works. It will be recalled, from our earlier discussion of autoethnography, that one of the methodology's purposes is to strip away the structures that have, for so long, constrained people and their experiences. An inescapable outcome of that is that we must sit amongst the messiness/uncertainty that results, that unedited life and social experience, actually involves. And, as discussed in Chapter Three, that is what an autoethnography does. Moving within the limitless specificities, multiplicities, possibilities and uniqueness that is human life, identity and experience, there can be no prescriptive application of a predetermined, universal set of rules. And so, as did Bresnahan in deciding to tell her story, "I breathe in deeply," (p.

259) in embarking on mine. And I'm okay with that because feeling that nervousness is perhaps my best indication that I am attuned to, and care about, what is at stake when engaging in narrative power (Tamas, 2011), when writing of those not present to speak for themselves.

Okay, finally, I think it may be time to close...

When I wrote the account of my encounter with Eddie I thought of it as, and thus titled it, the 'Eddie story.' Now, looking back, I see that, really, this has not been the 'Eddie' story at all. Rather, it is a 'Dan story' because, as should be the case, it has been about *my* experience, *my* movement. And the movement the Professor's questions initially started, several years ago, is spreading well beyond the confines of this chapter. Indeed, thinking about the importance of ethical relations, and the interconnectedness of the various roles we perform, I'm drawn to the ways in which these principles and practices are helping me navigate ethically, with care, in other areas of life. Notably, it is not only within the research/academic part of my life in which I am having to traverse ethical tensions. As I continue to write this PhD beyond prison walls, life around me is unfolding. Since my release the conditions of everyday life have become such that a tension is emerging wherein I've had wonderings about my ability to manage everything, about whether life is meant to be this way. Certainly, it has been a shock, transitioning from long-term incarceration to community life, to freedom. Notably, when I say 'shock,' the difficult emotions have not come on suddenly. Rather, it has been a gradual, somewhat imperceptible build. My homecoming has been occurring through a carefully structured plan wherein life is to be taken slow. Indeed, the strength and pace of the release plan we developed played a large part in the Parole Board's confidence in my suitability for release. Pivotal to my plan has been to take life slow –

not take on too much, not be in a hurry to meet people, to enter an intimate relationship, or take on full-time work. And I have followed that plan. For six months I rarely went out, did not engage in social media, and did not attempt to meet women. Indicative of the extent of my commitment to my plan, I did not even have sex. Certainly, the thought of making love to a woman provided, throughout my years in prison, much sustenance. Hope of it contributed to my ability to push through, to seek freedom. A vast majority of men pursue sex within hours of release. And understandably so, for the comfort of a lover's embrace is about as far from prison as one could get. So, yes, for months I just plodded along, deliberately doing life slow. What I did not notice is that I was growing, stepping out. I was, as envisioned within the SOC thesis, engaging in a process of becoming. It has been the realisation that it is happening that has thrown me. I mean, I've known, in my head, that life would develop. But I didn't feel it in my body. How could I – I've never lived it before?

In recent weeks I have paused, reflected, and taken stock of where I'm at. And, in doing this, I suddenly felt that life has gotten very busy, very full. It was then that I felt a kind of shock, shock that, without having seemed to have realised it, I am living. I realised that, well, I'm in the process of entering the kind of life those in the community tend to have, one wherein I can contribute, do what I love, love, and be loved; a life I have dreamed about having for over twenty of my 38 years. However, now that I have it – that I understand and *feel* that I have it, so comes a whole new level of tension. Because, as I am discovering in my body, the life of freedom of which I have long sought is imbued with responsibility, financial, social and cultural. It comes with duties, responsibilities and obligations, both to the people and organisations in my life, and to myself. I am not used to this. Rather, I'm accustomed to life in a prison cell, wherein existence was rather narrowly focused, revolving around Doctoral research,

surviving and, well, around trying to get out of the cell via the parole process. Undoubtedly, the tensions of prison were stressful – the stories to be told are testament to that. But they pulled on me in different ways to what community life is doing. Perhaps the most significant point of departure is that, then, no-one's lives depended upon me – I did not have grandparents depending on me in order to be able to avoid going into aged care. I did not have a woman deeply in love with me, planning a future and family with me. Furthermore, I did not have the Parole Board backing me, and declaring wholehearted faith in me. And I did not have people I've harmed – my victims – upset by my release and hoping I keep my word to do well, to live a successful life. Now, there are those dependencies, those commitments, those expectations, and so the fullness of life has become such that I am feeling hamstrung, unable to keep up. There is only so much of me to go around, so how do I attend to each of those? How do I take part of myself away from some, in a caring way, in order to attend to, and care for, others? How do I find balance? How do I address the ethical tension of making time for myself without it being at the expense of those I love, those who need, and have waited so long, for me?

These questions have been flooding, at times jamming, my body.

It is hard.

It is scary. A new kind of scary because, for sure, to be scared for my own safety is one thing. But being scared for that of others – that their wellbeing could be jeopardised by my decisions, is imposing upon me a level of fear that prison cell blocks and their terrifying inhabitants never could. It has taken coming home from prison to

realise that there is something scarier than prison – failure as a family man, as a citizen of the world beyond prison.

I am struggling with it, with how to do justice to everyone.

How, one may wonder, does all this relate to the ethics of my research? Well, amidst the struggle, I am finding that it is through the ethical principles and relational ways of caring and doing learnt through this research that I am becoming empowered to be able to attend to the conditions of everyday life. Certainly, reflexive practice and living relationally are enabling me to traverse my process of becoming and to respond to the rigours that everyday life is imposing upon me. It is no surprise that the ethics of my research methodology are enabling me, and being performed, in other roles in life because, as may be recalled, central to those principles is that our various selves do not function in isolation from one another. Accordingly, any performativity of caring in one area of my life depends upon an ethics of care in the others. We do not step out of our ethics when we leave our research – if I ever leave it at all... And so it is in this sense, then, that the ethics of caring and relating I am practicing throughout my research are also serving me as I navigate life in all its aspects, culturally, socially, financially, politically...

At the forefront of the pains of my becoming is a feeling that my movement as a researcher is imposing serious strains in other areas of life. For one, my role as a researcher is strongly influencing the extent to which I feel available to fulfill those other roles comprising my life. And it feels as though the commitment necessary to complete the PhD is constraining my ability to be...to be a grandson, a working man, a

boyfriend, lover. To be free... After so many years trapped in it, I feel an intense desire to get out of my head. For me, that means ten hour days in the shed, working on locks and keys. And rebuilding my Landrover: since I was about fifteen, I have always wanted to restore a Landrover and put a V8 engine in it. I whiled away many an incarcerated evening planning the build, dreaming about it. Like sex and so many other things, desire to see it come to fruition spurred me on during those periods when all seemed, and nearly was, lost. Those activities are therapy to me, they are me doing justice to myself. Then there other desires which, whilst nice for me, also involve obligations and responsibilities to others. For one, to my love, to reciprocate her love, feed and bask in our mutual love; to give Hope and her son *time*. And then there are my obligations to my Grandparents, to give them my afternoons, on weekdays. There are any number of jobs to be done from farm work to cleaning and gardening. With my weekends now being spent with Hope and her boy, I am trying to juggle, to cram all my desires, and my obligations, into weekday afternoons. It's not working. I'm constantly feeling that I should be working on the PhD, and that most else is done in neglect of it. Man, some days I feel that it is imposing, robbing me of the joy of life. "*I'm done preparing for life,*" I say to people. "*I just want to live it now.*" These thoughts have been impacting how I think, and feel, about it. Indeed, my thoughts are not doing it justice. Conscious of the aforementioned importance of my relationship with my research, something needs to happen, and quick.

To navigate these latest hurdles, I have had to begin with an inward, reflexive turn. It has necessitated asking what is going on, who am I presently, and who do I need to become, in these various roles? As with caring for those connected to my construction of Eddie, I must now work to be who I need to be to be who my people

need. That has required tough conversations. Amongst these, I have had to tell my love that I must deprive us of every second Saturday, as my PhD requires it. It was very difficult to deliver that news. I agonised over it for several days, first fighting my own desire not to lose the day with her. I mean, here I am, only into my eleventh month of release from a twenty year prison stretch, and I'm about to deprive myself, regularly, of a night with my newfound partner. Making that decision, it somehow felt like I was doing something inherently wrong. I mean, why wait so long for something, someone, only to deny it once you finally have it? I had to think of balance, of the importance of my PhD, not only the qualification itself but, more significantly, the community of people that are helping me pursue it. Sleepless nights and long conversations with both family and Massey staff ensued. Once I'd gotten a handle on the intense feeling of loss came the difficulty of having to fight the idea that my decision would cause my beloved pain. Primarily, I worried that she'd perceive it as me beginning to distance myself, the first signs of me losing interest. When I finally found the courage to raise it, we were lying on the couch, relaxing after she'd put her boy to bed. Quite unexpectedly, the conversation shifted from chat to serious stuff, talking about her ex and how co-parenting would work now he was home from work. The tune of the conversation provided an opportunity to perhaps lessen the blow; we have talked about how, when her ex comes around to spend time with his son, I will take a back seat approach, staying away in order to give them time to bond. Maybe, then, I thought, his returning home on leave makes this the ideal time to let Hope know about my need to stay at home every second Saturday.

I fumbled...

“Hey, um, I’ve been thinking,” I said. Long pause. *“There’s just so much I need to get done. This PhD is so intense, it requires so much of me, eh. I’ve been thinking about what I can do to make time for it, and am thinking that I need to spend every second Saturday at home...”*

Long silence.

“I mean, it’s just an idea...” I begin to say, wanting to backtrack. *“But yeah...,”* regaining my resolve... *“It’s only short term, and I really do need to do it.”*

As I expected, Hope didn’t say a lot other than that she was okay with it and that I should do what I needed to. I hadn’t been looking at her as I spoke, and it was clear she took the news hard. However, through sharing with her my processing I was able to communicate in a caring way, and to do our love justice. I explained what a PhD involves, what I owe it, and what it will mean for me, and all of us, when it is complete. *“Short term pain for long term gain,”* I said. Gosh, that sounds so clichéd – am I kidding myself? Is it really true that cutting back our contact, now, will benefit us, and life, later? Somehow, I don’t feel fully satisfied or at peace with my decision. I’m mindful, though, of how we can seldom reach such a state in our pursuit of ethical relations. As Bresnahan (2015) notes, we are always wondering if we have done enough. And, certainly, I suspect that were I ever to reach a place wherein I felt little angst regarding my relating and quality of care given to others, then I would not be engaging in the sorts of ongoing accountability and reflexivity that an ethical performance depends upon.

Sitting here, in my office, looking out at the rolling hills, the lovely shades of yellow and red of the deciduous trees, cows lazily working their way across the fields, I’m wondering about the plight of others experiencing the pressures of transitioning to

life after long-term incarceration. I have the benefit of strong social and economic support, and of an ethical framework through which to unpack, and respond to, the demands of life. What do they have? Most, I suspect, have very little. Many will not even have a view, or at least one that they are able to see, given the extent to which the stresses of life will be consuming them. Indeed, the literature is clear on the dire lack of resources and support for those reintegrating (e.g., Alexinas, 2008; Goger et al., 2021; Herrlander Birgeron & Dwyer, 2023; Ika, 2023; Johnston, 2016; Mills et al., 2022; Opie, 2012; Petersilia, 2003). And, as I contemplate, and navigate the issues of reintegration, my mind turns further still, to those yet to have a chance, to those who never will. That turn is sobering. It is helping me to put my present struggles into perspective, and reminds me to remain connected to where I've been. There's no doubt that I'm currently in a very intense process of accounting and responsibility, to myself and others. As Leigh has said, I'm "*...in the thick of the process of becoming*" (L. Coombes, personal communication, April 21, 2023), of becoming a free man, a working man, a family man, a man on life parole – a man with responsibilities and commitments unlike any I've known before. I'm experiencing the conditions of everyday community life for the first time in my life. And, indeed, I'm experiencing the tensions that come with experiencing these experiences without ever having experienced them before; much like when I first went to prison, I'm wading through the unknown. And yet, I'm HOME. I'm developing an identity and life as a *free* man. As I think about that, and about those who are not free, I find myself drifting back to what lack of freedom feels like, was like. Because, for all the joys and freedoms I am now experiencing I was, not so long ago, in the depths of the prison system and wondering if I'd ever get free of it. So much of what I'm experiencing now is being informed by what I experienced then, and so it is into those depths I/this story must now wade.

Will you come with me?

Chapter Five – On an emergence from captivity...

This chapter is largely about my first summer following release. Being eighteen months into life outside prison walls I am, now, amidst my second summer. The bulk of this chapter was thus written almost exactly a year ago. I have chosen to leave it in its then-tense in hopes of keeping the location it speaks of as authentic, and thus as accessible to the reader, as possible. My navigation through that location, as shared in the narrative to come, is illustrative of what the process of leaving a place of harm, after so long, can involve. Indeed, looking at the journey a person makes as they attempt to integrate into the community following long-term incarceration renders visible another part of what the harms of prison can do. My journey shows how prisonisation has lingering impacts, how there is freedom in release, yet also a new kind of constraint. It may be less obvious than that imposed by high grey walls but, perhaps in that, it is actually more insidious, more unjust, more stressful... I certainly found parts of that first summer stressful. And my present summer is proving no less challenging, my now being at a very different, pressured, though no less important, stage of my reintegration into society. However, that's a story to tell a little later... For now, let's step back to that unique place wherein I began taking the footsteps I'd so long imagined...

Becomings...

On the inside, we spent a lot of time talking about the outside, about what it would be like once released. Guys often said to me that, once out, one forgets about jail very quickly – about the discomfort of it, the 'feel.' I never used to believe it. In prison, it felt that the place had forced its way into every cell in my body, every crevice of my soul felt saturated with the toxicity, blood and violence... How, then, could one ever

‘forget,’ or become disconnected from what prison is like? To my surprise, I am finding that it is happening. So far removed is it from free life that, indeed, it is hard to relate to once away from it – even when one was in it for decades. It has only been seven months since I was released, but life is progressing and, as I enter my first ever summer as a free adult, I can feel myself shifting, growing.

However, indicative of the impact of incarceration, this sense of becoming feels somewhat temporary – as though it may be an illusion such that, if I allow myself to embrace it, it will dissipate before my eyes. My nervous sense of freedom is somewhat tempered by an ever-present fear of going back. And it’s a fear made all the more intense by the knowledge that, having now tasted the free, real world, prison would be *so* much harder. When I received my life sentence, as a teenager, I had not yet experienced the real joys of the world, or of myself as a self-aware human being. And because of this, I now see, I did not fully understand what prison was depriving me of. Now, I cannot even comprehend enduring it again, having my mind and body bent by it. I don’t think I could do it: the thought of it is very scary. Sometimes, when I hear the crunch of tires coming up the road, or the phone ringing, a sudden wave of fear rushes over me and I think it is the Police, coming to take me away. There are times when, working out in the shed, I look up at the drive, thinking it’s about to happen, they’re about to arrive. I see white Toyota Hiace vans driving along the main road. Watching from my bedroom window, it triggers memories of being in those vans – *prison* vans – and it triggers fears of being in one again. For a moment, until I can force it away, I imagine myself in that van, leaving. I think of the suicidal depression that would envelop me, being pulled away from my newfound life, being back in the trap, unlikely to be able to work free of it again. I worry about the impact on my Grandparents, about how people would write me off. I fear that I’d never get another chance...

These fears are for real.

I feel I'd rather die than go back.

Sometimes I feel that the system is just waiting, biding its time until it can complete some sort of case against me, to put me away. I've mentioned these fears to Paul, a fellow lifer on parole. He says they are normal for those in our circumstances, that for him it took several years for the intense worries about recall to dissipate. For now, I just push the thoughts from my mind, and have been trying to do as much as I can to live in a low-key way, drawing as little attention to myself as possible. I have been passing the days studying, and in the shed, pottering with locks, keys and landrovers.

Inevitably, though, as the months have passed, I have found myself wanting to step out more, to venture into the world beyond the front gate; I can only spend so long in the shed. With stepping out, of course, comes an increased level of anxiety regarding the vulnerability I feel. I am beginning to meet people and with that comes exposure and, oftentimes, the need to share my history. As I have recently been discovering, doing so – being part of the world – means having to endure its criticisms and judgements.

Of course, I want to live.

I have to live.

But it comes at a cost.

Only over the last few weeks have I began making an effort to be more social, yet I am already being confronted with the degree to which I cannot fit the same, and can't have the same freedoms of being, as those who are free of histories of imprisonment. Nowhere are these tensions being experienced more than when engaging in intimate relationships. Since being home, I have had deep, meaningful conversations with several people. Wanting to look for someone with whom I may develop that wholesome, heartfelt bond, I recently decided to put myself out there, but not in ways

that would merely attract hook-ups. Despite the urges I felt, I was looking for something more than just sex – companionship, a sense of belonging. Love? However, dating is not like it used to be. I am learning that, in the modern world, people of my generation no longer meet in person. Rather, it seems that dating typically begins online. I find that very odd – I am a face to face person: I like to look into a person’s eyes, feel their aura. Nonetheless, society has shifted since I’ve been gone, and I must shift with it. As part of making that movement, I joined a dating app. I avoided the likes of Tinder, an app which my friends tell me has a reputation for being more about pursuit of sexual encounters than meaningful bonding. Quite by accident, I became aware of one called Christian Connection. It appeared on my Facebook timeline: that’s another thing I’m learning about – the ways in which our lives are constantly monitored by the internet, with the algorithms attempting to feed on us, tirelessly searching tired bodies for money-making weaknesses. Perhaps they succeeded with me because, following perusal of a few reviews of the app I decided that, whilst not overly comfortable with it, if there were going to be the sorts of women I was looking for, that is where they might be. With some trepidation, I paid for an account and set up a profile. It was a nerve-wracking process: trying to work out what to say – how to account for a lack of community experience whilst also wanting to sound accomplished, experienced and, well, attractive. Oh, and then there was the matter of selecting photos to upload. I wish I could have the freedoms, and even vanity, of others, but I can’t: I worried about whether the photos I chose would hint at my imprisoned past. And, of more significance, at whether my victims might be impacted by my going online. I mean, there have been no photos of me on the internet since those taken by media during my sentencing, two decades ago. For my victims, the news of my recent release will have been more than enough to have to process. To then be confronted, six short months

later, with seeing me, and seeing me enjoying life after the harm I caused them... Much as I feel rightful in pursuing a life, it is nonetheless a tense pursuit, knowing that I'm doing it to the dissatisfaction, and discomfort, of some. In addition to causing my victims' distress, I also worried (and worry) about the wider controversy that could ensue. My case has long been politicised by the mainstream media. There were, and always will be, those who would relish any opportunity to produce a sensationalist account. I can just imagine it, entitled along the lines of, *'Murderer seeks love. Will he kill again?'* Any such outcome would be so harmful to my progress: it would remove the degree of anonymity I presently enjoy and, in so doing, would likely hurt my employment and relationship prospects. It would also, in the eyes of the risk-focused system, heighten the danger I pose and so lead to increased probationary surveillance. Such are the vulnerabilities to be faced upon a return to society from long-term incarceration.

Doing my best to push through worries of the numerous, and largely unknowable, potential consequences, I logged in and entered the foreign world of online dating. In the end, I decided to keep my profile's wording fairly light, just noting that I'd only recently relocated, and with a gentle indication to there having been a hard past. I felt an ethical responsibility to do that because I knew, that if any conversations did develop, there was going to come a time where I would have to share my criminal history. In mentioning that I had been through hard times I hoped that, at the least, it wouldn't come totally from left field... Progress was slow at first, a 'smiley face' here, a 'like' there. And I received a few 'waves' too. The first one was met with relief; it communicated to me that perhaps my profile might be okay, that at least I wasn't going to be shunned from the outset... And then came the first message:

'Hey Daniel 🐶 Where were you before relocating? Is family why you chose Nelson? Such a beautiful place.'

I felt paralysed. Didn't know how to respond. I mean, in short, the answer to her question was that, yes, I had most certainly chosen Nelson because of family. However, it isn't quite that simple, is it? My initial choice for release had actually been in another region. Until, that is, it was strongly objected to by the Parole Board. It was exciting to receive that first message. But, much as I wanted to, I didn't reply to it. Partly because I struggled to find a response wherein I could refrain from full disclosure and feel authentic in doing so. And partly because, well, I felt very wary, wondering if who was behind the message really was who was behind the message. Could it be media? Maybe someone had recognised me and so set up a fake account to lure me in for a story? Worried as I was, the desire to connect imbued me with enough courage to keep going. Before long I received a message to which I did reply. And it led to the start of my first deep conversation. What drew me to this person, T, was not so much her attractiveness, but that she was a single parent. And, more importantly, one who appeared to be owning life, working, giving her children the best life possible. To me, that spoke of someone who knew what hard is, who had been through a fair bit of it. I believe, in my heart, that single parents are quite amazing, and to be celebrated. I am, after all, the son of a single mum. In that sense, I have an insight into how hard life can be for them. This woman and I talked for about a week. Whilst there was no intimacy at all, there was an attraction. T told me I'm easy to talk too. She was easy to talk to, too, and the messages grew longer. We discussed our hobbies, our faith. As the conversation deepened, I began to think, more and more, about the elephant in the room – my history. I felt like a fraud. I was not one, but I felt that, because T didn't know exactly 'who' she was

talking too, I was deceiving her. In this way, my body was caught in an impossible tension. On the one hand, the released prisoner is encouraged, indeed, expected, to make efforts to build connections in law-abiding society (Community Law, 2015; Petersilia, 2002). An integral part of this involves working, as I was, to try and establish relationships with healthy, prosocial people. On the other hand, however, there are at play prevalent societal beliefs that hold the ex-con to be dangerous, as someone, even *something*, to be feared and shunned (Arrigo, 2013; Arrigo & Shipley, 2012; Brooking, 2011; James, 2005). The situation I faced, therefore, was one wherein by doing one of the things society asks of me, I could very well be doing something else that it does *not* want. It is within the complexities of this contradiction that I must try and function, to work to grow and reintegrate whilst also, lest I trigger a surveillance response, staying within the murky, ever-shifting but strong parameters that govern the ex-con's marginalised position in society. A particularly harmful outcome of captivity to such a complex, ultimately impossible location is that, as in my interaction with T, I begin to feel like a fraud and, consequently, work to self-surveil and keep my distance. In doing this, I participate in my own 'othering,' and marginalisation.

At some point, my online friend said she'd love to know more about me. I felt torn – to tell her of my background and risk ending communication, or refrain from disclosing, and continue to enjoy chatting to this nice person? Feeling trapped within this dilemma is horrible, and it is one that I'm always conscious of whenever deciding whether to allow a conversation to develop any momentum. Indeed, as invigorating as branching out can be, the joy of the process is tempered by that ever-present fear of whether or not I'll be accepted. Whether it be when applying for a loan, a job, or when talking to someone online, I never know what will happen when I share my past. Every time is like the first time – knowing what's coming, gently leading into it, watching the

shock emerge, then having to explain why I'm not a bad person. And, then, having opened my soul, brace myself for rejection, and for the bitter disappointment and sadness that will follow. I endured all of this with my online friend. Feeling we'd been talking long enough and that she had been brave in talking about some of her own stuff, I decided that it was time to share. Knowing this I had, in the days prior, alluded to having a past and, more specifically, to having made mistakes. I wanted to do what I could, for her, to soften the blow. One night, having received a long message, in which she said that she believes in redemption, and that nothing shocks her, I felt brave enough. And so I told her...

I find it very easy to talk to you too, T. Real talk. If you'd like to know, I'll share. You have an absolute right to know who you are communicating with. I have to be honest and say it scares me to completely open up with you because you may not want to talk with me anymore once I do. That said, maybe nothing does shock you. If my story does, I completely understand. The moral of the story is that I found God in prison. Actually, he found me. I was there a very long time, and will forever regret that part of my life.

Daniel that is hard. Can I ask what sent you there? When I was at bible college, there was a guy there who had not long come out of prison. It was super hard for him because he to had been in there for a long time...

I was there 20 years. And yes, of course you can ask. You're welcome to ask anything, T. I took a man's life when I was 17. My actions were totally disastrous. I'm sorry to put that on you this late in the evening, before you go to bed. It is deeply embarrassing.

Well thanks for sharing & being honest. Probably early on is best, just because like you said people deserve to know. But not like right away in the first conversation lol

Okay I haven't been to prison but your 2nd half of life is going to be better than the first. Obviously you lost a lot being incarcerated but God is the god of restoration (you already know this). I mean many of God's people went to prison, not for the same reason but nevertheless. My boys dad, ex husband is actually a corrections officer lmao

I'm going to say goodnight now, sleep well & keep winning!"

We'd been talking, in depth, most nights, for at least a week. But that was where the conversation ended. I was gutted. So much so that, initially, I reprimanded myself, thinking I'd made a mistake in telling her. Then, as the rejection, feeling of loss, and self-absorption subsided, I realised I had done the right thing. T had a right to know. The experience scarred me, though. And it is for reasons such as these that I feel a particular anxiousness, when meeting women, that aspects of my offending will be severely off-putting to them. Alas, building the more social, and intimate sorts of relations with women – indeed, with anyone wherein a deeper level of disclosure is warranted – is proving forever foreshadowed by the knowledge that once things get to the point wherein first impressions are made and they like me, I must reveal my past. And, with that, many of the hitherto good, promising relations will cool, and end. Despite saying they're non-judgmental and won't be shocked by anything, people pull away. With a veneer of politeness, usually, but away nonetheless. It is proving to make the process somewhat burdensome, and I'm becoming reluctant to put myself out there, at least amongst the professional, 'straight' morally sound sorts of people I wish to have in my life. Socially, what I want most is to connect with people who have no connection whatsoever with prison or the wrong side of the criminal justice system – 'straight' people. But, generally, they are by far the most unaccepting, judgmental group to form

social and intimate bonds with. These experiences draw my attention to the old adage that ex-cons usually wind up hanging around with other ex-cons. At this point I am thinking it is no wonder because, man, the straight, professional sector of society feels rather closed off to people 'like me.'

Alongside the difficult experiences, there are proving to be times of joy, times where I am not reacted to with shock and/or dislike. My first summer out of prison is just starting and, in stepping out and developing relationships I am also developing as a citizen. I'm becoming a person who is, by some, being recognised and respected for the qualities I have worked so hard to develop. Nowhere is this happening more than with my friends, Rachael and Erik. I met Rachael within a few weeks of coming home; she cleans here, once a fortnight. Nan had already told her a fair bit about me and, upon first meeting, she was very forthcoming and open. As time passed, we became quite chatty. Sometime in October, Rachael texted Nan, inviting me to a family BBQ. The invitation provoked great anxiety. I had not yet been out, socially, in any real way, and certainly not to someone's home and/or in the evening. It worried me – would the sudden change in pattern trigger problems with the GPS device strapped around my ankle? And were they safe people to become involved with? From what I could gather, Rachael and Erik are respectable people, but not angels; they refused, for instance, to get the Covid vaccines, and did not abide by the lockdown rules. And so I worried because, surely, the Police and Corrections were monitoring all of my interactions...³⁰ Could I afford to be associating with less-than-angels, even though it seemed I had little

³⁰ And continue to, over a year later?

other option given the difficulty in being accepted by actual angels? And, would I fit in? Did I have the skills to mix with them and their friends, or would I appear weird? As in my interaction with T, I became conscious of a bodily tension and constraint within issues of class, and class-based stigmas and binaries.

Somewhat reluctantly, I agreed to go.

The evening of the barbecue, I overthought things. Taking great care to ensure my GPS bracelet battery was charged, I carefully stowed it in the glovebox – away from prying eyes, but instantly accessible should any battery issues arise. A permanent fixture, the large black GPS ankle device is a condition of my release. Its stated purpose is to enable the establishment to be sure I do not enter regions of the country, including that of my birthplace, from which I am forbidden. Along with all of my parole conditions, any breach of it would result in instant, summary recall to prison. Like most electronic devices, they are prone to failure – I’ve heard the stories, from others who’ve been on them. And, in my six months being home, there have already been two surprise visits from the security company that manage the bracelets – both times, mine was *mistakenly* showing as having been tampered with. The device is thus a constant source of worry. It is bad enough knowing that they are surveilling me via it – that I’m a green (maybe red??) dot on a screen somewhere, being watched. But, that I also have to partake in that vigilance, surveilling myself to minimise the chance of something going wrong with the device, is painful. It feels like the personification of captivity. As if that wasn’t enough, there were other anxieties that emerged with the invitation to go out. Indeed, I worried about alcohol. And about having a deadline at which I’d have to leave. Having only a Restricted Driving License, I could not even have one drink without being over the limit. Further, one cannot drive after 10.00pm on a Restricted license, so I’d have to leave the gathering by about 9.45pm. Would that be awkward? The prospect

of it certainly felt awkward. And, knowing I had constraints no-one else did, also embarrassing and stressful.

I headed off, feeling somewhat nervous. I called in to the shops on the way, and bought a few bags of chippies for the kids. That would be a nice thing to do, I thought, a way to contribute. I was running a bit late and, unbeknownst to me, Rachael had texted Nan asking if I'd got "*cold feet*." For sure, my feet felt a bit cold, but I was still going... As per Rachael's suggestion, I parked out on the road. Then I sat there a moment, thinking. Several of her and Erik's family were coming, including Erik's daughter, former partner, and her father. Were they already there – would I be last to arrive? Had they been told I'm from prison? Would they know about the GPS bracelet? Checking that the battery was still in the glovebox, green light flickering to indicate it was charged, I made sure that my trouser leg was pulled well down over my bracelet, got out, and headed up the driveway.

I was the first to arrive!

Meeting for the first time, Erik greeted me warmly. "*Come in, man,*" he said. I was met by a large, busy family. Four kids, a wee dog, Rachael and her sister, Jennifer, were all buzzing around. "*Do you want a drink?*" Erik asked, holding out an RTD. I politely declined, saying I'd have a coke if one was available. Drinks in hand, we stood and talked, for ages. I noticed, as we talked, that I was conversing freely. I felt weird, but became aware that I wasn't presenting as such. My non-weirdness surprised me a little because, for so long, the dominant (as expressed by Case Managers, some officers and, most significantly, the psychologists) narrative in Corrections had been that I would find the outside, and social situations especially, "overwhelming." I'd long suspected that I would not find interactions with people overly difficult but, after being told the opposite for so long, by *expert*, authoritative voices, one starts to believe what

one hears about oneself. As the years passed, my oftentimes vehement disagreement with them had faded, particularly once I wisened and began to realise that, should I not conform to the narrative, I would be evaluated as institutionalised, as ‘naïve’ to the ways of the real world, and therefore as poorly equipped to cope with being released into it. Such an evaluation would only attract yet more attention from the psychologists, and bring more treatment down upon me. So, I learnt to nod, and go with whatever they were saying about me. Standing there in the hallway chatting with Erik, loud kids racing around, dog barking, music going, thoroughly out of my comfort zone, I felt vindicated.

What I’d always suspected was right: I would be fine. I was fine. And I was fine not because I’d been taught how to interact, but because I, within myself, am *capable*. I am adaptive, fluid, an embodiment of the human potential recognised within the SOC thesis, that which transcends the captive-producing narratives so long forced upon me by the institution.

We made our way outside, to a small deck. Lying back in a bean bag, I began relaxing. Before long, Erik’s adult daughter and her partner arrived. A pang of anxiety – just at the newness of meeting people. But it passed quickly, and conversation resumed. Like Erik and Rachael, they are laid back, down to earth people. Very easy to get along with – not the kind of people, I would come to see, who would have an issue with my criminal past. Neither, I found, did Erik’s former partner, Laura, or her father, Roy. When Roy came in, box of beers in hand, I felt no apprehension whatsoever. He sat down on a bench opposite me, got out a beer, offered me one (which I politely declined), and we got chatting. I found him easy to talk to, and conversing with him really helped me feel I was fitting in. The evening progressed quickly. Erik cooked

some meat on the barbecue, Rachael put out some salad, cheese, and buns, and we all made burgers. Whilst making mine, I offered to make one for Roy. I wanted him to like me and, at that point unsure whether he knew of my history, I also wanted to communicate that I'm a nice, non-dangerous person. Several times throughout the night, he commented on how good the burger I'd made him was.

At some point, must've been about 9.00pm, Erik offered me a bourbon and coke. This time, I accepted. What had changed? For one, I'd relaxed, the hypervigilance about my vulnerable position dissipating enough that I realised that the Police Special Tactics Squad was not going to descend if I had a drink. Maybe I was realising that I am *home*, and in the world outside prison it is okay to consume alcohol. Another thing is, I actually wanted to have the experience of enjoying my first drink, with friends, as a free man. It was a big deal. With the kids in bed, us adults chilled on the bean bags and sofas, and talked. The atmosphere was awesome – drinks in hand, chatting and laughing, watching embers from Erik's homemade fire-pit floating up into the night sky...

I felt free.

Time had gone quickly. Wanting to have some firm boundaries around this first social foray into the world, I'd planned to leave by about 8 or 9, and had told Rachael that. However, 9 O'clock had been and gone, yet I wasn't ready to leave. Then it got close to 10, after which I would no longer legally be able to drive. I mentioned this and Rachael commented that I could stay there the night, if I wanted. At that point, such a move felt too much of a departure from the plan, especially for my first time out. I reasoned that I lived so close that, provided it wasn't too far past 10, I'd be okay to drive home. As it grew colder, Erik, Roy and I went and stood around the fire. Rachael and Laura sat on the porch, near us. The conversation, and drinks, just flowed. I

purposefully took my time, consuming far less than the others. At some point I realised it was well past 10 and commented, *“Well, I won’t be driving home now. I may as well have another drink.”* I felt slight anxiety at the change of plan but, life having been so regimented, for so long, it felt good to just go with the flow, and live. The conversation amongst us guys turned to prison. Roy said that he’d known a few guys who’ve done time, but nowhere near the time I’ve done. Both he and Erik marveled at my twenty years inside. Deep in thought about it, Erik held his hand up for a high-five. *“Well done, Man. You’ve made it.”* He said. Roy agreed. They were clearly happy for me. And I was happy for myself. Around 3.00 am, the others slowly drifted off to bed, leaving just Laura and I. I was really tired, but wanted to keep talking. Quietly, I’d been hoping that Laura and I would be the last ones left – I wanted to spend some time alone, in the company of an attractive woman in my age group. Just to enjoy the connection that comes between two such people, deep in conversation in the early hours. Worrying I was keeping her up I asked, at some point, if she’d like to go to sleep. She shook her head, no, and continued talking. We talked until the sun came up, me lying back on the bean bag, coke in hand, her sitting on the edge of the deck. Laura poured out much of her life story – it was clear she has few opportunities for expression and that it was probably the first time, in a long time, that she had reflected, and talked, at the depth she was. It was a humbling experience. And it prompted me to think of how far I was from prison – sitting under the night sky, drink in hand, fire glowing softly, listening to a woman share with me matters close to her heart. Prison was nowhere in sight, during those hours.

My first ever social outing came to an end with the rising of the sun. Rachael came out, laughed when she saw Laura and I still up, and made us all coffees. We chatted awhile, had an impromptu breakfast of left-over meat patties and eggs from the

night before and then, around 8.00am, I said my farewells. *“It was nice to meet you,”* Laura said, still sitting on the deck. Her father also said it’d been good to meet, and that he’d like to catch up again, sometime. My Nan would later tell me that, even though I messaged to let her know, she’d worried when I’d not come home by 10.00 pm. It was, for all of us, a big experience. The next time I saw Rachael she said that I’d done well. *“We were really proud of you,”* she commented. And, when I think about it now, yes, I did do well. Interactions with everyone were easy, and Rachael’s sixteen-year-old sister had noted that it was impossible to tell, from my conversation or appearance, that I’d ever been to prison. She’ll never know how much her casual observation meant to me – it was a reward, and recognition, of so many years of work, in prison, to stay connected to the real world, to not lose my humanity to the chaos and culture of the inside. That I can be released from twenty years of confinement in our most dangerous prisons and, within several months, function in ways that totally belie it is all the indication I need that I made at least some good decisions in there, that I held out and didn’t lose my humanity. Right now, it feels good to be alive.

My PhD supervisors said to write about summer.

Summer.

Out of prison.

Summer out of prison...

What does that mean? No wandering the prison yard, wishing I was elsewhere... No having to dream of the beach, of women... No tossing and turning in the 30 degree heat every night. No needing to keep a bucket of water in my cell, to dip my head into, trying to cool a cooking brain, to push back the feeling of the walls closing in on me...

No, summer now means what it should mean – barbecues, fun, cool and peaceful evenings watching (and feeling) the sun go down. Indeed, I now get to see the last part of its descent, as it dips below the horizon – a period of time previously denied to me by 30-foot high concrete walls. Perhaps the most powerful moment of summer thus far, though, has been the ocean. I went to the beach for the first time last weekend. Again, Rachael invited me. It was, surreal. I didn't feel any social anxieties this time around. It would just be us and a friend of Rachael's, and her two boys. I'd met them a week earlier, when we went camping, so felt comfortable around them. And I felt excited. People have advised that it is important, when having all these experiences for the first time, to step out of a reflexive, analytical place in order that I can just 'smell the air,' can live in the moment. And, indeed, I had been caught up in thinking about the trip to the beach – pondering the significance of it. On the way there, however, something shifted and I suddenly realised, *'This is so cool. Stop thinking about this and just enjoy it, Dan. Your life has actually become really cool!'* I literally exclaimed, *"Yeah, this is mean!"* as I drove along, and felt great contentment. What was about to happen was not in doubt: I was no longer dreaming, but *doing*. Again, I felt alive.

We went to 'Green Island,' a low-lying outcrop largely covered in pine forest. Accessible only via a bridge, the island has lovely beaches on three sides. In most places, the trees come right down to the sand. We started off with a Barbecue. This is all so new to me that I was unsure exactly what to take. I thought, though, that I couldn't go wrong with fizzy drinks and chippies, for the kids. I'd done so when we went camping, and the kids must've remembered because a couple came up, asking if there was any fizzy. *"There sure is, guys,"* I said, going to the 4WD to get some. I felt as though I was contributing, handing drinks out to the kids. Erik had brought along a box of beach toys – plastic softball bat, balls, and the like. Sports is not my thing – at all –

but when Theresa's eldest son began playing with the rugby ball, I felt compelled to support him by joining in. I really should take a moment to describe him, because meeting him has been an important part of summer.

I first heard about Sam when Rachael mentioned Theresa to me. Half-jokingly, I'd asked if she had any single mates I could meet. Rachael replied that she has a friend who is bringing up two boys on her own. Both of them have had it hard, she explained. Evidently, Theresa was pregnant with Sam when his father went to prison – for life. So he has never met his father. And the younger boy, Harry, has, by all accounts, a pretty dysfunctional father. He uses methamphetamine and has perpetrated numerous acts of domestic violence. Indicative of the sorts of issues the boys have had to deal with, when he would go around to take Harry out for the day, he wouldn't take Sam, saying, *"You're not my son."* I can't even imagine how crushing that must have been for Sam. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he has some significant behavioural issues. He often lashes out, punching his mum, and refusing to listen. To try and manage things, he is on medication, and Theresa has also enlisted the support of a mentoring programme. It involves adults volunteering to work with at-risk kids, spending a bit of time with them each week. As soon as I heard their story, I felt a connection, and empathy. Their lives resonate with me because, I think, they echo my childhood in many ways. A father in prison, solo Mum, useless boyfriends coming and going, behavioural issues, little money. Fairly quickly after hearing about them, I decided it would be nice to try and contribute to their lives in some small way. Maybe it is intense, but I drove to Green Island thinking that I wanted to do as much for him as I could. And that is why, despite being no fan of rugby, I went and played passes, and kicks, with Sam. I felt a little inadequate, made worse by a few poor passes. And I dropped the ball a lot more than he did. I had to remind myself, *'Who cares!'* Sam certainly didn't.

I know little about kids, or parenting. As a guide to what to do, I just think of what I would have liked, as a boy. And then I do that. So rather than spending all my time sitting and talking with the adults, I spent it with him, and the other kids, playing games, chatting, swimming. After throwing the ball around for a while, some of the kids played softball. We then had a barbecue, before heading down to the beach. This was the part of the outing I had most been looking forward to. For many incarcerated people, the ocean is the epitome of freedom. Through the years, I have heard many men say that a trip to the beach is the first thing they want to do on the day of release. Two mates of mine, both of whom are serving Life sentences, swam in the ocean on the first day out. Paul spoke of the experience in his book (Wood, 2019), describing the sensation of being submersed in water, of floating: sensations unimaginable in prison. I have been in no great hurry to go to the ocean. I knew it is one of those special things that would happen when it is meant to. And it did...

*Hearing it before seeing it
Feeling it before touching it
Walking down the sandy bank,
through a gap in the marram grass
Spread out before me, sand
First dry, then moist and finally, wet
Singlet thrown off
Walking
Jogging
Running
Bracing for cold, instead met with warmth
In the shallows
Then deeper
Falling backward
Lost in its embrace
Water lapping against my ears
The waves lifting me, gently, effortlessly
The water washing away the past
The salt a balm, soothing wounds...
Standing
The earth beneath ever-shifting
Gazing outward
The world behind not existing.
A vast expanse of possibility,
stretching away beyond the horizon.
No restrictions, no structures blocking my view,
nothing manmade in sight
No people
Just me, nature, and infinite possibility...*

Figure 2

My First Swim as a Free Person



The ocean would have been a lot to take in, so I didn't try taking it in. I just allowed myself to be. Sometimes we have to do that – stop reflecting on the moment, stop analysing it, and just be in it. Because, sometimes, reflecting can actually take us away from where we need to be. It can, as friends have so rightfully advised me, rob us of the joy.

I'd run down to the water first, wanting a few moments to myself before the others arrived. Before long, Sam appeared. "*Let's play a game,*" he said excitedly. I came up with a race, whereby we had to run out, through the surf. Then we had a competition to see who could stay underwater the longest. Then the other three boys joined in and we had a game of throwing sand at each other. I made a point of running 'too slow' so that they could all give me a fair pelting! The youngest boy, Kai, got upset a few times. Being the smallest, he sometimes gets picked on, and left behind.

I remember the feeling...

"*I want you on my team,*" he said, between sobs. "*Okay mate,*" I exclaimed. "Let's get these guys!" I said, and proceeded to make him up huge sand balls so he could keep up with the others. It felt good to be able to be of use, and to resolve conflict between the kids. Theresa and Rachael were with the girls, building an airplane in the sand. Erik was flying a kite. In entertaining the kids, I felt that I was giving the parents a break, however short-lived it may have been.

I felt like I was contributing, and thus I had a place.

And, as summer progresses, that sense of place is only (*taking a deep breath as I type this, the worrying thought emerging that I may be tempting fate*) increasing. It's February now and, in the last month, I have received no less than three offers of potential employment. Only one of those was a result of me looking. It all started with my interest in trucks. I have long been interested in big rigs, logging trucks in particular.

There's a photo around here, someplace, of me in a logging truck when I was a child, would've only been about 6 years old. As with many things, I dreamed of trucks whilst in prison. Incarceration did not suffocate my passion. Rather, I kept it alive however I could – I drew trucks, did a wood-burning of one, even made models of them. And it is important to acknowledge that I could not have done much of this on my own – my mum brought me kitset models when she visited, and empathetic prison staff allowed them in. A supporter even visited our country's main agent for Kenworth trucks and obtained a large parcel of brochures for me. Anything that would help me resist my wider surroundings... Now, being home, I can do more than just tape truck pictures on my walls. I have recently discovered that I may, after so many years, be able to actually drive the trucks I have so long imagined. Combined with that new potential, an important part of a successful release is going to be employment. Having finally made the decision that a full-time academic career is not for me, thought has shifted to what a career might look like. I want to stay in this community and, to do that, I'll need local work. Fortunately, there are logging truck companies throughout the region. In fact, there is one ten minutes up the road. I drive past it every time I head to Probation. For months, now, I've contemplated going in there. But I haven't gone in. Quite often, when I hear a log truck go past, I run to my window, or jump out of bed, to watch it...

I ponder where it might be going, and think of how awesome it would be to be driving one of those big, tough machines, going up into the bush, huge engine growling. I think of the solitude the job must offer – just driver and truck, for most of the day. Of a life wherein I don't have to live alongside inflated, dangerous egos all day. Why not just go in and enquire about a job, one might ask? Why watch the trucks, then climb back in to bed wondering if I'd ever be able to drive one given my criminal record? Would a company take on a person *like me*? Why not just ask, you might think? Well,

I felt ashamed, embarrassed. Further, I feared rejection. To ask would be really scary, and hard work because, as in my online interaction with T, I would have to explain my history. And, as I found then, and through many other interactions, it could go any number of ways. The mere prospect of a meeting with a potential employer, therefore, trawls up all sorts of tensions, shame and worry. It's emotionally heavy, makes my body hurt.

Makes me want to hide...

So many people have said to me, since being home, "*Oh, you're overthinking it. You'd be surprised how accepting people will be.*" Such a perspective may have merit, but I can't afford to relax into it. If I do, I run the risk of being perceived as uncaring of my past, of having an expectation that people should 'get over it.' Despite all the well-meaning advice, one must live in constant deference to one's past. If one wishes to be accepted, there is a need to live with, so to speak, one's head down. At times, it can feel somewhat belittling. When I reflect on this, as with the earlier interactions with potential friends, the feelings I'm feeling alert me to that embodied tension I am often having to feel as an ex con being made to occupy that 'particular' location in society. And that is a key reason why so many ex-cons avoid law-abiding society: because, whatever people may say, former incarcerates are expected to live within it as second class, deferent citizens. Well, by many anyway. And that is a key reason why I've been so reluctant to call in at Company Transport: the fear of rejection, of being looked down on, of having my truck-driving dreams shattered and of having to leave, embarrassed and with my tail between my legs. So, for months, I put it off. However, at my last Probation check-in, prior to Christmas, I finally discussed the logging truck idea with my Probation Officer. I thought it a safe first step. She was very supportive of it, saying that she has friends in the industry. We talked about the process

involved in getting Heavy Truck licenses and she suggested I call in to the local Polytech, as they run driver-training courses. It turns out they don't. But my PO's support buoyed my spirits a little, enough that I decided, on the way home, to call in on the logging company. In the twenty minutes between making that decision and reaching the area the company is in, however, my confidence vanished, and I drove on passed. Looking in at all the trucks, parked in the yard, I felt very frustrated with myself; I knew I should be going in there, but I just couldn't. A few days passed, and again I found myself driving toward the logging company. I slowed as I approached, willing myself to go in. But, again, I drove passed. This time, however, I managed to pull over. I sat there a moment and decided, *'Fuck it, I'm doing this. I have to know.'* With that, I turned around, drove the hundred meters back up the road, and turned in.

I parked in the long park all the employees use. Today, though, it was empty. Getting out of the car, it seemed hard to breath. *'What am I getting myself into?,* I wondered. *'Have I made a mistake, doing this?'* I looked around - there was no one to be seen. But the trucks were there, row upon row of them, tidily lined up, trailers stowed on their backs', resting for the Christmas break. I think the sight of all of those machines gave me the push I needed, to overcome the intense anxiety washing over me. Looking up at the huge 'Company Transport' sign adorning the front of the administration building, I pushed open the office door and walked in.

The place looked deserted. *"Hello?"* I called. Someone replied, *"Hi,"* and a moment later a lady appeared from a side office. *"How can I help you?"* she asked. *"I'm interested in what would be involved in working here. I don't have my licenses yet, but am thinking of getting into it."* *"Oh okay, no problem,"* she replied enthusiastically. *"What I'll do is get our Company Director to have a talk with you. You're welcome to take a seat,"* she said, turning to walk down the corridor. I remained

standing, taking in my surroundings. I heard her knock on a door and say, “*Shane, have you got a moment? There is a gentleman out here interested in driving our trucks.*” Reappearing, she said, “Shane will be with you in a minute,” and then left me in the reception area, alone with my thoughts and anxieties. This is getting very real, now, I pondered. Pictures of logging trucks flickered across the screens of the office computers. For a person who likes log trucks, I’d come to the right place. The walls of the room were adorned with framed certificates and company awards. There was one for health and safety, another for performance in the logging industry. I searched the names for Shane, and found him. Ah, so the man I was about to meet was a high-achiever in the industry. That revelation didn’t do anything for my nerves. “*Hi there,*” a man said, walking up and holding out his hand. “*Come down to my office and we’ll have a chat.*” Following, I pondered his appearance. It surprised me: he look at least as young as me, long, manicured beard, black cap, tight jeans and van style shoes. He looked fashionable, not your typical rugged-looking log truck driver. His office was large. We sat down at a round table in the middle of it and engaged in a wee bit of chit chat. What I was most sure about is that I wanted to get my history on the table as quick as possible; there was no point prolonging my agony, or wasting his time. First, though, I explained that I didn’t yet have my licenses. “*Unfortunately, there’s not a lot we can do with you without at least a Class 4 Learner’s,*” he replied. “*Yeah, for sure, man,*” I said.

Here we go...

“*The reason I’ve really come in today is to find out if it is even feasible for me to work here. Because, you see, what I’m wondering about is criminal history. The thing is,*” I said, pausing, “*I was actually in prison for twenty years.*” There was a moment’s silence. Shane had not expected to hear that – how could you expect it? “*Wow,*” he

said, before quickly gathering his thoughts and asking, somewhat intrigued, *“Can I ask why?”* *“Sure, man,”* I replied, nervousness dissipating a little. *“When a teenager, I was in a really bad way. A whole lot of things happened, the worst of which is that I took a man’s life.”* The moment was that intense that I cannot recall Shane’s specific reply. What I do remember is that it was one of compassion and interest, not judgement. *“Can I ask, how did that happen man? I mean, looking at you,”* he said, gesturing toward me, *“I just can’t see it. You’d never know.”* I went on to tell him about my upbringing, and how a range of things going wrong in life got on top of me. Shane listened, with empathy. *“Look, I mean, we’d want to talk to your Probation Officer as part of the application process but, for us, the biggest consideration is your attitude. Our concern is who you are today, and what you bring to the job.”* At that point an older man came in to ask about something or other. *“Have you got a minute, mate”* Shane asked him. And, turning to me Shane said, *“Dan, this is Brett. Do you mind if I share our discussion with him?”*

Not until later has it struck me that I did not have any qualms, at all, with Shane sharing my story. And I see, now, that that is indicative of the affirmation of being heard: I knew, instinctively, from Shane’s approach and demeanor, that he could see *me*, and thus that whoever he felt comfortable sharing with would likely see me too. In his response, of embodying a process of seeing potential and ...rather than failure and risk, and so of seeing and hearing for real, I felt safe. Through that feeling, and without then even being aware of it, my body was able to relax, my defenses to recede, and my true, full self became able to emerge, and be in the moment.

“Not at all,” I replied. The man to whom Shane was about to share offered his hand, then sat down beside me. Looking to him Shane said, *“Dan is interested in driving for us. The thing is, he has spent twenty years in prison, and was wondering if*

it would be barrier to working here.” Brett simply shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly and said, *“We’re not worried about the past. It’s your attitude now that matters. What we care about is that you do a good job.”* Shane then asked, *“Do you struggle with conflict, now?”* *“Nah, not at all,”* I replied. *“And, the one instance of my offending aside, I’ve never been a violent person...even in my youth, I never liked fighting.”* *“That’s good,”* he said, before adding, *“Sometimes Drivers’ have disagreements.”* *“And some of the loader drivers can be difficult,”* Brett commented. *“But we manage that,”* said Shane. *“It’s like, right, you’re going that way today, and you that way...”* Adding to their clear openness to my history Shane looked to Brett and added, *“I’m pretty sure we’ve had another guy here, who had served time?”* *“Yeah, we have,”* the older man confirmed. *“And he was great.”* We chatted awhile about trucks, and the old days of logging, then Brett said, *“Right, I’d better go do some work,”* shook my hand again, and left.

With that most difficult, important conversation addressed, we shifted to what actually needs to happen to be able to work there. Shane explained the driver license application process. *“And once you’ve got a Class 4 Learner’s,”* he said, *“We can do something with you. Here is the name of a good Driver Training guy. Give him a call. Tell him I sent you.”* *“Cool, I will,”* I said excitedly as Shane handed me his card. *“Once you’ve got your Class 4, we can take you out in a truck. Can you drive a Roadranger?”* he asked. Ah, yes, the notorious Roadranger 18-speed gearbox. They are renowned for being very difficult to learn to operate. Once upon a time, I did drive a truck with such a gearbox, around a farm as part of my job. But it was years ago. I contemplated telling Shane this then decided, that, no, in reality, I don’t know how to operate one. *“Well,”* he replied, *“if you come down on the weekends, one of us can take you out in a truck, drive around the backroads and teach you, get you ready for the*

Class 4 full driving test.” “Oh, really?” I asked. “That’d be awesome.” “Yeah. Well its one of the biggest issues people face when going for their Class 4 and 5 licenses. You have to provide your own truck, and not everyone has an eighteen-wheeler sitting in their yard!” I felt so incredibly relieved, and grateful. Putting myself out there hadn’t resulted in a door in my face. “I just want to say, man, how much I appreciate your approach to all of this.” “That’s fine,” Shane replied. “You’re clearly an honest guy. I mean, to come in here and be upfront about your past says a lot. Many wouldn’t have.” “Well there’s no point in concealing it,” I said. “You guys need to know who you’re dealing with.” He quickly replied, “I’ve never had a guy doing a PhD wanting to drive for us before. But if you’re interested, then yeah... What I’d like to do is put you with a driver for a day. Go out in the truck and see what you think. I know you say you’ll like it, but sometimes people change their minds, once they’ve been sitting in a truck all day.” “That’d be great,” I said. “Sweet, my number’s on the card,” Shane told me. “Give me a call in the New Year and we’ll organise something.”

In sharp contrast to the fears and worries I’d harboured regarding the conversation to be had with Company Transport, their reception of me could not have been better. Indeed, there was no tension at all. It was so clear, in the tone and direction of our chat, that Shane was neither concerned about me, nor critical of me. In all honesty, we chatted as two old friends might. He told me a bit about his life, including that he’d earned a Bachelor’s Degree. Shane then took me for a walk around, outside. We went to a shed where he showed me some vintage machinery they plan to fix up. Standing there, looking at a huge old grader, he talked about the business, of its employee-oriented culture. “*We are a tight knit family here,*” Shane explained, “*and all our drivers’ know that my door is always open.*” He then shared with me his personal values, and why they matter to him. In the moment, I couldn’t believe what was

happening: I'd just told this guy I've served twenty years for a very serious offence, and here he is sharing parts of his life, and story, with me. Not until later did I appreciate that Shane was SEEING me – unlike so many, he was not seeing the past, but who I am today. As he and Brett said, that is all that matters to them. Being seen for who I am felt, and feels, incredible. It makes me feel worthy, and provides a point of reference against which to cast all the critical opinions of those who only see my past, who only see risk. Having endured so much scathing judgement and condemnation during my life, the interactions with Shane and Brett made me feel joyous and empowered. All too soon, the time came to leave. I'd actually been there an hour and a half. But it felt like it'd been just minutes. As I climbed in the car and pulled away, body awash with the experience I'd, we'd, just had, I thought, *'This is what they were talking about...'* Certainly, as so many argue (i.e., Arrigo, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Polizzi & Braswell, 2009), the understanding, compassion and recognition of potential afforded me by Company Transport are of the sort fundamental to those reintegrating from prison. And, in that, those processes are also fundamental to the safety and security of communities at large.

Man, I made the right call, pulling into Company Transport that day.

Since then, over the last six weeks, I have had two other offers of employment. I didn't go looking for either of them. Rather, the offers came as a result of random, casual conversations. One occurred when I met a friend of Erik's whilst we were camping. The guy, Kevin, brought his family out for the afternoon. Kids running around, having fun, us adults relaxed in picnic chairs, and had a beer. He looked very respectable and 'straight,' so I felt a bit nervous talking with him. But Erik had mentioned he is an electrical engineer for a leading firm in the forest harvesting business, so I asked for some advice about my Landrover's electrical system. That got

the conversation started. We talked about children – he explained that, although stressful, they’ve changed his life, and he wouldn’t have it any other way. I mentioned that I’d love a family one day but am single. He quickly responded, *“A good-looking man like you, that won’t last long.”* His comment hit me like a tidal wave – very rarely have I ever encountered such celebration of my person. It was then that I decided to tell him of my recent imprisonment. He barely reacted, and in fact said that if I needed work, to contact him. *“Thanks man,”* I said. *“I’m actually looking into driving logging trucks for Company Transport. I’ve talked to Shane about it.”* *“Shane’s a great guy,”* Kevin commented with interest. *“They run a good outfit there. But if you did ever decide that operating a tree feller would interest you, we run a number of crews, and I could arrange something.”* *“At this stage I’ve made a bit of a plan with Shane, and don’t want to let him down,”* I said. *“But I’ll bear it in mind, man, thanks.”* *“No worries, just ask Erik to get hold of me,”* Kevin replied.

I couldn’t believe how easily that had just happened. As with Shane, a stranger had, within thirty minutes of meeting me, seen and accepted me for the person I am today. My surprise would be extended further when, about three weeks later, it happened again. That time, a forestry contractor called in to enquire whether my grandparents wanted their stand of pine trees harvested. I took him up to have a look at the trees. We stood talking and, at some point, I mentioned that I may be taking up a career driving for Company Transport. *“Well if you ever want to get into machinery operation,”* he said, *“we’re looking for reliable people.”* *“Oh really?”* I responded. *“Look, I’ve actually not long got out of prison, after twenty years.”* The guy showed no reaction; he just kept talking as if it didn’t matter, telling me about how hard it is to find good operators. *“How old are you?”* he asked. *“38,”* I said. *“Ah, yes. All our guys are at least that age. I’m 35, and am the youngest in the crew. We like to have older*

guys.” We must’ve stood there, amongst the trees, chatting for nearly an hour. As with Shane and I, we connected. We told one another about our families, he told me quite a bit about his wife, her career, where she’s from, where they live now. We talked about old age, and me about wanting to keep Nan and Tim here. More important than what we talked about, however, was that, as with Kevin, and Shane before him, my past was there, but yet nowhere to be seen...

Thinking of these experiences draws me to the painful ones I’ve had. Such is the contrast. Perhaps the harshest instance of judgment I have felt, regarding my past, occurred when I first began spending time out in the community. As part of the process to prepare me for release, it was proposed that I be permitted to go on escorted visits to a local University Campus. By doing that, I could not only work on my PhD but also develop social skills and demonstrate to the Parole Board that I could function well, and safely, beyond the controlled confines of prison. Our proposal, to Prison Management, was the result of efforts from a wide range of people, including dedicated Corrections’ staff, University Leadership, and my family. Sitting here, now, I can’t help but feel sadness at how difficult it was to obtain approval to commence community outings. We had an abundance of evidence as for why it was appropriate. Yet it took months: there were countless declines, with the reasons growing more ridiculous and unjust with each. Sure, we managed to get things across the line in the end, but it was a struggle, one that left all of us exasperated and rather bitter at the clear contrast between the rehabilitative rhetoric of Management, and their actual practice: At the first sign of having to uphold policy relating to reintegration, they’d scurry, drawing on the services of the executive staff to formulate seemingly ‘legitimate’ reasons as to why my visiting the community was not appropriate. Activities that encourage potential and foster

growth in imprisoned people should not be such a fight. But they are, and it is an issue we'll explore further in the following chapter...

I allude to the experience here as it confronted me with, and illustrates, the degree to which anti-offender sentiments run through even the most liberal sectors of our community. Indeed, I had not expected to encounter much judgement when visits to the University began. Rather, I'd long envisioned the university environment to be an oasis of open-mindedness and understanding, wherein I could enjoy lively, deep discussions with fellow students. I'd thought it might even be possible to share with them some of my incarceration, and so contribute to their understanding of prison and the issues that lead one into it. Sadly, the situation that developed was far from this. From the moment I set foot on campus, it became clear that my fellow PhD students didn't want me there. Having been made aware of my criminal history, they made little attempt to conceal their feelings: death stares, refusing to share a room with me, making complaints to senior staff about me... Quite opposed to how the men in the logging industry have received me, those aspiring academics ostracised me and wholeheartedly looked down upon me. Certainly, they feared me and, in a few instances, despised me. It is therefore hard, after so long of enduring bad experiences like that, to now be encountering people who are reacting so positively. I mean, I'd begun to think that, man, if even the budding intellectuals of our society won't see beyond my past mistakes, who would? Without doubt, the conditioning of those years of critical judgment has been so pervasive that the recent, accepting, encounters with people sometimes seem too good to be true. But, man, they *are* true. They're happening, they're real. I, and the life I'm starting to live, is real. Nowhere have I been more confronted with this than in my experiences with Hope.

Hope hears me...

Hope sees me...

Hope accepts me...

Following the rejection that came through my online chat with T, I kept going. There had to be someone out there who would see me for me, and embrace me, I thought. Feeling rather wounded, I trod fairly cautiously, only saying 'Hi' to people whose profile I felt sure indicated openness. But, then, I'd thought that of T's, too? It was all a risk, such a risk. But after so many years of containment, the pain of ongoing isolation outweighed the pain that rejection could produce. And so, as my first January home progressed, I continued to reach out online. There were a couple of conversations, but they were superficial; things never got near a stage wherein disclosure was a consideration. Then I came across Hope's profile. And, within, what, two weeks, disclosure did become an issue. Indeed, it would become all-consuming... From the moment I saw her photo, I felt captivated. It was not merely a physical attraction. As strong as that was, there was much more in her photo – I sensed an intelligence and inner-strength. Reading her profile confirmed my perceptions: Hope spoke of having only recently left a long-term relationship, of being a parent, and of just looking to see who was out there. In that, reaching out to Hope felt safe – I felt a connection in the pain she was likely to be in. And there was peace in 'just looking.' No pressure, no expectations. And so, I sent a 'wave.'

Hope waved back. Then we messaged. A little in the first week. Then a lot. Early in February I went away, with Erik and his sons, on a 4WD trip. The trip meant a lot to me as it involved returning to a place which held many fond memories. Years ago – I must've been about eight – Nan and Tim took me on a tramp through to a place

known as 'Big River.' An abandoned town and mine, in its heyday it had been one of the largest gold mines in the South Island. Now, it is an eerie collection of old mining equipment, with a few ramshackle old buildings still standing. I've always had a love for Victorian architecture, and the building I most wanted to see was Mrs. Rooney's Cottage. When we'd visited, there had been an elderly lady staying in the one old house that was still standing. It turns out that her husband had gotten the demolition contract, to strip the town, when the mine closed in the 1950s. They'd left that cottage, one of the original town buildings, standing. The Rooneys used it as a summer get-away and, following the death of her husband years earlier, Mrs. Rooney continued to go in there, every summer. At the time, to my young mind, it had all seemed rather mystical. I've thought of Mrs. Rooney a lot in the years since. She'd have passed long ago, and I've wondered what has become of her old house. When in prison, I'd often sit at my cell window, late at night, dreaming of the things I'd like to be doing. Returning to Big River, to see the house so etched into my childhood memories, was one of them. But would it even be there anymore? That I now had the freedom to go and find out was so exciting. It felt rather magical. I told Hope all about it in the days leading up to the trip – a very long message, laboriously typed out on my phone screen, describing every detail. So passionate were my feelings about it, I think, that she became rather taken by Big River. One thing I was not looking forward to, about the trip, was that I would not be able to message Hope: being twenty kilometers into the mountains, there would be no cellphone coverage at Big River. Of course, on any other occasion I'd love that. But our correspondence was just then deepening, and so the thought of a pause hurt. Nonetheless, in the spirit of adventure, and wanting to keep things balanced, I readied myself to endure the lack of communication. When we arrived at the last town before heading up the Big River Road, I sent Hope a heartfelt message, within which I

expressed a little feeling: just a little, telling her I'd miss our chats. With that, we climbed into the 4WDs and headed into the hills.

Big River did not disappoint. The drive in was amazing – two hours of twisting and turning, circling up around steep valleys, through the thick bush of the Victoria Forest Park. Beautiful as the scenery was, I spent most of the time wondering when we'd emerge from the forest, out into the area where the Big River settlement used to be. With every turn we kept not being there, until we were there... My heart raced as we crossed the river and pulled into the clearing that I had not seen in what, thirty years. As we did I searched intently for it: the yellow cottage. And then, there it was. I thought of my memories of it, smoke wafting from the chimney, evening sun shining down, elderly lady sitting on the verandah, body awash with the memories of a world long gone. Erik drove past, to park up near the modern tamper hut. But not me. I wasn't interested in the present. Parking beside the cottage, almost in a daze, I got out and wandered over to it. The verandah had long ago rotted into the ground, the roof was slowly sagging, lower and lower. And yet it was, unmistakably, that same cottage of my youth. And the view, all around, had not changed. Thick native bush, and peace, in whichever direction one looked. Gingerly, I pushed the door open and stepped inside. Carefully, as the floor was gone in some places. The cottage only had three small rooms, none of which I'd gotten to see, on my last visit. I just stood and absorbed, let the emotions flow... Mrs. Rooney's small bed, still there. Her old mattress and deeply molded pillows, still there... The old fireplace, walls lined with sagging 1930s newspapers... Sheet of iron gently creaking in the breeze... The window frames long lost of their panes, yet the homeliness, the love, could still be felt; if you knew the history. And I knew. I may have been gone a long time... To another world along time... But my time there hadn't, hasn't, deprived me of my memories. I carried them

with me, protected them from the viciousness and desolation encircling me, everywhere I went. I ran my hand along the mantelpiece... Pressed, softly. The timber was spongy: a hard push and it would've given way. But I didn't push, and it didn't give. Not yet... I don't know, I almost feel like maybe the cottage had been waiting, waiting for someone to return who has memories of it, who will ensure it doesn't get lost to time...

Figure 3

Mrs Rooney's Cottage at Big River



Later on, when we got up to the camping hut, I looked at some large photos adorning the walls. They showed the mining town in its heyday. And there, down in the center of the town, was the old cottage. Sitting outside our much newer hut, that night, Erik and I talked for hours. Then stopped and I enjoyed the isolation... My mind wandered, more than once, to Hope. To the present. What was she doing? She'd mentioned that her sister's wedding was that weekend. I wondered how it was going. And I wondered if she was forgetting about me, if she might meet someone there, if she was chatting to others online... I cautioned myself to not get hopeful, to remember that it could all be too good to be true.

The following afternoon, we walked across the mining site to visit its main feature, the 600-metre deep shaft. During the 1930s, it was the deepest mine shaft in the country. To get to it we had to ascend a very, very steep mountain face. So steep was it, in fact, that we had to crawl most of the way on hands and knees. A very nerve-wracking experience, to say the least. And one that took at least twenty minutes. As I crawled, dragged myself up the face, the outside world was the last thing on my mind. I got quite the start, then, when my phone started beeping. It took a moment to realise what was happening: I'd climbed so high that, although deep in the bush, I'd reached an area where there was a bit of cellphone reception. A day's worth of information came flooding in: Facebook notifications, eBay alerts and, then, there it was, an outlook notification... Over the last few weeks, I'd grown to love that sound; whenever Hope sent a message via the dating app, an email notification would come through.

There was one on my phone now...

Scrambling the last ten meters or so up the rock face, I whipped my phone out, and there it was. In the hours since my last message to Hope, telling her I would miss her, I'd been worrying – had I overstepped the mark, was it too much too soon, or just too much full stop? Standing atop that mountain, steeped in so much history, both general and personal, I opened my inbox and read Hope's message. Looking out at the expanse of untamed, wild bush and hills all around, below me, my heart soared.

Hope said she would miss me too...

That's about all she said, but it was all I wanted, all I needed. Contemplating her feelings, I thought of how magical it was I was receiving them whilst in a place so special to me. I'd last stood on top of that mountain with my beloved Nan and Tim, more than three decades earlier. And here I am, only seven months out of prison, back

in that magical place, and with a lovely human telling me she'd miss me. Like I said a few pages back, freedom is starting to feel very real...

I sent Hope a message from that hill top... Allowing the heartfelt place and space I was in to guide me, a little emotion flowed, and I told Hope how much her message meant to me... In the coming weeks we messaged more and more. At some point we exchanged Facebook details and moved our conversation there. And from that more personal platform it grew deeper, more affectionate. There was a difference to our chat, a politeness and softness that I hadn't felt from the others. And Hope didn't make any grandiose claims to be anyone in particular. Rather, she just *was*. Who Hope is was strongly visible from the outset, in her conversation and responses. She talked about her marriage break-up, her views on life and, in time, her son. Indeed, there was an authenticity there I'd hitherto not encountered. I was drawn to her. And evidently her to me because, after maybe three weeks, Hope sent a photo of her son. We'd discussed him a fair bit by then, but I'd never seen him. When the photo came, I felt a shift. Both with regard to the closeness between us and, through that, the obligations I had. It was then that my past started to bug me. My body started telling me, given the degree to which Hope was sharing her life, that it was time to advise her of my past. It is always hard to know when it is the right time. But, for me at least, when a mother begins introducing her child, it is time.

I agonised over it; the stakes felt higher this time, much more so than when telling the potential employers. The prospect of telling T hadn't even felt as scary as this. I mean, our conversation had progressed a lot further than the one with T – I had developed feelings for Hope. As I said earlier, the whole issue began to consume me. I wished, so much, that I didn't have to deal with this: it reminds me, so strongly, of my past, of 'who' I am, and who I need to be, in many peoples' eyes. My past feels like a

dead weight, trying to drag me into the ground. Fighting the negative emotions, Hope's heartfelt messages began to feel a little bittersweet because I thought, *'She wouldn't be saying these nice things if she knew...'* Although having decided that she needed to know, I still needed to work out how to tell her. Doing it via message, as I had with T, didn't seem right. Gut feelings were telling me the right thing to do was to tell Hope in person. But I worried about whether I'd be able to, and about whether it would be putting too much on her if I did. Feeling stuck, I asked close supporters – and got conflicting views. Some said sharing my past via a message was the most ethical, caring way as it would spare Hope the potential pressure of having to provide a response there and then, with me right in front of her. Especially if my past scared her, some said. They reasoned that raising it via distance would allow Hope to be in her safe place whilst receiving what might be shocking news. Others said that such information is far too heavy to share from a distance. Advice from them was that sharing in person would, by far, be the most appropriate approach. It would, I was told, enable Hope to see that I was stepping up, being brave and holding myself to account, rather than 'hiding' behind a keyboard. Wading through everyone's opinions, trying to work out what was best for me, and for Hope, an old friend's words kept echoing in my mind. *'Daniel, you're a very forthright person. And, don't get me wrong, that's a good thing... But, please, when you're out there, give people an opportunity to get to meet you, before telling them of your past. Because, trust me, if you do, they'll see who you really are...'* That old friend is a long-serving prison officer. He's worked at Pāremoremo thirty years. He, Ted, is a very deep soul. I trust him. He knows me, and he counselled me with a full awareness of the challenges I was to face upon my release.

I tried to think of the situation from Hope's side. I'm becoming accustomed to having to sit with really heavy stuff, to regularly discussing issues involving serious

violence and murder. After all, when I told her, it'd be the fourth time I'd revealed my past in as many months. It wouldn't be me who would be getting the big surprise, and I felt terrible at the awareness of what I was about to 'drop' on her. How was it going to be for her? I mean, if she was shocked and disgusted by my past – as many are – then what kind of frustration might that produce for her? Would she have wished I'd told her sooner, as soon as she started sharing about her son, perhaps? Would she be angry that I'd told her in person? I could see how she may well feel all of these ways. So many unknowns. In the end, though, I decided to go with my instincts and tell her in person. I needed to do it soon, and I wanted to do it on our first meet. Working to try and reduce the shock she'd feel, I gently let Hope know that there was some hard stuff in my past. And I tried, but largely failed, to stall the conversation a little, wanting to prevent any further deepness between us until she knew who it was she was starting to like.

Man, what a minefield... Having decided I'd tell her in person, I began to wonder: but *where* to tell her? A café, my home, the beach? Again, I churned through the pros and cons of each location, and discussed them with others. I wanted to choose a place that was as open and safe as possible, yet also private enough for what was to be shared. My home would provide the privacy – and thus safety – I needed, but it certainly might not provide Hope that. Her profile mentioned that the beach is her happy place. A month or so following release, my Aunt had flown down to spend a week with us. A long-term supporter and beloved family member, it was really important to us all that she got to experience the family joy of my release. Whilst she was down, we'd gone to a beachside café. It seemed the best compromise. Thinking of how our meet might play out, I thought we could have a chat and then, once the nerves of first seeing each other had receded a little, could go for a walk along the beach. It was the best

scenario I could muster, and so I messaged Hope, telling her I'd like to share more of my life with her, and would like to do so in person.

She replied that she'd be happy to meet. We organised a date, in a week's time. And then I worried, worried, and worried some more. This meeting would be the culmination of so many years work, the realisation of so many wonderings. If things went well, that is: forever in my mind was an awareness that all of the possibilities may well come to a screeching, and very painful, halt. The person most able to walk me through all this, I felt, was Paul. He had, after all, experienced what I was shortly to experience. And he'd done so successfully – the woman to whom Paul shared his criminal history with is his wife of many years, and the person with whom he has created a beautiful family. For sure, Paul understood what was at stake, and in knowing he did, receiving advice from him was so reassuring. Not one to overcomplicate things, Paul said to keep it brief: if Hope wanted to know more, she'd ask.

I went to the place we'd meet, a day or two before, and walked down on to the sand. I wanted to familiarise myself with the area, both to hopefully reduce the anxiety I'd feel on the day, and to actually know where to walk, to get down to the beach from the café. Hyper conscious of my past, I felt a need to not appear as new to the area, as in any way inexperienced; the years of conditioning to dominant narratives was exposing itself, here, in that I believed there was a high risk I'd be perceived as 'less than' by Hope once I shared my story. And so, anything I could do to reduce what may come across as any 'ex-con' incompetence...

I know it will come as something of a shock, an upset perhaps, but I am jumping back to the present now. I have to. The writing I did a year ago, traversing my first summer, ended with that visit to the beach a few days before I met Hope. It ended there

because, following my meet with Hope, life took over. I put my pen down and lived. The meet with Hope went better than I could possibly have imagined. We talked, shyly, over juice, then I nervously asked if she'd like to go for a walk. I don't remember all that was said, only that, whatever it was, all I could think of was having to tell her. Hope told me about some of her past trauma, and that opened the door for me to share mine. And so, as we walked, I did. Hope didn't balk. But I worried that, as she processed, she would. We parted with a casual understanding that, 'We'll talk again.' I felt like a wreck the following day: worried all day, wondering.... I had a driving test that day, and it was all I could do to focus on it. Feeling stuck in my head, I messaged Paul. Immediately recognising the magnitude of the emotions threatening to swamp me, he rung almost right away. Paul advised me to not try and get rid of the thoughts and feelings I was having but, rather, to acknowledge them and then to just get on with the day as best I could. I'd have liked to keep talking, but Paul said he couldn't – he was waiting outside school, to pick up his kids. In that moment, as I became aware of his commitment to seeing a fellow ex-con succeed beyond prison, I felt intense gratitude. However it may go with Hope, I felt cared for. I knew there were people who had my back, who would help me through. Knowing that made, and makes, the pain of reintegrating from prison so much easier to bear.

I'm sorry my telling of what has been one of the most enjoyable, free-ing experiences of my life is not longer, or more passionate. But as I write this, the day of our one-year anniversary, I am not able to offer you a fairy-tale ending. I mean, there hasn't been an ending at this point, but I fear one may come. For, a year on, Hope and I are in the hardest place we have been. The first six, no – nine, months were magical. I wish I could write about them, about the exhilaration I felt, the companionship, love,

and acceptance... And with them the realisation that there is a real future for me on the outside, that I won't have to live forever in the shadows of society's judgement... But it is hard to write about that exhilaration, and the joy of realisation, as our relationship feels to be floundering. This chapter was due in a week ago, but I've had to put it off. I just haven't been able to deal with how things were, last summer. The contrast between then and now is so great. There is a heavy sadness, for both of us. In the first nine months there were holidays, deep conversations lying on the beach, as sense of ease between us... Now, there is tension, hurtful exchanges, pain... Fear. Like many would, I fear the pain that will come if things do end, the pain of loss. Unlike most others, however, I also fear that my freedom to live outside prison could be jeopardised. I mean, I'm almost certain Hope would not allow painful emotions to lead to some kind of malicious, revenge-seeking allegation. Such behavior is totally against who she is. But what would the system think? With it, I cannot be so trusting. After all, a failing relationship, and an inability to adequately cope with it, on my part, significantly contributed to serious harm to others, and to my imprisonment. And so, will the system become nervous enough to pull me (recall me) when, for the first time since release, I have entered a period of relationship difficulty? Or, will I be given the opportunity to be who I am today, and just navigate the process? Bearing in mind its intense risk adversity, there is considerable cause to worry. I've informed my Probation Officer of the challenges, as I am legally obliged to do. So, without doubt, the system is watching, and closely too. I can only hope it leaves me be. I mean, I'm sure it will... But one never does know, and there is a lot of thinking, and worrying, that can happen within that 0.1 percent chance. Even writing that feels wrong, and stupid, because it *won't* happen.

Will it?

Who knows... And that's one of the hardest challenges facing me, and that faces most long-termers, as they navigate the world beyond prison. Uncertainty. We don't get to know how life will play out; there is no lock-up at the end of the day, wherein a degree of certainty and separation from the world descends. Sure, a lot is possible in prison. But, out here, way more is possible, and not all of the potentials are good. There are bills to pay, rising costs to worry about, emails and text messages to answer, judgements to endure... It's a lot for anyone, let alone a person thoroughly conditioned to living a life confined to a concrete box. Yeah man, it's a lot. Eighteen months on from my release, life feels cumbersome a lot of the time. I'll cope, though.

I have to...

Chapter Six – On locks, locking, and the potential for more...

26/06/17

I've just finished a rather interesting conversation with my neighbour. We get along well. He's a good guy – a bit aggressive and violent at times, but that's nothing unusual in here. He is slightly younger than me, at 26, and is only serving a 6 year sentence. But he's been around awhile and we know many of the same people. We got to talking about the outside. We'd been talking about a high-profile murderer who'd just been on the news and it got me to thinking about the outside and how prison distorts one's thinking, or kind of freezes it in time.

"Bro," I called out. "I often see all these screws coming at work at 8 and cruising around before leaving the block at 4pm" I'm always thinking that they've got it really easy, eh."

"Yeah they have," he agreed. "They don't do fuck all bro. Sit in the guardroom and talk shit. They don't give a fuck about us."

"Yeah, but I've been thinking about it," I add. "This is Auckland. To be here in the block by 8:10, when we first see them, many would have to leave home by 6:30am to get here in time."

"True eh," he replies.

I continue. "And they have to work here for 8 hours. We see it as easy, but we're used to it. When you think about it, it's a pretty uncertain world for them."

My neighbour remains quiet. So, I notice, is the rest of the landing. I'm leaning back in my chair so I can talk through the gap between the cell door and its frame. The other guys on the landing are listening, for sure. After all, it's an unusual conversation; very rarely do we prisoners consider the perspective or life of the screw. I know that I am taking a risk by doing so in such a public way. But I have a feeling that this conversation is going somewhere important, so I plod on.

"I mean, we give them shit for being overly controlling or strict, but surely the unknown does a lot of that. We know what's going to happen, when shit is going to pop off. So it's easier for us. They don't know, so always have to be ready for anything."

"Yeah true that," Jax acknowledges.

I'm glad he does because Jax is a convict through and through. Indeed, he is associated with one of the nation's top tier MC clubs, hates narks, authority, and 'pigshits', as officers of the police are commonly referred to here. But Jax is also an intellectual, and is following my reasoning.

"So bro, that has to be mentally exhausting. And then to leave just after 4:00 pm and spend an hour or so getting home."

Very rarely do we think of life beyond the cell block. In our isolated world, we see the staff arrive at 8:10 and leave around 4 pm. But there is a lot that we don't see for example, we don't see the officers getting up in the early hours to prepare for work, or the meeting they have to attend elsewhere in the prison before getting to the cell block. We don't see that, although 'leaving' here around

4pm, they may not leave the actual institution until 5 and may not get home until 6 or 7.

"And bro," I add, "Once home they have family responsibilities to deal with, bills to pay, relationships to maintain. And they have to do this day in and day out."

We don't see all of this. For a variety of reasons including self-centredness and institutionalisation, people in prison often do not think about the plight of others.

"Life isn't easy out there eh bro," I say to my neighbour.

"Nah. It's hard as fuck," he shouts back. "Bro, if you even want to just survive on the outside, you have to work as hard as fuck. People have to slave away out there man."

What Jax is saying resonates with me. I need to hear this stuff. I have not been on the outside for so long and, even when I was, I was too young to experience the responsibilities of paying bills, caring for one's children, thinking about the future... As my neighbour and I talk, I'm thinking of how many of the aspects of life I struggle with in prison are in fact not unique to prison. Things like following numerous little rules, being unable to avoid socialising with people I don't like, having to do menial jobs that I detest, feeling down because of it all... I often entertain views of the outside world as being a utopia, a place where my struggles and challenges will fall away. Without a doubt, it will in many ways be paradise compared to the hellhole of prison. Nonetheless, there are important things I need to think about, and plan for, with respect to life beyond prison walls.

I explain all of this to my neighbour.

"I'm telling you now, life is a struggle out there," he says. "It's not all fun and games like we tell ourselves it is. Bro, people have to do shit that they don't want to be doing every single day out there. Just like us here. They have to spend time 'walking around the yard' doing mind-numbing stuff just like us. They get fed up and depressed with stuff, just like us."

Jax is right. It's bloody important that I get this ingrained into me because my eventual release into the civilian world is something that needs to be planned with great detail.

My neighbour is on a roll now, and takes our evening chat in a new direction. It's 7:00pm and one of New Zealand's most well-known soaps, Shortland Street, has just started. It is a show I spend the day looking forward to but, tonight, leaning back against the wall in the darkness, I barely look at the muted television as Jax continues.

"We underestimate the difficulty of the outside," he says. "Like, bro, I know you've been in for years and shit, but at least they'll put you through Self-Care and Release-to-Work and all that before they let you out." Jax is describing the process that the Department of Corrections is meant to follow in preparing long-termers for release. After decades in prison, people often lack basic living skills. Self-care units are environments that, whilst still within the secure confines of the prison, prepare guys for outside living. Within such units, prisoners do their own cleaning, laundry and cooking. In some instances they are even taken to a local grocery store, by prison officers, to purchase their foodstuffs every week. The

release-to-work programme addresses needs with respect to work skills and employment. It teaches prisoners the importance of responsibility and by requiring that the prisoner go out, into the community each day to a carefully approved work site, tests their ability to cope with that responsibility. Prisoners moving through these stages of their sentences will not have been exposed to real-world community values and norms for many years, and so often find it [the release process] very frightening and stressful. I assume, correctly, that Jax is about to refer to this stuff..

"But with me bro," he continues, "I won't get any of that. I've done 5 years of my 6 year lag, but don't qualify for self-care or RTW eh."

"No you don't," I reply.

"Exactly, and that's fucked up," he says. "I may only do 6 years this time but, bro, I've only spent 7 months out of jail in the last 10 years."

This saddens me. It is a story common to so many in here. Young, intelligent men like Jax who could succeed at anything. Unlike me, they have not committed the most serious of crimes. But, having started their experiences of incarceration with stints in boys' homes and youth prison, have become victims to the system as much as to their own poor decisions. I continue listening with a heavy heart.

"But we both know that even though I've done all that time, come my release date next year, they will basically just kick me out of here bro." Jax will, in fact, be seen by a probation officer prior to release, and be given three hundred dollars by Social Services. However, post-release support is, unfortunately,

dangerously lacking. My neighbour jokes that he'll get into central Auckland, won't know what to do and will ask to come back. It's a joke, yeah, but I detect the concern in his voice and...try to give a little encouragement.

"Yeah, but Jax," I say, "You've been out there recently enough, and keep up to date with shit. Don't you think you'll be algud?"

"Man, things change fast out there brother," he replies. "It won't be like it was in 2012 when I was last out and it sure ain't like it was when you were out."

I don't like hearing this stuff. The truth really does hurt, huh?

"And Dan," he says, "I'm not like I used to be..."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Cunts out there are cheeky motherfuckers. It's not like in here my bro. There's no respect. Guys will talk shit and get in your face. If they do that to me, I'll just smash them in the face bro. You know how it is."

"Yeah bro, I know," I reply. In prison, responding to blatant disrespect with violence is generally what you have to do. That is why showing others respect in here is a big issue. We tend not to look each other in the eye unless we are friends. Many walk with their eyes turned to the ground and take care not to touch when passing one another. Not out of fear, but out of respect. We have little in here to claim as our own, so personal space is highly valued. Indeed, one of the first things a predator or bully will do if he has a problem with you, or just wants to have a scrap, is stare at you or 'accidentally' bump into you. It is easy to think that all of this is just silly school yard behaviour, but when shanks, shivs and fists fly into

action, it is anything but. Officers and prisoners lives are put at risk when such incidents erupt and, without doubt, both sides have suffered severe psychological and physical injuries over the years because someone has reacted to a personal slight. So I understand what Jax is saying.

"You know," he continues, "I never used to be like that." Almost regretfully, my neighbour says, "I was brought up good eh. I remember when I first came to jail, when I was young as, I just wasn't like that. I was all new and quiet as. Everything was a shock. The banging of all the metal doors bro," he tells me. "I'll never forget the first time I heard all that..."

"Fucken jail eh bro," I reply. "Yeah bro, shit eh" Jax replies softly.

A silence falls over us. It's cold tonight. There are no heaters in the American-designed cells and I move my legs a bit, fighting the coldness in my young joints. It is deathly quiet, no TVs or radios can be heard. I turn my body slightly and look through the bars, across the narrow corridor, through the windows and across to B-Block. I can barely see it, twenty or so metres away. Only the faintest silhouette of the gigantic, three-story rectangular concrete structure is visible in the dull glow that the institution's orange security lights throw up into the night sky. It looks, and is, as cold and depressed as I feel. I turn away. I think that our conversation is nearing an end. Neither of us anticipated the talk going the way it has. Much like me, Jax is probably thinking of what could have been. And of the many challenges that will confront him upon his release. He knows that the outside is now as foreign to him as prison once was, and he wonders if he'll make it. If he'll last. As if reading my thoughts, he calls out:

"I'm gonna park up now my bro."

"Sweet bro, me too," I reply. "See you tomorrow."

We've both been 'parked up' since getting locked in our cells after our landing time at 2:50 pm, well over 4 hours ago. In prison, though, our worlds are so tiny that we define things in very particular terms. Being in one's cell is not merely being in one's cell. If I'm at my desk, I'm usually writing or eating, if I'm kicking back, I'm watching TV or listening to the radio, and if I'm 'parked up', I'm lying on my bed – often in a state of contemplation. I've got other things that I need to get done tonight, but for the moment, I'm deep in thought. The blasting of people's stereos ended long ago and, with my neighbour's words echoing in my mind, I've drifted out of the cell block, beyond the high concrete walls of the yards, across the grass field to the prison's perimeter fences. Those fences present a formidable barrier. Running 3 abreast, with rolls of razor wire woven between the first two, the outermost one carries numerous high voltage electric wires. But they pose no obstacle to a person's mind, to a soul that must endure the torture of knowing it is its own poor decisions that put it in such a Godforsaken place. To a soul that is constantly in conflict with focusing on its own pains as well as the never-ending pains of its victims. This shit occurs every day. Sometimes I can push it away and just get on with it. Other times stuff lingers and I have to surrender to the guilt, letting it wash over me. It feels right, sometimes. Feels right to feel shit, I mean. As if something, somewhere, is telling me that 'Yes, you should be feeling bad, you piece of shit'. There are many things beyond the fences to think about. Too many. Moments such as this are crucial for me, because they instil in

me the importance of preparation. I must continue to work hard, to first battle through the institutionalisation that long-term incarceration is imposing on me and, when moments of clarity come [like this one], to document them so that I can recognise the challenges. A continued engagement in this process is what enables me to grow and, ultimately, to prepare for a life beyond prison.

Seven long years since that conversation occurred. Where is Jax, now? I can only wonder... Rarely do prisoners follow one another's progress, or maintain relationships, once we move on. It is indicative of what brought the relationships to be, I guess: relationships of convenience – forced, necessary for both survival and a sense of belonging. Some endure beyond prison, but not many. This makes me think of how cut off, artificial, and other-worldly the world of prison is. How unhealthy it is. Here, sitting at my desk, free and beginning what is to be the last chapter of our journey, I am, in many ways, far from that world. Yet I know it is there, almost right there, waiting to envelop me should I err. During moments where that awareness comes to the fore, I wish I had the ignorance of prison that people foreign to it can enjoy. But I don't. Instead, I have my many memories, any of which can come to bear at the mere sight of authority. It would be so nice, so liberating not to know what sits at the other end of a police car ride. Not to have to know that in police stations are cold, piss-soaked cells that are the gateways to that other world; they are where the true separation begins. Man, the awareness is painful. It hurts to know that so many people are, right now, enduring what I did. It makes life harder to enjoy, the world not seem as nice as it might otherwise. When the memories emerge, freedom and becoming become harder to embrace. But, where once my burden was to endure and survive in prison, the challenge

now is to break free of the memories of it and live. I have done my time. And, whilst the decades I served will never make up for the hurt I inflicted, and what I took away, those painful years earned me the right to enjoy the life I now have. Indeed, within our retributive criminal justice system, where the overarching focus is on redemption via suffering rather than through the establishment of ethical relations with one's community and victims, I would be deemed to have 'paid the price.' In its vengeful eyes, I have given the pound of flesh necessary to be able to live the existence I contemplated, and prepared for, for so long, behind prison fences...

Last summer, as we've seen, I began to live, really live. Looking back, from the summer I'm now heading into, the last was a real process of transformativity. Just today I was discussing, with my supervisors, the structure of the last two chapters, of what should go where. I had said I'd tell the story of my first summer in this chapter, to end the thesis. That led to yet another discussion about time, process, becoming, and the importance of narrating stories not in some sort of disembodied structure but in accordance with how they occur in our bodies (Grant et al., 2013; Richardson, 2000). As Leigh said, a lot has changed for me since that summer. Amazing and progressive as it was, I've moved further still, in the last nine months. In particular, I have been able to actively, and without constraint, pursue my PhD, and my interest in locks and keys. Considering the visceral extent to which the system went, to extinguish my aspirations in these areas, that I am now free to pursue them is fundamentally significant. Why? Well, for one, my movement through them serves to highlight what is possible, despite the adversity of prison. Perhaps more important, however, is that my engagement in them assists us in questioning why prison need be so reductive to begin with. Because, for sure, the successes and benefits I am now experiencing through those endeavours is further validating what I long felt in prison – that if only my potential and aspirations

were not met with such strongly oppressive measures, so much more growth could have been realised.

This chapter will explore that. Through looking at several instances of the reductivity I encountered, I will offer what are to be my final lived examples of how, and why, we are existing within a society of captives. Certainly, those experiences, and the growth I've made since being free of prison, speak strongly to the SOC argument, raising questions regarding the need for all of the oppression, and assessment of risk and reduction, that occurred for so long. The present blossoming in my life, my self and being, begs the question: what if? What if that becoming had been allowed, and nurtured, during my prison journey? How might it have led to positivity and healing, rather than oppression and pain? And how might a different correctional process help us overcome a captivity in which we all share?

It feels like it has taken so long to get to this point. This doctorate has taken seven years to write, and it was many pages ago, back somewhere in Chapter Two, that I first mentioned an interest in locks and keys. I also let you know, all those years ago, that there was a story to tell. There is, and it is time to share it. As with all the autoethnographic storying we've been engaging in, this one serves multiple purposes. Importantly, its narration has contributed to my ongoing work to live beyond prison, to be able to become a fuller version of myself, to re-occupy aspects of myself oppressed during my incarceration. Further, processing it has helped me better understand, and unpack, some of the issues we are to explore. Indeed, through locks and keys, I'm now going to take us into a story of risk-aversity, of the sorts of risk-averse policies and practices discussed in the SOC thesis. We may witness perhaps the strongest example, yet, of what that adversity looks like in practice. Because, indeed, nothing illustrates

the risk-averse attitudes, and reductive measures the system will take in effort to crush potential and perceived risk, so much as that relating to my interest in locks and keys. Through it we will see the human impacts – consequences – that harmful correctional practices are having for one and all. The story will take us, for the last time, back behind the wall. But first, we're going all the way back, to where I was before I even knew those walls existed in our world.

The Dan that couldn't be seen...

31/10/2022

Contemplating what to write, I'm sitting here playing with a lock. It's a Lockwood 234 padlock, the very early 'fat-bodied' type, with the early steel key, with a round bow. I've developed a practice of having two or three of my latest acquisitions sitting here, on my study desk; presently, there is the 234 padlock, a second 234 padlock, with a Restricted 'SPC' profile keyway, and with a key I handmade for it. And, lastly, there is a large Chubb padlock, the 'treasure chest' sort of padlock. Their presence reminds me of where I am now, that I've made it, and handling them thus helps me chill. The concrete and steel that surrounded me may be gone, but the confinement continues to seep into my mind, to make me forget that I'm actually here. I've noticed it quite strongly, when studying and teaching; I'll be sitting here, participating in a Zoom class. My colleagues, and the students, will be talking about some aspect or other of imprisonment and it triggers memories, experiences, and I'll be gazing out the window, totally disconnected from the discussion occurring before me. I'll be back in the prison. It

happens quite often. So, having a high-security lock and key in my hands helps keep me from that captivity, helps me free myself from confinement.

In much the same way it has all my life...

My Grandmother tells me that I've liked keys since I was a toddler. Whenever we were out, she says, all one had to do to quieten me was give me the car keys to play with. My earliest memories of liking keys stems from my early primary years. For a short time I lived with my mother in a Victorian-era villa, in Whanganui. It had the old four-panel doors and I recall being rather fascinated by what I now know would have been a 'Carpenter No. 60' lock. It was a huge black thing, with the 'Japanned' paint that locks of the time were finished with. Other memories from this period include nailing a few locks to a tree out on the street. A neighbour was none too happy about it. Then there was Kev. I met Kev through playing with his kids, out on the streets. They lived just around the corner. Us kids shared similar backgrounds, being from the 'wrong side of the tracks' – the kids of criminal and drug-addicted parents, of parents who had bare-dirt backyards, Rottweilers, and old, rusty V8 cars, of parents who lived life different to the norm. I have strong memories of Kev that, strangely, are fond. Strangely because he ruled over his household with an iron fist, often sending his kids out on stealing missions. The fondness comes from the memories of the whanaugatanga and awahi within that house. It was an old, rather run down home, but I recall there always being food available, boil-ups and bread. Lots of bread. And I remember Kev vividly because he used to keep every door in that house locked. I mean *every* door. He carried the keys to all the doors, in a big bunch, on his belt. To this day, I remember just how cool I found that, and him. My liking of keys, and the whole 'jailer' style of locks and

locking, was reinforced further by the visits we'd make, to see mum's then boyfriend, Les. Les was then a Mangu Kaha (Black Power) gang member, and is the father of my step-brother. I recall going out to Kaitoke prison and, whilst Les and Mum sat talking, I'd be sitting over by the visits room door, stealing glances at the officers' sinister-looking bunches of keys, and admiring the large brass lock holding the heavy steel door firmly shut. Locks such as the one I was enraptured by, a 'Chubb 3G112,' are only used in prisons, police stations and Maximum-Security Psychiatric institutions. The use of them is very tightly controlled; they are not available to the public, and so it made going to the prison seem somehow otherworldly to me, as if I had some kind of special access to a forbidden world of security. It seems bizarre that, years later, I would be the one receiving visits in that room. I remember seeing the lock, recalling my childhood admiration of it, and feeling a resounding deflation that I was now being secured by it. I mean, what were the odds of that happening?

Importantly, most of the early memories I have, of locks and keys, centre around relations with people and places. There were the times with Les, who was involved in a car wrecker's yard. I would go there and, whilst he would be engaged in whatever nefarious activity, I'd be off going through the broken-down cars, searching the glove boxes and floors for discarded keys. And the one real memory I have of spending time with my father was the time he gave me (likely shoplifted) a 'Lockwood 001' deadlock set. It was a special moment. I only ever saw him a few times, the last being when he called out to me from behind a prison grill: I was being escorted across the compound of Whanganui prison, only a few days into my prison sentence. And, until that fraught, embarrassing moment wherein I heard, "*Son, son, Daniel!*" being screamed across the yard, I had not realised he was there, too, serving yet another drug-related sentence.

Another irony there, perhaps?

Collecting began, I think, when I lived at my Aunt and Uncle's. I was moved out there when I was about five, as Mum went to Prison. I only recall one lock – a padlock essentially identical to a 5-pin Lockwood one. Only this one was stamped 'DL' which fascinated me as the letters are my initials. I would discover in later years that 'DL' stands for 'Dominion Lock Company'. But at the time I was just happy to have it, and it was locked onto the handlebars of the old tricycle I used to ride around the yard. I'm told there was an incident, around this time when, whilst attending Maxwell primary school, I found a hatch to get under the school that was unlocked. I locked this, snapping the padlock shut – with a fellow student stuck in there. Although I don't remember the incident, I do remember the padlock – it was a long-shackled Lockwood, 'Model 234.' Having been returned to my Mother upon her release, I was, several years later, once again farmed out to extended family when she received another prison sentence. This time, with my Aunt unable to cope, I was sent to my step-Aunt's. I was seven or eight. I didn't enjoy it there, much, either. My collecting did, though, increase. Aunty Ann allowed me to keep a single ice-cream container of locks and keys.

Thankfully, Mum never went to prison again, after that second time. I spent the rest of my youth – well, up until my own imprisonment – in her care. There are a couple of moments I remember, clearly, from that period of life. One was when Mum's then boyfriend turned up with a huge pile of keys for me. He lived in an adjacent town, and we'd been out looking around local demolition yards. At one, they had a large drawer full of keys. Every time some keys came in, from a building they'd pulled down, they'd be dumped in that drawer. I recall pushing my hands through all the keys, picking out a few to buy. I think we got them for a couple of bucks. I thought about, and probably talked about, the drawer for days. At the time, we lived in a little council flat, in suburban Palmerston North. Life was pretty bleak there. I had few friends and, largely

because of my impoverished background, got picked on a lot at school. A highlight, though, was when Mark came walking in the door, one day, carrying that huge drawer of keys; he'd obviously gone back to the demolition company and done a deal for it. I was ecstatic. And, more importantly, I felt cared for, seen. A sense of recognition of who I was, am. However, these times of recognition and happiness were few. Most of the time, home life was dismal. Whether it be because Mum and Mark were fighting, or 'heavies' (other addicts working off drug bills, usually) were coming around to repossess stuff due to debts Mum owed, there was often a heaviness and negativity in the air. It hung, threatening to engulf. I was a silent witness, and thus participant, in all of it. And that is where my other strong memory of the time is embedded. My response to the chaos, to try and cope, was to withdraw into my locks, using them to create a space for myself. In that instance, I built a gate on the doorway of my bedroom. I even made a little hatch in it, kind of like the food hatch on a prison cell door. And I threaded a chain through the gate, and through a corresponding hook that I cello-taped to the door frame. Of course, it was only made of cardboard mesh, the type used in large fruit-packing boxes. But, in my body, that cardboard gate provided a sense of separation, and thus protection, from the dark happenings beyond it. I would close it, snap the padlock shut around the cardboard latch, and they *knew* not to come in.

At least, I thought they did...

Over the years, my interest increased and, as I got older, I began learning about locks, reading locksmithing books, visiting locksmiths, and learning how to make keys. My Grandfather, Tim, taught me a lot about tool use, and engineering. He made several large steel keys for me, for antique locks I had. I'd take the locks down in my suit case, when I visited at Christmas. He actually set me up a little locksmithing workshop, down in an old chook shed at the back of the garden, replete with a strong door to which I

fitted a number of locks to make it my own. Hmm, there's a pattern here, huh? Thinking about it, now, those locks gave me a sense of autonomy, of control in my life so seldom felt. I'd while away much time down in the chook shed. And in Tim's shed, with him, watching and learning. I later put the skills to use, myself: by the time I went to prison, I had bought and sold locks and keys, made keys, and learnt how to re-pin and re-key high-security locks. I had a fairly decent collection of keys, some of which I own to this day, and would sometimes sit on my bed, with my keys all spread out, and just go through them. It was very peaceful and, without doubt, absorbing myself in the enjoyment I derive from locksmithing enabled me to find peace and security amidst very uncertain, threatening situations.

It did then, and it does now; since being released, I have set up, once again with Tim's help, another locksmithing workshop. It is far more advanced than the chook shed. I have a comprehensive set of tools, and many antique lever locks and keys. It is the culmination of many years' dreams. And some in prison management would *hate* it, hate that I have finally been able to move, to occupy legitimate space, and practice skills, that they feel only 'good' citizens are supposed to have access to. But I'm home now and should, irrespective of what they think, be free to be me. I'm certainly trying...

Yes, I'm trying. Trying to be me. And not just that, but also to cope with the process of reintegration. It is, as emphasised in the last chapter, a stressful process. And so, now that I am legally able to, I am turning to locks to help me through... To reconnect with my hobby I have gone all the way back, back to a lock and key that has held my heart for many years. Sadly, the original lock is long gone. I don't recall the details, but I believe it had 'disappeared' before I even went to prison. The '...' are me not really wanting to think about what may have happened to it, a lock of its quality, a

quality known to the numerous impoverished souls who frequented our lives back then...

Throughout my sentence my lovely Nan regularly sent photos, both of current life, and of moments from years long passed. Like with the container, taking the time to do all this was just part of her dedication to doing anything she could do to reduce the conditions of my confinement. One day, amidst the handful of memories she posted in, was a particularly special one. How the image had made it past the mail censorship office I do not know, but I'm grateful it did because, there in that photo was a very young me, holding my most prized lock. Indeed, I was not merely holding it, but displaying it proudly, admiration and joy clear (almost painfully so) to see on my young face.

Figure 4

A Boy and his Lock



That lock represented so much to me. Once a year I used to get to go on a week-long holiday to Nan and Tim's, down on the West Coast. Well, on one of those holidays, we visited Robbie, an old friend of Tim's. The two had worked together in the local Government coal mine, and had hunted together. Robbie was old school. He was also

very aware, as were most of my Grandparents' acquaintances in the region, of my passion for locks and keys. This came in handy because the West Coast, you see, was a place modernisation had barely touched: the buildings and, well, most things, really, were very old. It almost seemed as though the place was another world, a world half a century older than that surrounding it. Importantly, that is just the way many 'Coaster's' liked it. I liked it too – the place was a haven to me, a soft balm against the harshness of impoverished life at home... And it was a veritable treasure trove of old locks and keys. Across the handful of Christmases I spent down there, I was gifted a variety of cool old stuff. None was more significant, however, than what Robbie gave me. Tim tells me he used to call me "*The Outlaw*." I don't remember that, but I do remember the time he took me out to his shed.

"*Come out here,*" he said. "*I've got something for you.*" We went out to his old, ramshackle shed and, there on the bench, were some old door locks. And I mean old, West Coast old. One stood out more than the others. A lot more, actually. I recall putting the locks in an old, white plastic bag and keeping them close to me the rest of our visit. Robbie knew how much I would value those locks. He knew because he was a dear soul, the sort that sees people and, in that, recognises what matters to them, and how to engage with them. When we left, I wasted no time in getting out to Tim's shed, where the lock was disassembled and cleaned. And that evening, sitting at the dinner table, soaking in the warmth from the coal range stove behind me, I held my prized lock up for a photo.

Later on, back in our little council flat, I carefully placed the lock on the top shelf of my book case. It seemed almost magical – I recall admiring it daily. It reminded me that the West Coast was real, and that my time there really had happened. In addition to all of these connections, equally powerful was the quality and engineering of the lock

itself. In the years since acquiring it I have learnt that my prized lock was made by the Russell and Erwin Manufacturing Company (REO). The REO was formed in 1846, in New Britain, Connecticut (Hennessy, 1976). Alongside the P.F. Corbin Company, which it merged with in 1902, it was one of the world's main suppliers of high-end security locks. The company provided locks for specialist applications such as asylums, hospitals, and ornate, Victorian era homesteads. The '1090' and '1096M' asylum locks, requiring two keys to operate, are especially interesting. However, my favourite REO model is, of course, the one I once owned. Not knowing the particular model number of it, I named it, in acknowledgement of the lovely person who gave it to me, the 'Robbie lock.' It is (was) a large 'slam lock,' designed to lock automatically, when the door is closed. Unlike most, the lock does not have a conventional handle. Rather, it has an ornate brass 'pull', which can be used to open the automatic latch part of the lock. However, this pull is only accessible from the side of the door the lock is on; from the outside, a key must be used to withdraw the latch. In addition to the automatic latch, the lock also has a 'snib.' When the snib is activated, the key cannot move the latch. As if that wasn't enough security, the Robbie lock also incorporates a deadbolt. Located below the latch is a large, thick steel bolt operable only with the key. The bolt can be 'thrown' twice. This means that one full turn of the key will make the bolt come out about 10mm, and a second full turn will throw the bolt another 10mm. At that point, the lock bolt is protruding a long way, securing the door very firmly. This double-throw system was developed by early English lockmakers, originally to be used with locks that saw heavy abuse, such as those for prisons and asylums. That the REO lock has this feature is a sign not only of its quality but of its ancestry in centuries-old English engineering. Notably, its connection to the prison industry is a primary reason I liked that double-locking feature so much. Why? Because that connection communicated its

strength, rarity, and provenance. In owning a lock of such quality and capability I felt...special...

Countless times over the years, usually whenever I felt myself being crushed under the weight of risk-averse reduction, I would look at that photo. I had another photo in front of it so that, if the Guards went through my photo album, they hopefully wouldn't see it. Gazing wistfully at the beautiful scroll work of the lock's ornate cast iron case, the horseshoe design around the keyhole, the shiny brass, I vowed to own one again, one day. Thoughts of this, of finding one, and restoring it, provided so much sustenance throughout the long years of banishment from my passion.

Very soon after my release, I began searching for a Robbie lock. Being so rare, I could find almost no historical information regarding the lock. Even the almighty Google yielded little. Thinking about it, I like that – I can only wish I was as unknown as my lock... Several months of searching produced meagre results. I managed to find a few examples of the lock on eBay, but they were either very rusted, missing parts, or both. Then, almost by accident, I stumbled upon an architectural salvage website. I scrolled through screeds of items – native timber, roofing, windows, doors, hinges, and locks. Lots of locks. A fair few turns of the mouse wheel, a pause. I compared the image on the screen to the thirty-year old image in my hand: the locks were identical. The salvage company had listed the lock with a price of NZD\$194. Postage would be extra and, coming from Australia, it wouldn't be cheap.

I didn't care, I bought it immediately.

Don't get me wrong, I don't have money to burn.

However, this process I'm engaging in matters...

It is part of my process of healing...

To the extent that photos can capture the quality of something, the lock appeared in good nick. Unfortunately, however, it had no key. And, in the weeks since buying it I've learnt that discovering the lock has been the easy part; despite extensive searching, I've found it is impossible to obtain original keys for the Robbie lock, either cut or blank. Some of the other REO key types come up for sale, on the likes of eBay. But never the profile for my lock. And it is not possible to buy them from any manufacturer. I mean, even when in production, they would have held a somewhat restricted status, and thus been hard to obtain. Now, over a century later... Forget about it. Registered locksmiths have told me they cannot even supply, or make, them. Accordingly, when my Robbie lock arrived, I knew I was going to have to make a key for it. Well, try to...

“Mr Luff,” he says, sternly. *“Why did you make that key?”*

“I didn’t make it,” I say, for the, what, third, time. *“Like I already said, I found it.”*

“Mmmhmm,” the Security Manager mumbles, clearly not believing me. Or, more likely, just not wanting to...

21/05/2017

The box. It was on the top left hand side, on the top shelf as you walked into the store room. That it had 'wet weather gear' or something like that written on it. I explained that I only happened upon it by fluke. We were in the storeroom looking for a box of small-sized paper towels because a prisoner had asked for some. Apparently, someone had seen these in there at some point so we were rummaging around looking for them. The storeroom has shelves on three of its sides, three shelves high. Most of the stuff stored in there consists of things like detergents, laundry powder, toilet paper, soap, razors and so on. I had noticed, however, that there were a few odds and ends too – an old sewing machine, several old CRT computer monitors and a few cardboard boxes. But there were dozens of new cardboard boxes of supplies in there to and none of it looked of any real interest. So, until I'd found the box of concern, I never gave the store room much thought. And besides, it wasn't open all that often so there were not many opportunities to explore it even if I had wanted to. But when I found that box, everything changed.

I casually pulled it down off of the shelf and as soon as I felt its weight my curiosity peaked. Stacked on top were several layers of thick, heavy rubber gloves, the Hazchem type that you'd use when cleaning up blood or other dangerous substances. These were all packed tightly into the box, giving the impression that the box was full of them. But it wasn't. Whilst the officer behind me was looking up at other boxes, I dug down and pulled the gloves out, revealing an Aladdin's cave of cool-ass gear. At a glance I saw computer disks, a 3.5" IDE computer hard drive, an aerial, metal plates, cables and, of most interest, a padlock and keys. I

dropped the gloves back down and put the box back on the shelf. I couldn't think straight. This was all totally unexpected, and I didn't know what to do. I didn't think of telling the officer behind me, nor did I think of quickly pocketing some of the stuff. All I knew was that I needed to get the hell out of there and gather my thoughts. Do an assessment and all that. The search for paper towels lasted another minute or so and then, with no towels found, we left, me to sit at my desk just outside the storeroom door and the officer back to the guardroom. When the officer had first turned up, I'd been at my desk reading or writing. Can't remember which. But now I couldn't do a damn thing except think. My mind, my heart even, were racing. That box was exciting, and I just couldn't stop pondering its actual contents. Also, if that one was there, then what the hell else was in there, in them other boxes??? Endless possibilities began to cloud my brain.

At this point I had no thoughts of what I'd DO with the stuff, or of taking it. I just wanted to know WHAT was in there. The unknown started killing me. When I was a kid I used to make treasure chests out of wood and put big locks on them, put my pocket money in them and bury them in a nearby paddock. Then I'd see how long I could last before I dug them back up. But I can tell you right now that that box was the most tempting goddamn treasure chest I've ever come across. And it was right there, sitting on a shelf less than two meters away, with only a thin wall separating us.

I lasted several days. The worst thing was that I had seen the padlock and keys. The lock was a long-shackled ABUS 83/50. These are a rust-resistant, 6-pin lock with a detachable locking cylinder. I've owned plenty of them

and they are a good lock. Very easy to re-key as the cylinder can be prepared separately to the lock and then simply inserted into the lock's housing and secured with a single grub-screw. They are, however, vulnerable to leverage (i.e., a crowbar). They have double-locking balls and a hardened shackle but the problem is that, with prolonged steady force, the shackle splits at its weakest point, where the indents for the locking balls are. This is the trade-off with having a hardened shackle; hardened steels are very inflexible. Hard to cut, but not so hard to break. I once tested a Lockwood padlock of comparable quality to the 83/50 but with a thicker shackle. I did this by wrapping a logging chain around the bottom of a grounded, concrete fence post. I then attached another chain to the drawbar of a tractor and then connected the two chains with the padlock. I wrapped a towel around the lock so that it wouldn't go flying if it broke. I then put the tractor in low-1st, took up the slack in the chain and anticipated that the wheels would start slipping on the grass when I did. It was a big tractor, a 100 horsepower, four-wheel drive Case 1594 and, to my dismay, the shackle of the lock quickly gave way. Upon inspection, the shackle had stretched and snapped and the brass housing had also split. Anyway, the padlock in the store room box...

The problem with this damn padlock is that I knew, straight away, that it was a cell padlock. And, that being the case, the keys that I'd briefly seen were almost certainly cell keys. I'd only seen them briefly and had no idea how many there were, or how they were cut. I only need to glance at a key for a short time to take it in, but these were jammed down in the box amongst a lot of other shit so I couldn't tell. But they'd looked roughly the size of security keys, with big heads

or 'bows'. Security keys usually have larger heads than standard keys and these heads are usually a square, rectangular or triangle shape. Anyway, I was burning with curiosity and just had to know more.

Was it a set-up? I've thought about this a lot in the time since. But, fuck it, I'd likely have taken them even if it was. And, if it wasn't a set-up, then it wasn't like anyone would miss the keys if I did take them. And it wasn't like I was going as far as making keys. These rationalisations helped me to take the next step. The next time the store room was open and I was left to it, I went right to that box and pulled it right on down off of that shelf. Quickly ripping the gloves out, I dug through the other stuff to the locks. There were four 83/50s. Two had brand new shackles and housings whilst the other two were damaged, with no cylinders and the shackles have been cut with bolt cutters. Straight away I theorised that they had been on cells and had either jammed themselves or, more likely, had had the keyways tampered with by prisoners. Staff had thus had to cut them off and the two new ones were no doubt intended as replacements. Why the heck those replacements had ended up in an insecure store room rather than on cell doors was (and remains) anyone's guess. But I wasn't complaining; I'd hit the jackpot. There was also a small brass padlock there but, being of poor quality and damaged, it aroused little interest. Placing the locks back in the box, I turned to the keys. They were in a small 'Auckland City Locksmiths' bag. There were four, split between two rings. All four were of Lockwood's 'OQ' range of security key. So, they were not cell keys but, even worse for me, they were for the main facility doors around the unit. I just could not believe that I was holding these. It was

fucken crazy. I remember thinking, what are the odds of this occurring? And of the 10,000 prisoners locked in New Zealand's prisons, how is it that it has to be me – the prisoner with a keenness for locksmithing – who comes across these damn keys? It has to have been a cruel test, one that I was about to fail miserably.

Totally unable to help myself, I quickly pocketed the four keys, returned the box to its shelf and exited the storeroom, pulling the door shut behind me. I'd been in there for what felt like half an hour but in reality would've been, like, 2 minutes. In the moment, I don't think I rationalised taking those keys. I just did it. There was no consequential thinking, no morally-guided cost-benefit analysis or any of that other stuff I try to utilise. This was deer-in-the-headlights stuff and my strong passion for security-related phenomena took over completely. Objectivity was gone in a flash. I'm not at this point willing to say whether I told others about my crazy discovery, but I sure wanted to. This was too exciting to sit on. I mean, damn, these were PRISON KEYS. And real ones, no less. I jammed the keys into a stack of blankets on the shelf in the kit locker for later inspection. I needed to get out of there for a bit and, having perhaps the first thought about the seriousness of this, wanted to wait until it felt 'safe' to sit down and have a closer look at my 'treasure'.

As you might imagine, the day passed painfully slowly. I had no interest in anything else – training, studying or using the phone. I can't remember what I did, but I know that it was after dinner that I went back to suss the keys out. Leaving them there like that was dumb – SERT could have come in at any time to have a look around; they certainly had before. But such was the state of my

thinking that, yeah, I thought it better to leave them there than take them out into the compound. Flicking on the light, I sat down and pulled the keys out. Whilst they were all 'OQ' security keys, and it was clear that they were all part of the same system, two of them were well-worn, obviously not new. These were stamped '1.19' and '1.21' respectively. They were on a ring along with a brass Lockwood key tag, designated '45'. So, at some point they had been hanging in the Unit's key press. The numbers stamped on the keys indicated that, although part of a Master system, they're only able to operate an individual lock within that system. The cylinders or housings of the locks in such a system will generally have corresponding numbers stamped on them, indicating which pass-key operates that lock. Although I instinctively knew they wouldn't work, I turned in my seat and tried the two pass keys on the storeroom door. It was great feeling them go into the lock but, sure enough, neither turned. I now switched my attention to the other keys. Straight away, these two looked more promising. Although both on the same ring, there was no key tag and it was immediately obvious that both were freshly cut. You can tell a new key – when cut there is a very fine burring left along the blade or bit. Over time, this is worn off by the pins and keyway of the locks the key is used in. One of the two keys was stamped '1.01'. Ratshit, another pass key. Nonetheless, still cool and a great score. The fourth key, though, was the kicker. This was the minuscule piece of alloyed metal that would lead to me making a series of decisions that would very quickly fuck my life up.

The fourth key was not a pass key. No, it had 'GMK' stamped on it and anyone with a passing knowledge of security will know that this acronym stands

for 'Grand Master Key'. The GMK is the powerhouse of any master system. It sits above even the Master Key (MK) that prison officers carry and operates every single lock in its respective system. Thus, I knew instinctively that this key would unlock every facility door in the unit: the guardroom access passage, interview rooms, parole room, dining room, kit locker, gym etc. It would also open the maintenance trapdoors in the ceilings of the various rooms. There is no camera in the kit-locker or store room so, utterly unable to do otherwise, I tried the GMK on the three locks that I had access to. As I knew it would, it operated them all: the kit-locker door, the store room door, and the trapdoor. I cannot even begin to describe the feeling. There really are no words for it. Here I was with four of the type of key that I'd hoped to own since being a young fulla. And they'd literally fallen into my life. I'd not had to make them nor gone looking for them. Indeed, I'd not given more than a passing glance to the unit's locks until then. I had other focuses and, whilst there was other low-level contraband activity occurring in the unit that I was sporadically engaging in, I was essentially on the straight and narrow.

Having found that the key gave me access to the attic space, I stupidly (and also entirely logically and adaptively, if one considers my thinking within the context of a person trying to live and enjoy a few freedoms) decided it would be a great place to explore and, subsequently, hide our goodies – pornographic magazines, pirated CDs and the like. It was during one of my excursions into the attic that I was apprehended. Upon being caught, and upon learning that I was in possession of prison keys,

Management promptly had me shifted up to Pāremoremo, Maximum-Security. And it was in an Interview room of that Prison that, within a few days of having arrived there, the interview with the Security Manager (SM) was taking place.

People may reasonably ask, why? Why not just hand the keys in as soon as I found them, and receive the praise that surely would have come by doing so?

23/05/2017

A desire for quick results had a lot to do with it. The rewards of my main life-goals are many years away. There are few rein-forcers along the way and I find myself losing sight of the prize... I want to get up in the morning knowing that the day will test me 100%, that it will bring some hard, hands-on tasks that not only have immediate results but which also enable me to be doing something DIFFERENT, something few others have done. Pushing the boundaries... seeing if I've really got what it takes... I've always been that way inclined. It's how I drove tractors all day, built advanced things, collected and repaired locks and keys, collected Landrovers... And, now, study, and train to excessive, intense levels - Ultra marathons, 50km charity runs around 170m concrete yards, 1000-burpee challenges, sets of 30+ pull-ups, high grades, a PhD... For sure, the challenge of something is an important factor in what I do. I look at my peers, the majority wandering around doing mundane shit, just 'lagging it.' Fuck that. Can't do it. I've tried. And, man, I've gotten better over the years - better at not being my true self. Nonetheless, I still get really down and start feeling hopeless when I try and just sit still, try to 'do the lag' in the traditional sense.

I tried explaining all this to the SM. And I explained how handing the keys in wasn't really an option – that, given my known interest in keys, Management's entrenched dislike of me, and what would surely be a disbelief that their staff would leave keys lying around, there was little chance my claim of having found them would be believed. More likely was that they'd think I was 'up to something.' The SM agreed that, for certain, I'd not have been believed. Given how rarely they see things from a prisoner's perspective, his acknowledgement of my opinion surprised me. It indicated that perhaps, deep down, he was acknowledging not only how suspicious the system was but also that I had been in a lose-lose situation. What was not surprising, however, was his lack of acceptance of my other rationalisations, that it was all pretty much down to boredom, and to a desire for adventure. Indeed, such was his narrow view that it seemed he was captive to his position. Like, just did not have the ability, whilst occupying that Managerial, Security-focused role, to be able to see my actions as anything other than some grand criminal scheme, as *deviancy*. Hoping to be able to reach him, his humanity, I went further. Became vulnerable...

24/05/2017

I reiterated my complete inability to do what I call 'sitting around' – just engaging in the day-in day-out things that constitute prison life and that most prisoners do: reading, going to the gym, talking, mind-numbing employment. I said how I can do all this and then still be bored. Like, I'll get up, train hard for an hour, doing 100 pull-ups and several hundred push-ups. Then I might go clean several cells, going hard for an hour per cell. Then I might study hard for several

hours, or read a hundred pages, then use the phone. Then go for a 2 or 3 hour run, and then at the end of it all still be restless and bored, wondering, now what? [I hoped, in discussing this, that the SM might feel a bit of my reality, of how soul-destroying the nothingness of prison life can be to an active mind].

I then discussed how my keen interest in locks and keys far predated prison, that it is a childhood thing. I mentioned how I was making keys and that at a young age, had a huge collection of keys that I kept in tins and, with the special ones, I had a big shadow board for them. Worried that he would think I was all bullshit, I then explained how I was once suspended from high school for 3 days for having (and using) a Master key to take various padlocks from around the school (I wanted these for my collection). It was easy for the school authorities to identify me as the culprit because it was well-known that I had a fascination with locks. I mean, I always used to cart a bunch of assorted keys around wherever I went. I'd fidget with and examine (sometimes polish) them during class, and on breaks and stuff. I had visited several locksmiths, and been given old blank-key catalogues. I'd also trawl through the public library after school, looking for books on keys. I'd then go through these, seeking to learn all I could about the keys in my collection. The latest additions to my collection would always be on the bunch I carried. I had a particular interest in 'Restricted' security keys, and in lever-lock keys. You know, the old-school looking safe and prison type ones. Indeed, it was always a goal of mine to obtain a REAL prison key for my collection; but I never did – until I came to jail [How ironic].

I explained this stuff to the SM in the best way I could. Although, I know that I'm explaining it better now. I write better than I talk. It's hard to explain things when you are being questioned, especially when you are feeling like such a piece of shit for letting everyone down and are trying hard not to sound like you are justifying things. People always think I'm just trying to justify or excuse my behaviour. It's really frustrating because, for me, I'm just describing exactly what's going on in my mind and how things work for me. If people cannot understand that or it's too weird for them, then that's their downfall. Just because they cannot understand, or don't like it, doesn't mean that I'm lying [or that I'm bad].

The Dan they saw...

The investigation into the incident lasted several weeks. During that time, I was 'kept on ice,' in 'A' Block. 'A' Block was considered Parry's progression Unit: from there, one's next move would be to a lower-security facility. In holding me there, Management were employing the age-old investigative tactic of giving a little hope. For example, I was told, by the SM, that the best thing would be to get me back down to the lower-security Units as soon as possible. In this, they hoped that I'd share more, open up about the grand scheme they believed I was caught executing. As we know, I did open up. But not in the sense they wanted. I talked not about some non-existent criminal scheme but about something much harder, much deeper: my life. It took courage, great courage, to take the risk of sharing my story of keys and locks with our Maximum-Security Prison's Security Manager. But I did it. And, as we know, he, they, did not hear me.

I was duly reclassified as maximum-Security and sent to ‘C Block.’

You know, to this day it amazes me: there they were, seeking to gather intelligence regarding a serious security threat, and there I was, the apparent threat, trying to bare my soul, explain what made me tick and why that ticking needn’t be seen as a bad, dangerous thing. And yet they couldn’t hear it/wouldn’t listen. Was it not a perfect opportunity to learn about me and, through building a meaningful relationship of recognition and understanding, to work to manage the risk that my knowledge presented? It was, and it is just that sort of approach, centred on engagement with, and fostering of, potential, that is sorely needed within our criminal justice system. I’m going to argue this, and explain how that caring response can be so powerful. To do that, however, we must first look to the various issues underpinning how the system responded to me. Indeed, how it tends to respond generally. Because, after all, it is those issues and responses which need to be problematised and deconstructed when developing different ones.

Thinking back to Chapter Two, the SOC thesis draws our attention to particular structures, processes, and the ways in which these function to produce policies and practices (behaviours) that harm. There are two overall ways through which this occurs. One is through an intense focus on risk, wherein people are viewed as threats to be contained. The other involves a fear of difference which, again, leads to a correctional focus on containing, rather than engaging with, human potential. These forces/approaches operate closely together, and they are very visible in the prison’s response to me and my key interest. Indeed, following my classification and relocation to Maximum-Security, life became very constrained. And it would become clear, largely through the various restrictions put on me throughout the remainder of my years

in the system, that it had come to view me not only in a narrow, totally risk-focused light, but also as unacceptably different.

I would end up spending a year in C Block. During that time, it was arguably the most dangerous Block in the prison. Every single week, there was an incident, several involving the most serious of violence. It was a severely stressful time, for all there. Mortality, my own, was confronted more than once. Adding to the chaos was that the prison was in a state of serious disintegration, both physically and, more importantly, culturally.³¹ Certainly, with a replacement facility soon to open, Paremoremo was experiencing its dying days. Some prisoners', knowing this, made it their life's purpose to make a legacy for themselves in what was New Zealand's most notorious prison; to make such a legacy in Parry involved, of course, committing an act of extreme violence, one that would be remembered long after the prison's closure. I wanted to leave the place so badly – the environment was so far removed from what I needed, and from where I was at with my rehabilitation and growth. To stay there too long was, I knew, to risk suffering irreversible trauma. However, what I wanted, and what I could have, were very different things: to be able to escape the torture of Parry, my Security Classification needed to lower. And, with Classification reviews only being twice-yearly, it felt as though I was staring down a long, black tunnel; all that faced me was, at the least, six months of nothingness, during which time I would need to absorb, without detectable reaction, a level of stress unknown to most.

Yes, one could argue I had brought all this down on myself. But, doesn't the system have a responsibility to care for the hurting souls in its prisons? In the midst of

³¹ See Luff (2018), and McCleod (2017), for further insights.

my poor decision I was more in need of care than ever. Instead of care, though, came control...

The six months was as tough as I had expected it'd be. Yet, despite the daily chaos and gang wars swirling around me, sometimes threatening to engulf, I managed to endure, to hold it together. So much so that, upon reaching the review of my security classification, I received really positive reports from the Block staff. My preliminary Classification review came back as 'Low Medium.' That rating is two levels below 'Maximum,' and so one might say I had significant reason to be optimistic. But I wasn't. Rather, I felt apprehension. You see, the 'Preliminary' stage of the classification is completed by the Block staff – prison officers who work in the cell-block and who get to know the people they're locking up. In my experience those staff, engaging with the humanity of their charges on a daily basis, tend not to operate in risk averse, self-protective, 'arse-covering' ways. In short, they seldom operate politically and so it came as no surprise to me that they saw the real me, and did not deem me a significant risk. Management, however, to whom the final decision regarding security classification rests, do operate politically. Disagreeing with the preliminary outcome, they utilised an aspect of the classification process known as a 'Manual Override.' At Management's discretion, my classification was overridden to 'High.' I was disappointed but remained hopeful because, at 'High,' I could still leave 'Maxi' and go down to the High-security Division of the prison.

Or, so I thought...

Unbeknownst to me, an 'Alert' had been placed on my file that essentially concreted me in Parry. Put there by the Department's top Chief of Security, it stated that I was NOT to be transferred out of Maximum-Security without the explicit consent

of his delegate at the prison. And thus it was that I was to spend at least another six months in Parry. The thought of that was almost incomprehensible. I felt desperate. Yet, that desperation could not be shown in any way whatsoever, or else I'd be assessed as deviant and dangerous. Within such a perception, any chance of my security classification lowering would be obliterated. I thus, like so many others around me, had to suffer quietly, endure the disrespect, and outright violation of my rights, without complaint. Part of the reason I was able to cope with that suffering is that I was developing an awareness, through engagement with the SOC thesis, of the forces producing my pain. Indeed, it was during that year I spent in C Block that I began this PhD: the journal entries above are amongst the first I wrote. And, as during my first stint in Parry, I sought to connect with stories of others who had done time in Maximum-security. I was looking for an ally, I think, or perhaps for a voice that would align with the scary thoughts and beliefs beginning to emerge in me. I wanted to find someone who had been assaulted by the same sort of conditions assaulting me. In Jack Henry Abbott's (1981) memoir, I found that person. Reading of his life of incarceration I came to understand that I was in the 'Belly of the Beast.' And that is just how it was, man. An insidious weight gradually crept over me during that second six months. I felt an overwhelming sense of being devoured by something bigger than me, something infinitely powerful. The Prison. It felt as though my brain was eating itself. Silently, with only the decades-old thoughts of long-gone convicts, like Abbott, to keep me company, despair reigned...

17/01/18

"I do not want to be in prison so long," wrote Abbott (1981), "that I come to gaze up at the sky and curse the story of my misery. I do not want ever to come to the upside-down conclusion that "no one is to blame" as the saying goes. Or that this state of affairs always has been and always will be in our world. Or that I turned the key on myself" (p. 195). How do I make sense of this? I struggle with every one of these issues/conditions. Presuming, for moment, that deep-seated musings and worry emanate from the brain rather than heart, it is almost as though Abbott sliced the top of my skull off, delved into that part of the brain that holds those things we dread – our greatest burdens – and spotted each of mine. Not only that, he identifies them as the very outcomes he wishes to avoid. Indeed, he writes about them as if their occurrence would, for him, mean utter failure, complete hopelessness. As if, were he to reach such a state of consciousness, he'd be little more than breathing meat. I may know what he fears as thinking those things makes me feel hopeless, as if I'm too far gone to recover. And, yeah, breathing becomes difficult in these circumstances.

It is so hard to read that from the place I am in, now. How was that degree of despair, that other place, possible? Yet, even as I think this, I am not so disconnected from the Beast's belly that I can't remember my then-self sitting there within it, asking, will freedom ever be possible?

I did finally leave Parry, in May 2018. And the prison closed, after exactly fifty years of operation, five months later. It was the end of an era. Yet it was not the end for

me; when I left Parry, the pain it had inflicted left with me, in me. And, in the years since, that pain has grown. Spawned inside the prison's now long-abandoned walls, a deep sense of injustice and sadness has developed within me regarding the utter needlessness of the time I was made to spend there. And, through that, a need to understand *how* such a harmful outcome could even happen. Because, ultimately, what good did locking me in Maximum-security achieve, for anyone? That, I have learnt, has been a powerful question to ask. Responding to it – largely through this research – has enabled me to come to understand the real reasoning behind the system's risk-based response. It is such a simple, even obvious, question – isn't it...?

Why, *how*, was I managed in ways that produced harm?

Hmmm...

Simple, obvious and *legitimate* as the question may be, it is almost impossible to ask. And thus, getting to this point has been a tenuous, fraught and tiring process. I'm thinking, here, of the stuff discussed in presenting my methodology,³² of the power relations that govern interaction between the kept and their keepers. For a prisoner to question the actions that harmed them – to question the conditions of their confinement – involves the kept challenging the legitimacy of their keeper's actions. Well, that's how the keepers see it anyhow (ask me how I know.). Holding the reins of power, and needing to be seen as in control, they feel it is imperative to minimise any questioning or criticism of their practices. It has only been through my research that I have come to recognise, and become able to speak back to, this most complex milieu. By undertaking doctoral research, I was able to cultivate a patch of ground beneath my feet wherein I am able to utter the otherwise unutterable (Tamanui, 2012) – to question the system. Much as it wanted to, the system could not be seen trying to silence me. The reason it could not, you see, is that by engaging in doctoral research, I was participating in an activity highly esteemed in the world beyond prison walls. In that, I was doing something deeply rehabilitative, something that the system purports to actively pursue. I was working to reduce my risk and the system would need to be seen working alongside me. Of course, there was plenty it could do behind the scenes and, as I'll mention later, did do, to try and suffocate my study. But it didn't succeed, and here I am, free (mostly) to respond, non-violently, to its violent responses to me.

³² See Chapter Two, in particular.

It has been through the SOC thesis that it has become possible to find a way into unpacking/understanding the system's response to me. To find the how within that quagmire, the thesis, and the many voices speaking with and through it (e.g., Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009; Brown, 2013; Coombes & Te Hiwi, 2007; Johnson, 2013), have encouraged me to ask a most fundamental, revealing of questions: who, and what, is being served by a particular way of doing? The question provides something of a principle with which to analyse/explore my experience. Importantly, asking it reminds us that the overarching goal of the correctional system is (in its own words) to manage those in its care in ways that contribute to community safety. Allowing that notion to hang in the air, things immediately become problematic and an inescapable thought comes to mind: in responding to me and my key interest in ways that produced so much harm for me, the system was clearly not demonstrating care for me, or pursuing its goal of rehabilitation. How then, was it operating?

Ahhh, another question...

If it wasn't working to foster growth and healing in me, what was it doing? The thesis draws our attention to the power relationships, cultural, legal and political, that inform correctional practice. It argues that those issues tend to produce an approach wherein any ethics of caring, or focus on rehabilitation, becomes superseded by not only a fear of risk but, from that, a perceived need to control. We bear witness to this in the prison's management of me. In condemning me and locking me away in its most dangerous, restrictive prison, the system was able to be seen RESPONDING. I remember asking a Manager, at the time, why they were going to such lengths to contain me when none of it would in any way reduce the locksmithing skills I held, or what I could do with them. *"It's political, Luff. It's about perception. You've made us look stupid, and embarrassed us."* (Confidential source, personal communication, July 17,

2018). And that is exactly what I had done. I didn't really appreciate the extent of that at the time, neither the deep degree to which public perception matters to the Institution or, more importantly, the reasons why. The Prison felt that, in the eyes of wider society, it had been shown to be failing in its role of controlling the threat, of keeping the prisoner kept (silent, invisible, hidden). Accordingly, by reacting to me with the full weight of its control apparatus, it was able to be seen, on paper at least, as striving to keep the community safe. And, in that, it achieved its overarching goal of minimising the criticism it might face, the political fallout. The Correctional Department, as an organisation, and individual managers within it, were able to respond to all criticism by giving the assurance that, 'We locked him up, we contained the threat.' Whether they actually had reduced the risk, long-term, becomes a secondary concern. What matters, within the pressures of the society of captives, is that punitive, retributive action is taken (Arrigo, 2013; Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009). Informed by meta-narratives that punishment works, and that containment works, society demands action, and the prison must provide it (Arrigo, 2013). Think of all the government inquiries that are called for every time the Corrections Department is perceived to have 'gotten it wrong.'³³ Media, quick to capitalise upon Governmental mistakes, are able to produce amongst the public imagination perceptions of a criminal class out of control, and of a danger that far exceeds the reality. This is achieved through a plethora of 'infotainment' (Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009) – reality crime shows, documentaries, and dramatised news reporting of crime. Within the hypervigilance that is produced the public –

³³ There have been numerous high-profile inquiries, all actioned amidst scathing public criticism of the Prison, and that have led to wide-ranging policy reviews. Recent ones include those relating to reoffending (Smith, 2016), to escape (Priestley & Murdoch, 2015), and to rioting (Adair, 2022).

understandably – turn to those in power to address the apparent issue, to restore and maintain order. And, of course, those in power turn to the prison to do that work. The prison, then, serves, both symbolically and practically, as the rock upon which society's safety from the criminalised 'other' depends. And thus, when the prison is perceived to have failed, dis-ease, and fear, reign. It is a perception that, quite simply, cannot be allowed to exist. Socially, economically, politically, it is unpalatable, untenable.

It is in this context that my security classification was overridden. At the time it happened, I didn't properly see the context; my pain wouldn't allow such reflexivity. Instead, lying in my cell, amidst the conditions and finality of having been classified as a person requiring Maximum-Security confinement, I struggled with thoughts that I was being singled out, discriminated against, and persecuted by vindictive Managers. I mean, fuck, it wasn't hard to think along those lines, given their complete refusal to hear, or see, me. Thankfully, I'm no longer prisoner to the feelings the harmful treatment of me produces. And that's not because the system has in some way drastically changed how it views me. Rather, it is because *I* have changed, moved, grown. I have clawed, and fought, my way into a place of understanding. Indeed, and as detailed in the earlier discussion of my methodology, through this research it has become possible to develop ethical relationships with those who've harmed me. From that, I can now see the multiple layers of captivity that were producing my experiences. And in that seeing, it is impossible not to feel for the prison staff involved. They, too, were being subjected to a form of violence, and were captives. Indeed, what those people thought, and felt, within their uniform-clad bodies, was silenced by an overwhelming pressure, a requirement, to act in accordance with their uniforms. Moving as part of a machine to feed the hypervigilant societal expectation that action be taken, they thus had little choice but to depart from rehabilitative policy and classify

me as Maximum-Security. And, as we saw, even once that classification lowered, the forces of the society of captives ensured I stayed confined by a level of security far exceeding what was legally, and morally, appropriate.

This aspect of my experience strongly illustrates the degree to which it is not only the kept, but also their keepers, who are harmed by correctional processes. And it behoves me, in doing justice to both SOC theory and to those aforementioned ethical relationships, to attend to that harm. Importantly, in doing so I seek not to speak for others, or to somehow claim to know their experience. Rather, the aim is to draw attention to the structures within which correctional staff are forced to operate, and the ways in which those structures impinge on their agency. In much the same way as prisoners, prison staff also go unheard. I have found this to be particularly so for front-line officers. Rarely are they able to articulate their pain or voice any opinion that departs from the dominant Government narrative. There have been times, over the years, where I've felt bewildered at the degree to which staff would action decisions they didn't agree with. Like with my security classification – some disagreed with Management's decision, but they would *not* voice their concerns. Seeing the exasperation on their faces, and feeling my own, I questioned their silence. *"I'm just a prisoner,"* I exclaimed. *"But you guys are out in the real world. You carry the keys. You have the power to say something."* *"Why not challenge things?"* I asked. *"Send an email, ask why?"* I was told that it is not wise to ask such questions. A shared anxiety, amongst the various staff I spoke to, was fear of being seen as advocating for a prisoner, especially one considered a reputational risk. Having lived within the 'us and them' world of prison so long, I should have recognised this. Any staff member who fights for a prisoner's rights, even if that does just mean working to ensure their legal entitlements are upheld, risks becoming known as a 'crim-lover.' Short of being

labelled as outright corrupt, becoming known as such is about as bad as it can get for a prison officer. A 'crim-lover' is perceived as being on the wrong side of the fence. Their loyalty is questioned – I've seen it happen. A suspicion descends, wherein the person will be talked about, surveilled. They'll feel eyes on them when they arrive at work, will feel the attitudes when passed over for much-deserved promotions... And, of most concern, they'll see it when shit goes down and they're amongst the first sent out the door, into the fray. Certainly, the officer who is perceived as going against the grain will become an outcast, a pariah. And that is something one cannot afford to be when working in a prison. It is both dangerous and, if (more like, when) the prisoners detect such a status, some will move in, seeking to exploit it, to bring the ostracised officer over to their side for real. It happens. I've witnessed it. Running with the frustration that our shared oppression was rendering us captive to, I pressed further, suggesting that the staff could take their concerns beyond prison walls, to the media. It was a somewhat naïve suggestion. I see that, now. But at the time, incredulous at the apparent willingness of staff to endure such conditions, it seemed logical to me. I should note that the various conversations about all this stuff took place in secrecy, a snippet here and there when down in the laundry or Yard. None of the officers expressing these views dared do so in earshot of their colleagues. Indeed, the staff members were taking a risk in even confiding those views to me. It was only through our shared pain, and in awareness of my critical research, that they did so. Funny, isn't it, the collaboration and ethical relationships that can emerge, to bring together opposing sides of a very wide chasm, out of the conditions produced by a dysfunctional system. Within those hushed moments, where the vast cultural divide separating us receded, it was explained to me that staff employment contracts forbid talking to media. It was also made clear to me that, even if there weren't the legal barriers, to speak out would only make things worse.

For example, being a crim-lover is one thing, but to be seen as both that and a nark... Unsustainable. To be seen complaining would be to be perceived as soft and, worse, as traitorous: prisons are very tight-knit communities. There tends to be a belief that, whatever happens, staff stand together and close ranks in dealings with 'the outside.' The irony here is that, in functioning within this code of silence, both correctional staff and prisoners operate along very similar lines.

In looking at the pressured conditions staff, and thus prisoners, have to endure, it is important to consider the prison's symbolic role. The system places such emphasis on it that cultural structures and practices have developed wherein any criticism of the institution leaves correctional staff very vulnerable and, in so doing, produces extensive risk-aversity. And that aversion, in turn, is leading to conservatism and to decisions that harm.

It has already been discussed that the prison works largely in service of cultural, political and economic objectives. Politicians use it as a tangible, practical way of demonstrating to the public that they're working in its interest. And, thus, the public are able to use it as a means of reassurance. A critical aspect to this structure, of course, is that the prison's integrity must be maintained. Within these conditions, what happens, then, when the institution does come under scrutiny? People get hurt, is what. In service of the cultural, economic, political imperative, staff become disposable. Individual staff can come and go, can be replaced. The prison, however, as that symbol and guarantor of safety, cannot. It MUST stand. And so, when the prison institution comes under criticism, part of the response is that efforts are made to attribute blame to individual people within it. In this sense we can see how, within the society of captives, structures and institutions assume far greater importance than people.

One only need look to what happens when correctional staff are deemed to have erred, to appreciate the positions they occupy, and the pressures they operate under. Within the neoliberal structure that dominates Western society, individual responsibility is emphasised (Langan, 2010; Rose, 2000). When the aforementioned Governmental inquiries take place, an overarching objective is to establish culpability such that those responsible can be held to account and the institution absolved. Certainly, staff will readily be sacrificed to protect the Prison's reputation. When it happened around me, it would usually be fairly obvious. For example, staff are generally situated in particular roles for fixed periods, a year or so. When one would suddenly disappear, you'd know. Despite my suspicions, I'd sometimes ask what had happened. Irrespective of the real reason – whether it be that they were being 'Too soft' on prisoners, or had 'Challenged Management,' the response would always be along the lines of, 'They stepped out of line.' And, of course, the response I got would be a hushed one, made by a person not wanting to be in any way connected to their colleague's demise.

For the person working in a prison, then, to be seen as not working in accordance with the dominant narratives and emphasis on risk, to *risk* not being seen working to control the threat, would be to risk becoming the scapegoat (Szmukler & Rose, 2013). Imagine the impact for people, being aware of this... With families to feed, social positions to protect, the awareness that any decision 'different' from the dominant tune could attract scrutiny would be scary. I've seen what that knowing does. It leads to paranoia, fear and then, from that, to self-surveillance. Wanting to minimise risk of attracting dissatisfaction, staff watch/monitor themselves in the ways they feel their superiors would. And, in this, they play a role in their own captivity (Arrigo, 2013; Szmukler & Rose, 2013). Undoubtedly, to minimise the risk of personally harmful

outcomes, people comply. Understandably, they become docile (Arrigo, 2013). And an outcome of that fear and docility is intensely conservative cultures and practices (Arrigo, 2013; Langan, 2010; Szmukler and Rose, 2013) – the sorts of practices that kept me locked in a dungeon, that saw me controlled rather than cared for.

We see, here, again, the society of captives in action, and the way in which fear of reprimand can weigh heavily on individual actors throughout the system. Remember the National Security Chief, and his directive regarding my security classification? That's how far the captivity surrounding correctional processes runs, right up into the upper echelons of power. Because, for sure, as with the Managers and front-line prison officers to whom his directives were sent, there are people above the Security Chief who were depending upon him to do his part. The Chief is but one example – the risk-averse culture pervades the system. It reaches into every nook and cranny, infecting the entire criminal justice process, from imprisonment to release and reintegration (Opie, 2012; Petersilia, 2003). Within this milieu, the focus of decision-making regarding prisoner management and rehabilitation becomes not about what is best regarding rehabilitation (and thus community safety) but about what is best regarding reputational management. Indeed, numerous scholars (i.e., Arrigo, 2013; Langan, 2010; Szmukler & Rose, 2013) have noted the ways in which a sense of accountability, and concern regarding reputation, often lead to conservative, and punitive, decision-making.

My own experience, as we've seen, demonstrates this. Thinking through the example of me and the keys, had community safety been the overarching goal/principle guiding its response, the system would have prioritised my rehabilitation and worked with me. Instead, bound within the complex socio-political apparatus being discussed, it pursued reductivity and, in so doing, did pretty much everything it could to damage me. Through a year of existence within our nation's most intensely criminalised,

dangerous environment, the oppressive practices it followed risked *un*-rehabilitating me.

The other fundamental thread to why the system responded (and tends to respond) in these risk averse, reductive ways relates to perception of difference. We have already considered the ways in which media representation, and commodification, of crime produces a hypervigilant fear of the criminal class. What it also does is generate a dominant stereotype of the ‘criminal.’ From these has developed an entrenched belief that a criminal class exists that, in order to be safe from, must be crushed and rendered docile. An outcome of this is that any behaviour from a ‘criminal’ that is not seen as totally compliant is viewed as deviant and, more importantly, as a threat. It is in this way that difference has become indicative of/synonymous with dangerousness. Combined with this is a strong expectation, prevalent within western, neoliberal cultures, that people should think and behave in ways commensurate with the class position they’re held to be in. Any transgression of those locations is eschewed as it brings into question the very fabric, the norms and values, upon which society is based.

These cultural and linguistic forces contribute, significantly, to the problematic and harmful custodial practices being discussed. Operating within, and captive to, those structures of prisonisation, it becomes very difficult, and even impossible, for those within the system to see prisoners as anything other than inherently deviant. Indeed, any difference from mainstream stereotypical norms must be pathologised and reacted to as deviant, as criminal. It is in this sense in which Arrigo (2013) writes that, within the society of captives, difference is demonised. The system becomes forced to respond to, and deal with people who commit crime, in accordance with the demonising perceptions produced, commodified and normalised within mainstream media.

Importantly, bombarded by those powerful narratives, a tendency has developed for people to think less independently or critically about these issues but, rather, to think through the dominant lens forced upon them (Arrigo, 2013). In this, context, and humanity, are lost. Important issues such as poverty, culture, and unique personal differences, all of which work together to produce crime and other seemingly ‘deviant, ‘dangerous’ behaviour, are not seen or considered. In the absence of this critical evaluation, instances of difference and nonconformity, such as me and the keys, are unable to be seen as anything other than criminal deviance. Within that, the person becomes invisible, and any chance of helping them impossible.

A further significant reason for the demonisation of difference concerns power relationships. Within our society, where Western class-based values and norms dominate, power is distributed in ways that ensure the maintenance of that dominance (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020; García-López et al., 2019; Roper, 2024). Anything – anyone – that operates to the contrary must therefore, in order to preserve the status quo, be controlled and made to comply (Braidotti, 2007; Fredericks, 2013; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Tsianos et al., 2012). This is why docility is so important within the society of captives, for when there is docility, or total compliance, there is no threat. When I was found to possess knowledge held to belong only in the possession of the state’s security apparatus, I was found to be unacceptably different. There were several grounds upon which my difference was especially problematic to the Prison. For one, I was unacceptable culturally and symbolically because what I knew contradicted notions of what a criminal is meant to be. Secondly, and more importantly, my locksmithing knowledge was viewed, by the system, as a challenge politically, to its grip on power and ability to control.

Certainly, the system's attitude toward that knowledge extended well beyond practical security issues. For them, I was crossing uncrossable lines in terms of both social class, and politically. In doing so, I was challenging, quite unwittingly, their power base and sense of legitimacy. To them, I was/am a criminal and thus was/am not supposed to know anything about things that only Government people, 'good people,' are meant to be knowers of. I didn't need to be utilising the knowledge (or even be in a position to be able to use it) to be a problem to them; I just had to possess it. Remember that prison officer, the one back in Parry, who told me that it's all about how things look? Having now traversed the socio-political structure within which the Prison resides, and its accountability to both wider society and its political masters, we can see he was right. And so, for those in positions of control, and whose positions need to be perceived as invulnerable, I was considered an impossibility. Indeed, my existence – a criminal who knew as much about their locks as they did – made the Masters, in a society of captives where everyone is watching, vulnerable. This placed me in a very precarious, and impossible, position because I could not unlearn or un-know a set of skills that, as we've discussed, have been developing since my childhood. Pondering all this takes me back to my journal notes, the ones wherein I wrote of my efforts to tell the authorities of my childhood passion. As we know, in no way did my pleas decrease their intense suspicion, discomfort, or dislike. Because, of course, that was impossible: there was no room for the context, or my humanity, to be seen. To see would have required the Beast to perceive me as something other than danger, and to step out of the validating comfort of the 'us and them' subject position it resides in, feeds on and benefits from, by keeping the prisoner firmly confined as other, as 'less than.'

Shaking my head at my naivety...

I was so desperate for them to just see me...

But I understand, now...

The system had to de-legitimise me because, through doing so, it was able to legitimise itself. In the end, then, both my keepers, and I, were left in impossible positions: I had to keep being me within their prison and they, captive to the political, risk-averse structure of that Prison, had to do all they could to try stop me from knowing – from being. And it is in this contradictory, damaging and dysfunctional chaos that the ‘totalising madness’ of which Arrigo (2013) speaks, was produced.

Indicative of the extent to which these forces of the society of captives reach, and work, the system’s oppressive response to me did not end when I left Parry. Rather, from the time of the keys onward, it affected everything I did. This became especially obvious with regard to my academic endeavours. Indeed, the prison’s response to this Doctorate was almost as severe as with the keys. In undertaking such research, I was developing knowledge that, as with the locksmithing skills, was perceived to be beyond the scope of what a prisoner should possess. In short, I was moving into a legitimate, respected area of society, of the knowledge economy that informs it, that is supposed to be off limits to the criminal. The system felt concern in several ways. For one, in that I was breaching those cultural boundaries and norms. And, secondly, in that, by virtue of developing knowledge, I was attaining a level of social legitimacy and recognition, and thus power, that those locked in prisons are not meant to have. Perhaps of most concern to them though is that, through my academic movement, it was becoming possible for me to be seen, and maybe even heard. And that, arguably more than the locksmithing knowledge even, rendered me a threat.

I mentioned, earlier, that although needing to be seen supporting rehabilitative activities such as my PhD, the system did much, behind the scenes, to try and suppress

it. And indeed it did. Where the Prison could be direct and obvious in its approach to crushing my lock knowledge, such a stance was not possible with my study. This time, it needed to be more cautious lest it be seen denying a prisoner their rights to rehabilitation. In a sense then, it needed to operate in the deviant ways it often accuses prisoners of, doing bad whilst appearing to be doing good. And that's just what it did. By drawing on the immense power of bureaucracy, the prison apparatus was able to hinder my study amidst a narrative that it was to *my* own benefit. The primary tactic taken was to deny me the resources needed to be able to study: things like computer and phone access, and visits to the local university campus. Working deviously to protect its reputation, the system's denials were always ensconced in cloaks of legitimacy. In repeatedly declining applications for day visits to the university, for example, various Managers stated that I 'wasn't ready' for the rigours of community interaction. Trying to negotiate and make a compromise that would still see progress toward my study and reintegration plan, we narrowed the scale of our applications. Instead of asking to go to the University, we applied for a one-hour visit to a department store to buy the clothes I would need for later visits to the university. The Prison again declined, saying the Rehabilitation staff needed to provide evidence of how such a community outing would aid my reintegration into the community. Denying me the ability to purchase the civilian clothes necessary to participate in civilian life was ridiculous, and the excuses given so thinly veiled that most could see the situation for what it was.

One of the most harmful outcomes of this dysfunction was that the staff preparing and submitting the applications gradually became very disillusioned at the contrast between the rehabilitative rhetoric their employer pedalled, and actual practice. The Management 'Advisory Panels,' at which applications for things like reintegration

would be considered, were always held on Thursday afternoons. It would be an agonising time, waiting for the day, and then the hour, to arrive. Generally, following the meeting, my Case Manager would come down and advise me of the outcome. I can still recall the numerous times, going into an interview room and, as I sat, searching the staff member's face for any signs of the outcome. Then would come the crushing news, as crushing for the staff member delivering it, as for me. Those applications took weeks to prepare, involving liaison with other organisations and significant investment. Certainly, for such an application to even stand a chance at the Advisory Panel, it would need to address every conceivable risk – and then some. To then have all that work, and hope, dashed with the stroke of a pen... Sometimes, the system would become so chaotic that the submitted applications would not even reach a Manager's desk. I can remember...

21/01/2021

"The application hasn't been heard," he said as I sat down. That wasn't what I expected. It was shit news, but not as bad as a decline. Well, depending on the reasons for it not having been heard. "Eh, why not?" I asked, hoping there had not been some kind of directive that I can't do community outings. That has happened before and, when you have been through such a painful, back-and-forth process with the reintegration stuff, it is amazing the paranoid and cynical scenarios the brain can come up with in the seconds it takes before the 'actual' reason is given. "None of my applications were heard," the staff member replied. "Apparently," he continued, "the Admin officer is away and so none of my applications were forwarded to the Panel members." My Case Manager looked

utterly dejected. It was clear he had not long left the Advisory Panel meeting and was feeling extremely frustrated by the fuck-up. He was hurting, too. "I think I'll cry on the way home," he said in frustration. He explained how much work had gone into getting the five community outing applications ready, and that they were all organised to occur at specific times, in collaboration with other organisations (such as visits to accommodation providers). Seemingly at a loss, my Case Manager slumped in his chair, looking exhausted.

This is what Corrections does to those who advocate for rehabilitation and reintegration – it burns its staff out with its risk-averse inefficiency. It is like an overheating, lumbering engine, spewing steam and oil everywhere. It rattles so loudly you think it will blow, but it never quite does. What it does do, though, is chew people up, prisoners and staff alike. Unless you are one of the cynical, risk-averse containment-focused staff, life is very hard in Corrections.

Not long after I got to the interview room, an officer popped his head in the door and asked how things went – whether we are going to visit the University. My Case Manager told him what had happened. I shook my head and added how it is yet another example of how the Hokai Rangi ³⁴stuff is all nonsense.

³⁴ Hōkai Rangi is the Department's strategic rehabilitation plan, outlining a range of approaches and practices it will utilise, between 2019-2024, in pursuit of rehabilitation and reintegration. Upon its launch, in 2019, the plan was notable in that it emphasises a prisoner-centric approach, and advocates for engagement with community-based organisations.

https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/strategic_reports/corrections_strategic_plans/hokai_rangi

"Oh, it's bullshit," the officer replied. "It never ceases to amaze me what goes on in here."

Evidently, what happened is that the various Panel members knew the Admin officer was away, yet no-one informed the Case Managers. As such, it was not until mine got into the meeting that he discovered that, in fact, his applications were still sitting in the Admin's email inbox.

What a fuck-up. As I wrote the part about staff not informing him of the Admin's absence, I wondered if perhaps it was deliberate – an attempt to delay the applications. Yes, I fully get that such reasoning sounds rather paranoid. But explanations such as that enter the mind because what else could possibly explain such a monumental oversight? And these incidents of incompetence are by no means one-offs. That is a symptom of Corrections inefficiency and nonsensical, totally irrational and illogical, counter-policy, counter rehabilitation/reintegration movement: that movement is so dysfunctional that the mind thinks, 'Surely these people know they are being wildly inefficient and are acting in such ways deliberately, with calculation, in pursuit of some hidden agenda (such as delaying the applications).' Certainly, the system's illogical dysfunction pushes the logical, hitherto healthy minds of those it impacts into very suspicious places in efforts to try and make sense of that system's dysfunction.

It was sad, watching these front-line staff, long dedicated to helping prisoners grow, slowly lose their belief in the rehabilitative aspect of their roles. I came to learn

that a fire, no matter how strong, can only have so much water poured on it before it goes out.

Even before the key incident, the system was wary of the difference that my study presented. Recall, back in Chapter Two, I shared a story of how the system worked to try and extinguish my study. I discussed how the concern regarding it reached such a point that, for a period, I was forbidden from engaging in my PhD. In this instance, the system could get away with it as it was able to manipulate policy in ways that made its punitive actions appear to be in my best interests. Even now, several years later, the memories of that time still feel very heavy. Their punitive decision produced so much angst, so much pain, in me. Having little choice but to live with it and find a way through, I told myself that, ultimately, the situation was not personal. It was the machine doing what it must do and, indeed, had done, to many before me. I thought of the numerous accounts I'd read from overseas (i.e., James, 2003; Santos, 2006, 2012; Woodfox, 2019), of those in prison having their academic aspirations suffocated. And I thought of a friend who, fifteen years before me, attempted a PhD whilst walking the very same corridors I have. He, too, encountered numerous barriers, including the culturalised perspectives of some Managers, that prisoners just shouldn't be doing higher education (Wood, 2019). So, yes, I was not the only one. And I wouldn't be the last either.

Or, could I be...?

I could be...

Couldn't I?

Potentials for freedom from captivity...

Hmmm, I need you here Bruce... I can hear the thesis, feel it. I know where it, my research, wants me to go. Needs me to go as, after all, it's where I've been headed since we started this journey. A way out of the madness... What was it that you, Bruce, once said to me, and that I opened this research with? Ah, yes...

Overcoming the harm of this social dis-ease requires a journey through captivity's madness. (Arrigo, 2013, p. 684)

Well, I've done that, heeded that call. All that remains now is to, finally, say what I wished they'd done. Because, for sure, I've long wanted to talk of a way out. Crawling through the decades of captivity and madness we've just traversed, I used to spend many an hour imagining... The thesis presented, so clearly and strongly, an argument for what needs to happen in order for a move away from the sorts of practices and conditions I was enduring. Indeed, it is largely the thesis' imaginings that awakened mine... Lying in the belly of the beast, dreaming of the good that could have come, the peace and growth, if only they'd work with, rather than against, me... Now that I'm here, to a degree free and able to utter those imaginings out loud, now that I've bought us out the other side of that journey through captivity's madness, I dunno... I feel wary. Now that I'm living out in the world, I'm amongst the forces, political, economic, social and cultural, that are rendering the prison and *all* of its inhabitants' captive. And those forces, as close to them as I now am, are strong. They are perhaps even stronger, in a sense, than the harsh correctional practices they produce. I mean, something I've really noticed, since being home, is that the dominant narrative out here, about prisons and

what is happening in them, is sooo far removed from what I know to be happening. It's scary. And, amidst it all, having just relived my prison experience whilst now experiencing the wider structure that produced it, contemplation of another way feels incredibly difficult. In this, it feels like I've moved from one suffocating world to another, one prison to another... And, indeed, let's not kid ourselves: in being released from prison, one is merely moving from one area of the society of captives to another...

I have to say, I had not anticipated, during those imprisoned years of feeling impassioned about advocating for change, that I'd feel this way once released. I do, though, and part of me feels a strong inclination to do what many ex-convicts do – hide under a rock, stay out of sight, don't try being where I'm not wanted. For sure, I want to just return to the shed, return to that story of making the key for the Robbie lock.

It's safe there.

I know, though, that is the society of captives at work against me, trying to push me into a hole of isolation, disconnection and, were I to tread in the steps of so many others before me, recidivism. And so I must continue to fight, both for myself and for this thesis. Indeed, I have an obligation to take you into my imaginings for, in them, is an example of a way out...

In the wake of the key incident I was, as we know, subjected to a risk-based, security-focused response. However, there was also another response. It began as a quiet one, murmured in desolate corridors. It could never be actioned within the conditions we were all living in, but the idea of it was there. And it is an indication of potential, of a different way of doing. During my time in Parry, a senior officer and veteran of that old prison, would come to 'C' Block, every few weeks, for a chat. BA, as he was affectionately known amongst the other long-serving staff, had been

transferred down to the low-security units a few years earlier. In his mid-seventies by then, BA had well and truly earned the right to be in semi-retirement, working down in the ‘chilled’ (comparatively speaking) units. Still, understanding the harshness of life in Parry, he used to go up and visit a few of the prisoners there, during his lunch breaks. I was one of those very fortunate people. He’d appear at the gate, unannounced, and say, “*I’m here for a welfare check.*” If I was in the presence of other prisoners, I’d try to feign disinterest. But, inside, my heart would lurch, happy at the chance for some time with someone I could fully be myself with, who understood me.

Most of our conversations took place downstairs, in the basement laundry room. It was fairly quiet down there and, most importantly, free of the prying ears of other staff. We talked, at length, of course, about the key issue. “*They’re pillorying you,*” BA said. “*What they should be doing is using you.*” (BA, personal communication, June 27, 2017). What BA was saying was that the prison should embrace my identity and skills, rather than feel threatened. He talked of a situation wherein they, even at executive level, could engage with me on an advisory basis. I was taken aback to hear a staff member, so experienced and highly respected within the system, broach such an idea. But, and as he explained, it made sense given what I knew. Who else would be better positioned, he mused, to advise on the security of their systems, than someone who not only understands locks but has long been experiencing those of the system first-hand.

The most powerful aspect to BA’s approach is that he’d listen. He saw me, recognised I wasn’t a threat. And that, in and of itself, contributed to significant movement within me. He did not even need to be able to do anything to change my material surroundings or the conditions within which others were managing me. Just by letting me be me, talk about locks and keys, share my inner thoughts, a comfort and

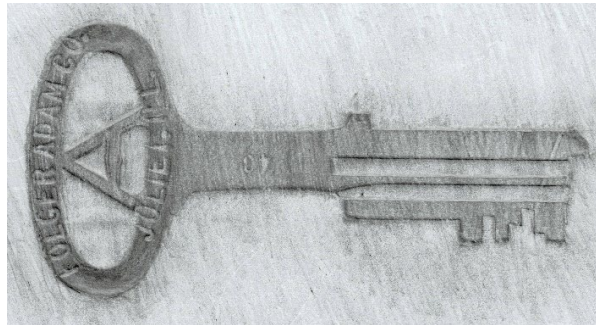
gratitude toward him grew in my heart. It is that sort of engagement and connection that reduced the likelihood of my thinking in ways that might be constituted as risk. In seeing me, in engaging with me not as risk but as potential, as me, BA formed a relationship with me. When we compare that to the sort of adversarial, ‘us and them’ interactions that characterise risk-averse, control-focused responses, the power and benefit of BA’s approach becomes clear. Where a control response will prompt stress, resistance and violence, a response of seeing, listening and caring can lead to affection, trust, gratitude and, from these, to a sense of not wanting to let down that person who is helping you. That is certainly how I grew to feel toward BA. And it wasn’t just BA who saw me and engaged with my humanity. As time went on, the murmurings around what I could offer the system became louder. Indeed, emboldened by BA’s ideas, when I was eventually moved back down to the lower-security units, I began talking with other staff about it. The conversations and movements that developed were, in their recognition of potential and thus departure from the usual correctional response, amazing.

The most significant of these is, without doubt, the conversations had with one of the prison’s locksmiths. Yes, you heard me right – I, *that guy*, entered into a lengthy, ongoing dialogue with a person responsible for maintaining the Beast’s locks and keys. That we could even talk, connect across such a vast political and epistemological divide strongly illustrates what can be when things are done differently. I’ll call the locksmith Ranger. I met Ranger many years before the key incident, during my first stint up in Parry. Walking the landing (cell corridor) one day, bored beyond comprehension, I heard a loud hammering noise. It was coming from the top guardroom of ‘A’ Block and, within the close confines of the concrete cell block, was deafening. Going to the grill gate at the end of the landing, I looked through the bars into the Guardroom and

saw a tradesman in there. He was holding what I now know to be a ‘No. 4’ key. It was laid flat on the steel windowsill and he was pounding it with a hammer.

Figure 5

A key I Shouldn't Have Been Able to see...



When the hammering stopped, I called out, asking what he was doing. “*Straightening the key,*” he said. “*Won't that wreck it?*” I asked. “*Oh, no. They're pretty rugged,*” he commented in true, she'll-be-right Kiwi fashion. I could immediately tell, in his demeanour and openness, that the guy was non-judgemental, and a good sort. In the nine years since then, right up to my release, we'd bump into each other from time to time. He'd always make time to stop, even for just a minute, to say hello. Gradually, he became aware of my interest in locks and, following the key incident, very aware. Unlike his masters, he never took it personally. Conversely, he expressed understanding for my situation. Because of that, the usual suspicion and caution I exercised when around most correctional staff evaporated when talking with Ranger. So much so that I shared, with him, BA's views. He and BA knew each other well. Ranger wholeheartedly agreed with his old colleague's opinion, that I would be an asset to the system. As if that wasn't enough, Ranger told me that, were it up to him,

he'd not hesitate to put me to work, repairing the prison's locks. He also acknowledged, however, that they'd never allow it because they'd worry about being criticised for it.

Being seen for real...

04/03/2021

After ten minutes or so Ranger got up, ready to come out of the Guardroom and do his maintenance checks. When he went to the key cabinet with Jay, to withdraw a set of Unit keys, I said to Moses, "Do you reckon it would be all good to walk around with him and keep talking, or nah?" He shook his head and said, "Nah. It might look bad for you." I knew it might, and I respect Moses's opinion. But such is the good feeling I get from interacting with Ranger that I decided, 'Fuck it, fuck how it looks. If he's cool with it, I'm going to follow him around and keep chatting.' He was okay with it, so that's what I did. Who knows when he'll be back in here again? I felt I had to make the most of the opportunity. We talked about all sorts. Contractors always have to be escorted by an officer when among prisoners. Dave, the PCO, was the one who came out with Ranger. That pleased me as I knew he wouldn't mind us talking. The locksmith started at cell 60 and, as he worked through the first few cells I commented to Dave, "You know what would be mean, bro, is if I was allowed to be Ranger's lackey." Dave looked at me, smiled knowingly and said, "I reckon a lot of people would support you, too." That buzzed me out. Then, in the midst of unlocking and relocking a padlock to check it, Ranger interjected with, "I'd have you with me in a heartbeat. I've already told you that." He said it with total sincerity. It pumped me up and I replied, as if I

was actually in an interview for a job as his assistant, "You know what? It would be about as less of a security risk as you could get because I would never do the locks a disservice. And I value security. It needs to be treated with integrity." Having examined a few more padlocks, Ranger replied, "Your work would all be checked, anyway." This moment, in the twenty minutes or so we were out in the Unit talking, was, by far, the most powerful.

What stands out to me is that we were talking about it not in a hypothetical sense but in a manner wherein it is actually entirely feasible. In fact, the realness of it was almost scary. The reason for this entry, and for the full account of my conversation with a contractor rests in what that interaction did, and does, for me. Indeed, the interaction with Ranger is an illustration of me being seen for real, and what being seen for real does for me: the possibilities that emerge...

How do I explain it? Not for a moment, whilst with Ranger, did I feel like a prisoner. I didn't feel judged or suspected. Even when we were talking about the media, I could sense him being courteous and empathetic. At one point, for example, he said how important it is that I stay out of the news. "You know how they are. If the paper gets wind of something it'll be, like, 'Convicted...'" He did not say the 'murderer/killer' part. I appreciated that. It told me he knows that is not who I want to be, and that it isn't who he sees. I felt seen and respected. I have written, before, of how he does not see my interests in locks and keys as a threat. That was evident, again, today. I think that is the crux of it: I did not feel at all like a prisoner: my crimes and history didn't matter to him. I was not seen or

treated as a threat that needs to be contained. There was no risk-aversity from Ranger. Not a drop. It felt beautiful and made my heart glow.³⁵ I was pumped for several hours afterward.

The above interactions, between a person tasked with maintaining the integrity of the system's security, and a person held to be a direct threat to it, are significant. They are an embodiment of the sorts of correctional practice envisioned within the society of captive's thesis. A praxis wherein harnessing of difference and pursuit of healing and becoming are prioritised. Where class-boundaries are eschewed such that human potential can be seen, and realised. Indeed, the engagement between keeper and kept illustrates not only that my lock and key interests did not need to be viewed as deficit and risk by prison Management but also that there was room for real possibility, and opportunity, for human growth, connection and thus rehabilitation. And, crucially, the relationship that emerged between Ranger and I, and with others associated with it, demonstrates what can happen, within a person, when their humanity and potential is recognised. Further illustrative of the power of being heard, and seen, for real, I felt so buoyed and empowered by the positivity and recognition from Ranger and Dave, that I

³⁵ It felt a bit awkward writing that, just then. For one, I thought, 'Really? Were you really that excited?' I must remember that, at the time, I absolutely was. Secondly, it feels uncomfortable due to the masculinity I live within. One man writing about an interaction with another, and a tradie at that, in such a way... Feelings, the softer ones at least, are seldom able to be articulated within the environment of prison. When they are, an awkwardness, a strangeness, often ensues. Given that prisons are purported to be places of healing and rehabilitation is that not, in itself, strange? Hmm...

began wondering if the idea of me working alongside the former, as a helping hand, may actually be feasible. Is it actually possible, I wondered, that Management may see this situation how some of their most trusted staff do? I made a commitment to myself that, next chance I got, I'd ask. I didn't have to wait long.

One day, a Manager came into the Unit. Of the dozen managers it could've been, it was the Security Manager. I felt my stomach tighten. Nonetheless, finding courage in my resolve, I embraced the opportunity and casually struck up a conversation. And at some point, heart in my throat, I asked what he thought of the possibility of, to use BA's words, the prison utilising me.

"Don't be ridiculous, Luff," the Security Manager replied. I didn't want to tell him the opinions of Ranger and Dave, lest they be reprimanded for their difference. But that was okay, I had another piece of strong evidence up my sleeve.

"But they do it in America – I've looked into it. The correctional departments use the inmates for lots of the prison maintenance."

"Yes, and that's why the Yank system is such a disaster," he said, laughing sarcastically. "

But I know about the locks anyway," I naively replied. *"Wouldn't you rather use the knowledge?"* My thinking was that if I was using it in service of them, they'd feel less threatened, and also, I'd feel less antagonised and oppressed, and so be less likely to pursue my passion in problematic ways. But the concept of having me in their camp, on their side – a person 'like me' – was just too much for them to swallow. I should have known it would go this way. After all, it was the very same Manager to whom I'd worked so hard to try and be seen, a few years earlier, when being interviewed about the keys. The factors that impinged upon his ability to hear or see, then, had not gone away.

The Society of Captives is like that. It lingers, ever-present...

Thinking about it now, part of me wants to say I'm surprised at how I ever thought it appropriate to even ask about working on the prison's locks. The rest of me cannot be surprised, though, because I know that, as theorised in the thesis, and as realised in my engagements with some staff, even the strongest forces of captivity can be overcome. I must've known that at the time too because, despite the Security Manager's negative reaction, I remained hopeful. There must be other potentials, I thought, through which I could engage in my hobby in ways that did not trigger a risk-response. Sitting amidst the recognition of the various staff I'd been talking to, and feeling the sense of legitimacy that a collectivity of kind voices can conjure, I began talking with senior staff about the possibility of being able to be me. From that, I decided to make another approach to Management. With the support of senior Unit staff, I made an application, to the Prison Governor, for approval to have historical literature on antique locks posted in. Such a request, I felt, was a good compromise: I wasn't asking to actually have access to locks or keys, just to read of their history and development.

The Governor declined the request.

However, and it deserves particular acknowledgement given the magnitude (i.e., difference) of what I had asked for, he took the time to explain his decision. The Governor said he could understand my interest in wanting to study the history of locks, and that he personally had no issue with it. From an institutional viewpoint, however, there was concern regarding how it might look. Demonstrative of the ways in which the Society of Captive's thesis positions public perception and concern about reputational risk as heavily impinging on the ability to practice differently, the Governor raised the issue of media. He said that, whilst he accepted my intentions were harmless, there was

just too much risk to allow me to pursue my interest. Indicative of my own becoming and increasing awareness of the conditions impinging upon us all, I felt little ill-feeling toward the Governor. I actually suspect that even if we had won the support of the Prison's Managers the structures surrounding it, and within which we all move, would have constrained the possibility of their allowing my possibility. Indeed, we see through this story how the forces discussed earlier – the politics, social values and risk-averse culture – impinge on, and harm, policy and practice concerning rehabilitation. And to the highest of levels. With regard to Prison Management putting my locksmithing skills to use, any ability for them to do so was extinguished by a need to be seen punishing, controlling, and holding the prisoner in a particular class-based position.

I wish I could say that a situation developed wherein I was spending my imprisoned days working alongside Ranger, learning, becoming, feeling accepted and, in the process, saving the system (and thus tax-payer) thousands of dollars. But, of course, for the aforementioned reasons, that level of becoming could not be realised. All had not been lost in the process of trying, though. Thanks to the brave, boundary-crossing efforts of a select few staff, the conditions governing my body did relax a little wherein, to a constrained extent, I could talk about locks with them. And I could do so without fear of reprimand. I recall the efforts of one officer, in particular. His name was Ted. He'd take me out to his office, make me a coffee (with 'real' instant coffee, not the bitter, horrible shit prisoners were restricted to buying) and just sit and listen as I talked about locks and keys. The feeling of being able to do this was...indescribable? It takes me back to my engagements with Amy Johnson (2013), to where she writes of the power of being heard for real, of what can happen for a person when they are able to be seen, and are allowed to be themselves... We have come such a long, long way since meeting Amy, haven't we? When I think back through our journey since then,

and of the visceral personal experiences it took us through, what feels most problematic, and what has been the most damaging, has been the system's refusal to see who I really am. It kept seeing risk. All I wanted was for it to see and harness, rather than crush, my potential and efforts to become.

What is important, here, is that, had the system listened, seen and embraced me, it would have established a caring relationship with me. And, in so doing, its leaders would've directly, and significantly, reduced the risk that so concerned them. We see the power of that potential in the relationships their front-line staff built with me, people like BA. I mean, even in just being able to talk about locks, I began to feel a sense of togetherness and accountability toward the staff, the people, who allowed it. Certainly, the sense of respect and loyalty I developed toward those staff provided a formidable barrier to the possibility of my doing anything that would let down people who were being so kind to me. The sad and concerning irony here is that Management would have been furious, and intensely worried, at the relational, ethical approach some of their staff were quietly taking. Yet, the outcomes that approach produced – the production of openness, care and, through that, compliance – were precisely what Management had wanted to achieve, several years earlier. By confining me, denying me and 'pillorying' me, they, instead, harmed me, and so produced the opposite. I became frustrated with the system, at times disdained it and so sat there, suspiciously watching it watching me. In this we see, yet again, the sort of totalising madness, the counter-productive outcomes, that are produced within a Society of Captives. I can only hope that this story will in some way make a difference, help those in control to step beyond the risk-based acoustics of the institution and see the person in front of them, the person who is trying to tell them something. If they do, they might just find that they like what they hear.

Making dreams real...

When we went back to prison so I could tell the story of its response we – I – was in a very important place. I was in the shed, doing something the prison never allowed. Do you remember? Me and the Robbie lock, and the realisation of a long-dreamt dream. It's time to go back there and complete what, in fairness, started when I was a little boy. It feels good to be able to do that because, I have to say, I've had enough of imagining. Imagining can be really tiring, especially when, for so long, you were made to feel that your dreams were delusions. The conditions and becoming I long dreamt of were not delusional. I know that, now. When I look down at the key in my hand, I know.

I think, when we left, I was waiting for the lock to arrive. Unable to find a key, I was going to make one for it. Indeed, the thought of taking on the challenge of making a key for my Robbie lock had invigorated me from the moment I purchased it. Nothing could happen, though, until the lock arrived. It felt like a long wait (relatively speaking! ☺) Every few days, sometimes every day, I would check the tracking details online. Then, one day, three weeks later, it was here. I didn't open the box. I didn't need to, to know what was inside – it must've weighed two kilograms! The box was placed in the back bedroom, out of sight and out of mind. Well, kind of. You see, I was chomping at the bit to get stuck into the lock. But, for one, I was not yet in the headspace to be able to delve into it. I wanted to be able to totally relax and dedicate several days to the job. It was something I had waited so long to do, and so I didn't want it to feel rushed. And secondly, before I could cut a key for the lock, I needed to sort a blank. And that was not going to be easy. A couple of months passed before I finally found the space to begin. During that time, I would sometimes pop into the bedroom, sit down on the floor,

and study the box. I'd pick it up, turn it over, feeling a thud as the heavy items inside moved around. A wee shake, the sound of clinking. I was intrigued. It felt amazing to now, finally, once again own such a lock. I felt important; ownership of it helped me feel further away from the 'criminal other' subject position I have for so long been relegated to. To me, ownership of a high-end lock designed for use in upholding the law made me feel that I had a foot in the door of, a little membership in, that straight, legitimate, honourable world that I often feel those who deal in such locks generally occupy.

When it felt right, I opened the box. I cut carefully around its edges – I wanted to keep the box, and international postage label, intact. They mattered to me: I'd earned them. Lifting the lid, seeing the lock sitting in there, carefully enclosed in bubble-wrap... How many years had this thing been in existence and, in all that time, it, I, was destined for this moment. Peeling away the layers... It was cold, old, intricate scroll work adorned the case. And it immediately took me back, back to innocence, to realness, to who I am, and have always been. Holding the lock in my hand, turning it over, I contemplated. A nice contemplation this time, my mind turning and twisting not at the hands of another, but through my own willingness. I analysed the complexities of the lock. No, making a key was not going to be easy...

The first stage of the process was to see if I had an old English-style rim lock key from which I could fashion a blank. That took several days. Before the fabrication process could even begin, I had to sift through hundreds of old keys, trying each in the lock. There were several aspects, you see, that any prospective key required. For one, the key had to be of the correct diameter; too big, and it wouldn't go into the keyhole. Too small, and it'd be loose and not operate correctly. To find the right kind was no easy task given the rather small keyhole. Secondly, the key needed to have the correct

style of 'bow,' or head. Sure, I could have just used a modern style key with a simple, circular bow. But no, this key needed to be right, period-correct. It needed to do justice to Robbie, to the lock, to the journey I was on. And so, several keys with the correct diameter were rejected. The final criteria was that the key needed to be long enough – about four inches. Many had the right bow, many the correct length, and some the right diameter. But to find that single one that had all three characteristics? In the end, I found just that – one key. But it was all I needed.

Having found a key that would provide a usable foundation, I now had to convert it from a cut key to a blank. This meant that the various steps, or 'teeth,' that had been cut into the working end of the key, needed to be filled in such that new ones, corresponding to the internals of the Robbie lock, could be cut into it. Filling in the existing cuts would involve welding new metal to the bit. The 'bit' is the square piece of metal at the business end of the key. It is the piece with the cuts that goes into the lock and, when you turn the key, operates against the lock's internal mechanisms. When working with such small, comparatively thin pieces of metal, welding can be extremely tricky; through the generation of too much heat, it is all too easy to completely melt what you are trying to weld. If I did that, I'd destroy the only suitable key I had.

Making an error was not an option.

Having secured the key in the vice, and filed angles into the bit to help the new metal connect, I set about welding. A few practice runs first, on a piece of scrap metal... Visor lifted, a few turns of the voltage and wire-feed settings and then, visor lowered again, I positioned the tip of the welder as close as I dared to the bit. When doing such fiddly work, you have to weld in short bursts, just half-second taps. Also, it was important to keep the bursts in close succession, both because I could only see through my welding visor when the metal was red-hot and, secondly, the metal had to remain

red-hot for when I did the next burst. If it was allowed to cool, too much, before the next layer was welded over it, the metal would not blend together properly and, crucially, there was the risk air pockets (known as ‘porosity’) would form. Should that happen, the bit would be severely weakened such that, when I began filing the intricate cuts into it, the teeth I was trying to create would likely break off. And so I welded quickly, but so very carefully. I didn’t worry so much about putting too much metal on, just that what did go on went on right. Once the bit had been built up sufficiently, attention turned to shaping it. And that would be easier said than done – with the bit now resembling more of a roundish blob than the thin, rectangular shape it needed to, I had a *lot* of filing to do. One may ask why I wouldn’t just grind it down? Such a process, although quick, would’ve been too aggressive. Besides the likelihood that the force would break the bit off the key’s stem, there was the not inconsiderable risk (ahhh, now there’s a kind of risk the contemplation of which doesn’t trigger past pains) that I’d slip, and the grinder would hit the key somewhere, causing instant and irreversible damage. This key had been on the earth a very long time and, besides the modification I was making, it needed to stay just the way it was. And so, I began filing. With so much metal to remove, it was tempting to press down hard as I dragged the file across. But I resisted, worrying that the key would snap, or bend, and I’d have to start all over.

Painstaking as it was, the challenge exhilarated me. I felt pride in myself, at my ability to overcome the odds, overcome the constraints I faced. I watched YouTube videos, of people making similar keys. They had flash milling equipment and key cutters; I can’t afford any of that. I felt I was in uncharted territory, with no map to follow, no-one to ask for help. A bit like jail had been, really. I thus had to improvise, and to figure it all out for myself. Of course, Tim provided advice where he could, letting me know of the importance, for example, of not trying to remove too much metal

in one go. *“You need to make numerous passes,”* he said, *“just taking off a millimetre, or even less, at a time. And don’t pull back on the work with the file,”* he added, *“or you’ll damage it. Only file away from you.”*

Accordingly, I spent about two hours standing at the vice, bent forward, intensely focused, sweating, the entire world beyond that key and I not existing. Taking off tiny amounts of steel with each pass. And when I thought the bit was thin enough, removing the key from the vice and trying it in the keyhole of the lock. And, for the fifth time, not thin enough. Carefully remounted in the vice, taking care to position it exactly where it had been, lest the next cut not be in the precise place it needed to be. Slowly pushing the file forward, lifting coming back, pushing again. Again, and again. A sip of water here and there in between. Eyes narrowed, watching, assessing. Taking off such small amounts as to be almost undetectable to the human eye. Tried the key again. I didn’t think it would go in, but I was growing impatient. A feeling of intense satisfaction and sense of accomplishment as the key dropped into the keyhole. A little rough, but in. Stage one of the mission complete: I had my blank key, and the real work could begin.

I didn’t want to cut the key right away. Making the blank had been exhausting: its production having called upon all my senses. I needed to recuperate. And, also, I wanted to be fully present because cutting the key was going to be about so much more than just being out in the shed, engaged in engineering. Indeed, the amount of time I had spent, in prison, contemplating being able to do this. I recall numerous occasions in the gym, pausing amidst my workout to quiz my mate about metal fabrication techniques. Lying in my cell at night, sustaining myself amidst the boredom and hopelessness with thoughts of making a key for such a lock. Could it be done? How? And did I have the skill? And underlying all that, of course, was the ever-present

wondering about whether a time would ever really come wherein I would be free enough to engage in such activity. So I waited. A few weeks passed and, finally, I decided I was ready. I set aside a whole day for the project, the adventure, the *mission*. The morning of it I woke feeling very happy, excited that something I'd waited so long to do was about to eventuate. I was also at peace, calm, bathing in the freedom that the possibility of doing this allowed. Waking that day, knowing what I was about to do – it was one of the best feelings I had in the four months since I'd been home. Indeed, to wake knowing that I was about to cut a key for a High-Security lock with roots back to my childhood, was the epitome of freedom; my ability to do so communicated to me, more clearly than ever, that I was free of the constraining, suffocating clutches of a system that, for so long, had demonised my interest and skill, my identity and person. There would be no looking over my shoulder, I thought. No need to hide my tools. I was about to celebrate my freedom, myself.

The Robbie lock, and key I made, are sitting here. Just in front of my keyboard. As soon as the key was completed, I fitted the lock to the shed door. And, until commencing this chapter, the key has been used daily. Such is the significance of the lock, though, that I decided to remove it from the door and keep both it and its key here, at my desk, until this chapter is finished. I keep pausing to play with the lock. To handle it, to put the key in. Lock it, unlock it. Rotating the key slow, listening to the clank of the parts, shifting, lifting, and moving against one another in unison. Feeling for the slightest resistance, the slightest sign of imperfection. Finding none. Then fast, wrenching it back and forth, strongly, as a jailor does when moving down a line of cell doors, throwing each one open with uniform precision. The heavy bolt snapping out, strong spring driving it home. The sound unmistakeably prison, Maximum-Security prison. Holding the key at an angle in the lock, to see if it will still operate, checking

the quality of my work. Held at an angle, it shouldn't turn. It doesn't. Taking the key out and holding it close, inspecting it, turning it over to check for flaws. Admiring it. I'm pleased to see that it is getting a little weathered, now. And it should be because, notwithstanding the short hiatus wherein the key is on my desk, it'll be getting used, every day. Before long, the key will attain the smoothness and shine of a well-worn jailor key; like the 'Folger Adam' keys from Pāremoremo Prison, square edges worn round from fifty years of abuse, from being turned thousands of times, from hours of jingling, as officers run to emergency situations, from being dragged across prisoners' flesh when extracting utu. Indeed, an officer from D Block once told me that the keys are a useful weapon, the pointed tip serving as an effective tool with which to drag down a prisoner's back during a 'take out.' Such behaviour, the officer clarified, was usually reserved for those prisoners who were being "*taken down*" after having assaulted staff. My handmade key, scarcely a month old, has not had such experiences, but I have, and so wanted it to look as though it had, too.

Sitting here looking at it, now, it is hard to believe how much work was involved in making, and cutting, my key. The process began with a coffee. Then I went out to my wee workshop, sat down and, sipping my drink, contemplated the job. And the joy of it. I laid out all the tools I'd need; my small vice, several screwdrivers, a 6 inch 'second-cut' flat file, set of four inch 'needle' files, and sandpaper. I have three sets of needle files. For this job, I selected the best of them. They are very fine, and would make the narrow, precise cuts required. The first stage to cutting the key was to disassemble the lock. Most modern locks use 'phillips' screws, but not the old ones. Taking a wide-bladed, slotted screwdriver, I set about taking the cover off the lock. The case of the lock is ¼" thick cast iron, and very heavy. Screw removed, I carefully inserted a flat screwdriver and prised the cover free. Slipping a hand in, under it, I held

the internal components in place, and lifted the cover away. There, before me, was a very complicated-looking assemblage of bolts, levers, springs, and wards. Well, complicated to some, but not to me. Because, although it'd been a long time since I'd seen inside one of these locks, I immediately knew what I was looking at. My focus went, firstly, to the lever. It is the lever, after all, that locks the main deadbolt in position, stopping forward/rearward movement. For the lock's bolt (the piece that goes into the doorframe when you turn the key) to be able to move, the lever must be lifted to the correct height by the key. With the key being a 'blank' – having no cuts in it, it will lift the lever too high. The process of 'cutting' it involves filing (cutting) into the key, right at the point where it makes contact with the lever. The rectangular cut needs to be just deep enough so that, when the key rotates, it lifts the lever to the precise height at which the bolt becomes unobstructed.

With the Robbie lock only having one lever, sorting that aspect would be the easiest part. Of more complexity were the lock's 'wards.' Most Victorian-era locks utilise a 'warded' system. Wards are a series of obstructions that protrude from inside the lock's case. For the key to be able to turn (and thus lift the lever and throw the bolt), its bit must have cuts in it that enable it to clear the wards. There was a trick, often used by burglars in days gone, to ascertain the ward pattern in a lock. It involved 'smoking' or waxing a key-blank, and then inserting the key into the lock and turning it, firmly, side to side. The key would, of course, only rotate a fraction each way. But, in doing so, the wards would press up against the key's bit. When the key was removed, the shape of the wards would be visible in the soot, or wax. From there, all one needed do was file away all metal where the wards were contacting the bit. Fortunately, my lock was open, in front of me. I thus didn't need to rely on soot or wax. Rather, with the lock

open, I could simply insert the key and, looking from inside the lock, see where it needed to be cut.

'Simply,' I write...

Nothing about cutting the key was simple.

I started with the wards and, before long, encountered my first problem. As there are wards on both sides of the lock's case, both sides of the bit would need to be cut. That, in itself, was no big deal – I reasoned that all I need do is ascertain the pattern for one side as, being a lock that is keyed on both sides, the wards on one side would mirror those on the other. As such, I carefully cut the metal out of the rear of the bit, precisely where the lock's rear wards would come up against it. Made quick work of that: before long, the key would freely rotate. I then set the lock aside and, turning back to the vice, filed an identical set of cuts into the opposing side of the key bit. I was thoroughly enjoying myself and, reaching to pick the lock case back up, thought that all that was left would be to cut the groove for the lever. Sitting the rear cover on the lock, I inserted the key into the front and turned it. I was met with resistance. Turning it over, removing the cover and looking in the back, I could see that the cuts in the key were not properly aligning with the lock wards. Indeed, the cuts looked too narrow for the wards to pass through them. Hmm, strange... I pondered a minute, puzzled. The key looked to be accurately cut, so why wasn't it turning? Had I, after all, not selected a key with the correct diameter shaft? If the key was too loose in the keyhole, for example, the bit would sit too low, thus causing the present issue. Testing the fit of the key's barrel in the hole: a snug fit... The problem wasn't there. Hmm... It's in moments like these that I wish my criminal history didn't force me to hide in the shadows, afraid of society's judgement. I mean, were it not for society's marginalising attitudes, I'd reach out to an

expert, visit a locksmith and ask for advice. But I worry that they'd discover I am *that* guy...

I guess that's one of those parts that makes me not truly free, eh?

Just gotta live with it.

Assessing the key as fine, I decided the problem I'd encountered had to reside within the lock. And, to an extent, it did. I'd neglected to take into account one of the qualities I love most about the Robbie lock: its age. That lock had been on a door, maybe several, for over a century. Who knows how many times the key was turned in it? Even if just once a day, over a century that would be around 36,500 turns! Now the error I'd made, you see, was in overlooking that the lock would be a little tired. I had assumed that the warding on both sides of the lock would be the same. And, when new, it would've been. But, upon closer inspection, I discovered that the outer warding was significantly more worn than that around the inner keyhole; the key had clearly not been put into the lock, from inside the building, very often. This critical information in hand, I set about widening all the cuts on the key, such that it would pass by the bigger wards on the unworn side. And with that, there was only one thing left to do...

I laid the lock down and carefully reassembled it. The main and secondary bolts went in first, then the lever and, finally, the springs. Leaving the rear cover off, I picked the lock back up and, struggling to hold the components in place, inserted the key from the front. As expected, when I turned it, the bottom edge of the bit engaged the lever, lifting it far too high. A cut thus needed to be made, precisely where the bit touched the lever. By doing so, the lever could drop into the cut as the key turned. Holding the key firmly against the lever, I took a metal scribe and marked the position on the key where it and the lever contacted. Bent over, and squinting when doing this, getting my eyes as close as I could. The cut I was about to make in the key blade needed to be exactly

underneath where the lever was touching. If it wasn't, the lever either wouldn't drop into the cut or, if it did, would rub against the side of the cut and thus start to lift again, as the key was turned. I spent a lot of time thinking about that cut and, as I sit here now, writing the story of its making, other threads are emerging. There's an urge to dismiss them as frivolous, as unimportant distractions. However, my autoethnographic senses are tingling...

I'm feeling in several places, all at once. Making the recent cut on the Robbie key, making cuts decades ago and, now, here, telling the story of it all. One could say that's a confusing location, but it's also not. If we can sit within the multiplicity of time and space, it's possible to see that it is characteristic of life itself. It's funny, isn't it, the degree to which our lives are made up of so many threads, all woven together rather haphazardly. I'm really feeling that concept – that what we do, and who we are, in any given moment, can be influenced so strongly by what we did, and who we were, in another. I'm feeling drawn into this reflexivity as pondering the importance of getting that Robbie cut right is taking me back to specific moments in my youth. There was a time, for instance, where I was not so careful. Fuelled by teenage emotion and naivety, I would just want the end result, the key done. And so I would rush, almost blindly tearing metal away. The journey, then, did not matter to me. But it matters now. So much matters to me now. Like, not giving in to emotion, not just filing away blindly... The result of those old rookie, emotionally-charged movements is that the key would have to be jiggled to work or, oftentimes, just wouldn't work at all. With the significance of the Robbie lock, and the blessing I'd experienced in finding a suitable key, I was determined not to have any errors this time around. This time, I would proceed slowly, and cautiously. It is that feeling of need for caution that has raised my antenna. Working to try and story the story, I sense more going on, in my caution with

making the Robbie key, than just wanting to get the key right. For sure, I'm sensing parallels here, connections, echoes... Indeed, could it be that there is more pushing me to do it properly than just a desire to get it right? I've not thought these thoughts until right now. But, yes, maybe the carefulness to my engineering also involves communicating, both to myself and the world, that I can be relied upon, trusted. That I'm the kind of person who won't rush or take risks? Is there an ingrained sense of the system watching here? And, with that, an embedded anxiety, an almost subconscious one, that I must operate slowly, and deliberately, in all I do? I suspect so because those who do rush, and take risks, they're the ones the system tends to lock back up.

I'm aware these thoughts may appear haphazard,

disorganised,

unstructured.

And that's okay. You're reading them just how I thought them. You're moving with me, in the moment...

Having marked the key, I removed it from the lock, secured it in the vice and, selecting a 'second cut' warding file, made a slight cut in the bit, right at the point of the mark. Rather than doing what I used to do, just filing away until I thought the cut was deep enough, I removed the key, put it back in the lock and turned it, to check if the slight cut (more just a mark) I'd made was in the correct place. It was. With the cut's location firmly established, I turned my attention to its depth. The easiest way to ascertain this is to turn the key until it lifts the lever as high as it will go, and then look at how far too high it has lifted. That distance provides the depth to which the cut in the key must be made. I filed very carefully, putting the key in the lock several times to check: one 'pass' of the file too many and the cut would be too deep, resulting in the

key not being able to lift the lever high enough. The tolerances in these high-quality locks are very fine. There is no room for error.

No, there isn't. Any error, even just perceived, would cost me dearly...

At some point, I decided enough metal had been taken out. The cut was, I felt, deep enough. Rather than try testing the key with the lock still open, I fitted the rear cover. Then, holding the lock in one hand, I took the key in my other and tried it.

It worked.

Figure 6

The Robbie Lock and key



It has been months since I completed the key. And it really is time for me to go – I'm tired. And I'm needing to move on, to work on realising future dreams rather than focusing on a past one. But, coming back through this chapter, reviewing and editing it for what I thought (and hoped) was the final time, I can see that I've moved. I know this to be so because there are a few things I said, earlier, that aren't quite representative

of where I am, now. And so I'd better attend to them, just quickly, before heading off to chase those other dreams.

Something that stood out to me, as I worked through the story of the Robbie lock, is that I still did not know the lock's original name – or if it even had one. Such is its rarity that, during initial narration of the story, I'd not been able to find any information, whatsoever, regarding the lock. I'd trawled the internet, searching every key word I could think of. Dozens of REO locks came up, but none even close to the Robbie. I pretty much gave up, consoling myself that having the lock would have to be enough. But it irked me, largely because it triggered feelings I'd felt when I was locked up, feelings of deprivation and loss, of not being able to access knowledge. Then, one day, about a year following completion of the key, I got chatting with a fellow collector. He advised me of a website that held a number of digitised copies of vintage documents. Visiting that site, I found a dozen REO product catalogues, stretching right back to the nineteenth century. Some were 600 pages long – so large my computer would freeze when I tried to scroll through them. I persisted, but with little success. For the second time, I admitted defeat and moved on. After all, I had the lock, didn't I? There was plenty to be grateful for...

Well, just the other day, very near to finishing the final edit of this chapter, I got stuck. It was one of those moments that's happened countless times during the writing of this thesis: sitting there, gazing at the screen, trying to work out how to transition from one place to another. And not being able to. It was late in the afternoon, it was cloudy, and drizzling a little. Anyhow, glancing at the Robbie lock, sitting on the desk beside me, I got to thinking I might have another look through those old lock catalogues. I mean, technically, it would classify as study, right? I'm not quite sure how being able to provide the actual name of an old lock contributes to the quality of my research. But

that knowing, and what the ability to search symbolises for me, is beyond quantification. And so I searched. The computer froze, just like it did a year earlier. I saw the same locks as a year earlier. Remembered, and relived, the disappointment of seeing what seemed like every lock except mine. Nine catalogues down, one to go. I opened the last with little hope – it was only sixteen pages. Slim chance it'd be in this one, I thought. The catalogue wasn't even in colour, or ornate, like the others. A supplement to one of the other volumes, perhaps? Scrolling, I was thinking of how I'd done enough, for the day, to justify heading out to the shed. And then, mind elsewhere, there it was. A cloudy page, a poor scan, or more like a good scan of a page so old, so faded it was almost illegible when copied. But, unmistakably, there it was. And, quite humbly, just like the man who gave me an example of it so long ago, its name: 3F.

Figure 7

3F Lock Advertisement



Note. This image is taken from an 1858 Product Catalogue, produced by the Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company. Catalogue accessed under Creative Commons PDM 1.0 license, from <https://archive.org/details/IllustratedDescriptionOfRussellErwinManufacturingCo.sNewImprovements>

If that wasn't reward enough for this journey of discovery and healing, there, below the lock, was an image of an original 3F key. I just couldn't believe it – my Robbie key is almost identical. Looking at the 3F key, then down at my creation, on the table before me, just above my keyboard, I felt vindicated. All those years of thinking, imagining, had not been in vain... The key is not just a key. It is memories, it is a physical manifestation not only of where I have come to, but also where I have come from. The key is not just a wondering anymore, a seemingly impossible dream floating around in my mind. Indeed, it is not questionable. Instead, it is here, real, strong, and in its strength able to reassure me whenever I start doubting. The Robbie key is legitimate, and it reminds me that so, too, am I.

A little earlier, when faced with discussing a way out of captivity, I wrote that part of me just wanted to go back to, and stay in, the shed. We now know that, after sharing my imaginings, I did indeed go to the shed. I'm happy to say, though, that I won't be staying there. Sure, part of me wants too, for the reasons so painstakingly discussed throughout this, *my*, thesis. But that's just it, you see; irrespective of how I may sometimes feel, I'm no longer invisible, no longer unimaginable. Through *my* thesis, I have moved. Indeed, when we started this journey there was one thesis. As we leave it, there are two. And I hope for there to be more. Certainly, they are out there, locked away in cages around our nation, and beyond. Stories of pain and silencing, suffering at the hands of a risk-averse machine that is producing the very outcomes it wishes to avoid. Stories waiting to be heard...

Figure 8

A Dream Realised



Epilogue

A journey out of madness: from one container to another...

When I went to prison, life, in a sense, stopped. Who I had become, up to that point, could no longer be. And all the while I wanted to, had to, try and preserve parts of who I had been so that I could be them, again, once the conditions governing my life permitted it. Through this journey we've traversed twenty years of imprisonment. Nearly a quarter of a century. And I felt every single day of those years... Yet, located where I am, now, almost two years beyond prison, it's beginning to feel like it was but a moment. Part of this sense-making can be attributed to the process released prisoners go through generally, wherein life feels so good, and different, to prison, that it starts unravelling that sense of connection to the alien world one has just left. However, in the case of long-term, and life imprisonment, the impact of the prison is so pervasive as to require more than just spending time beyond prison walls. Rather, it depends upon the dedicated support of people in the community. And it also requires a series of deliberate decisions and actions during one's incarceration, all of which must work to help a person stay connected to their non-prison self.

One of the decisions I made, as part of that strong desire to hold on to threads of the life, and person, I'd lost, was to keep my possessions. When I went away my bedroom was, at my request, left untouched. The impact of this was, for me, immense. I mean, through it, I was able to know, even up to a decade into my incarceration, that there was a place beyond prison fences that had not changed. It was a little like my memories of Big River, that strong sense of attachment and identity. However, with Big River I'd had the wonderings: I could never quite be sure that the place hadn't changed. But, with home, I *knew* it hadn't: my books stayed on the bookshelves, clothes folded

in my drawers. And my two Landrovers stayed: One in the shed, the other outside, in the same place I always used to park it. Of course, none of my hopes could have been realised without the total support of my family. Certainly, they understood the importance of it all. Especially my mum. Having experienced incarceration herself, many years before, she has felt awareness of the degree to which prison tries to strip you of your non-prison, former self. Of your innocence. And so she prioritised the preservation of my things, my former life. And, for the most part, my family's efforts have been successful.

About fifteen years into my sentence, Mum made the decision to move. It was met with great anxiety from me – “*What about my stuff!?*” I asked. She, and my aunty and Nan, assured me it would all be well-cared for, and disturbed as little as possible. At the time of Mum's move, it had become obvious to us that I would never be permitted to return to my home family region. As Mum was remaining within it, we decided the most likely place I would be able to be released was to my Aunt's. And so my possessions were shifted to her home. The move was very much a family affair: Tim bought me a shipping container. Then he, Mum and Nan packed everything into boxes, and my Aunt and her partner carefully stowed them. The best of the Landrovers, along with the contents of my room, and shed, went into the container. I asked for photos: they sent photos. I asked for this to be put there, that over there: they put this there, that over there. Through their efforts, I was able to relax, to feel a semblance of peace. Knowing my stuff was moving was still hard, and a part of that was the sense of powerlessness I felt at not being able to help, to have any control over my things. It was all tempered, however, by an awareness that the stuff was being moved to a place wherein I would be able to access it upon release. And that, of course, was happening

in acknowledgement that release was, finally, becoming a possibility. So many threads weaving and flowing in life...

So many...

In the end, I didn't end up at my Aunt's, but at Nan and Tim's.³⁶ Once here, we all decided that, at some point, my container of belongings would need to come down. But there was no hurry. Life has been more than full enough, navigating the world, finding my feet. Although really wanting to see my stuff, I knew that I was not yet present enough, available enough, for that experience. Mainly, I needed to begin to feel that I really am home, that it is not some kind of bad dream, or momentary freedom that will end with the system taking me away... The thought of that potential is still here, but it is mellowing a little. Enough so that, about four months back, we had the container brought down. Since its arrival, I've gone into it once or twice. Opened a couple of boxes, sat and thought...

So many thoughts, memories...

Waiting, like I did for so long, to emerge.

As I had long expected, and hoped, the connection the container provides to my past life is strong. There's an irony here, isn't there – that a steel container is serving as something of a conduit, a link, to a life lived, and taken away, due to my being confined to another container... But yes, it, the green container helps ground me, and has kept alive important parts of a past life that prison – the *grey* container – may, otherwise, have obliterated.

³⁶ As it transpired, I was banned from my Aunt's area too, as it is adjacent to my home region and so was deemed too close to the area my crimes were committed in.

The temptation to go further, to delve into all the wee time capsules packed away in there, has been strong. I can see it, sitting out in the paddock, from my chair. At least once a week, I've thought of going in. But I've resisted. The memories in there, in here, are deep, heavy and, as I said, there are many. They deserve respect... When I do go into the container and begin unearthing, I'll be coming full-circle. I'll be able to connect my life before prison to my life after it. And, in that, for me, there will be a sense of achievement, of victory, of completeness. In the meantime, I have just had to force my self to trust the process, to have faith in myself, and in life, that the time would come, and that I'd recognise it when it did. Amidst the struggle to go in, I hear the many guiding voices of my prison years, counselling me to *'Trust the process...'* Ultimately, it was empowering advice because the reality, even though I often didn't recognise it, was that there was little else I could do. My life was so enmeshed in powers and influences beyond my control that, really, I had no other option but to trust...

The signs are showing – and it's easier to write it than to actually feel an embodied sense of it – that my life is not so controlled, now. And prominent amongst those signs is that, after four months of battling, resisting, wondering, I've decided it is time to open my past life – properly.

It is time to get the Landrover out.

Heaviness...

Deepness...

Uncertainty...

Mere contemplation of bringing out my old Landrover... There are many memories in the container. But none feel so steeped in history as that old truck. It means so many things to me... For one, it represents the single area of life in which I felt, during my troubled teenage years, that I was succeeding. I mean, I built the vehicle, by

myself, out of scrap parts. Yes, so many memories here... Around the time that I was assembling the Landy, I was in seventh form at school. One of the elective classes I'd taken was automotive engineering. A retired mechanic, from the local Ford dealership, tutored us. Tony was his name, and he was great. We got on well, so much so, in fact, that he gave me a lead to a family member who had an old Landrover. Having sat in a paddock for years, Tony said the owner would likely let me have it (and, much to my delight, he was right!). I was not at all bold, in many areas of life. But with mechanics, as with locks and keys, things were different... It was like I found myself, momentarily, when in those realms... I recall asking Tony if, as part of the course, we could rebuild a motor. He agreed to that, and so I took things a step further, asking if we could, as a class, rebuild *my* motor. Again, he agreed. Thinking of that, of the fun we all had, in automotive class, working on the engine for the Landrover, feels a bit surreal: when I went to jail, the engine had not even done the paltry 500 kilometers driving required to run it in.

So many complexities here...

I have to admit, to myself, that I actually don't quite know what will happen when I come back to the Landrover. I mean, I have long known that keeping, and eventually re-visiting, my things would provide a sense of connection, and of having kept some of myself. But perhaps I haven't put enough thought into the possibility that other outcomes are possible, too. Could seeing my stuff also hurt? Now that I'm here I can see that it could, yeah. Because, whilst there are many memories of my pre-prison life, and Landrover, that are joyous, there are others that are not. Indeed, some are tragic: the last time I sat in the seat of that vehicle, I was being pursued by police. And when I exited the vehicle, I took a man's life and, in a sense, my actions rendered mine lost too... So, yeah, not quite sure what will happen, in me, when I revisit that time...

Just the sight of it, when I first pulled the container doors open... I couldn't see much of the Landrover, and didn't go near it. But, yeah, the complexities... They are many... To sit in it for the first time since...since *then*...

I just don't know...

But I know it needs to happen.

So many years thinking about, and looking forward, to this moment... So many years imagining... Well, I needn't imagine any longer. It is now possible to live my dreams. That in itself is a lot to try and get my head around. For now, though, it is time to stop contemplating and go get my keys... Because, after all, there is only one way to find out what the outcomes will be...

I feel weird. Not bad weird, but a heaviness all the same. And thankful. The container was packed, right to the doors, with boxes. As I ferried the old boxes out, to make a path to tow the Landrover out, I paused, and opened a few. One turned out to be a big box of old mail. Prison mail, letters I'd received back in 2006. Right at the bottom was an envelope Nan had sent me – one of a great many: hundreds, if not thousands. I always knew when mail from Nan had arrived because, aside from her distinctive printing, there was always a return address stamped on the back. It was that return address I could see now, as I looked down at the yellowing old envelope. Sitting here, hunched over the box, the life that life had put on hold contained in boxes stacked all around me, I feel very thankful. My body feels awash, with a powerful realisation, that I'm actually at the address on the envelope. It's weird. I know I'm home, and I very much appreciate it. My homecoming and the last two years have been an intensely felt experience. Yet it seems there are still these moments, powerful ones that catch me unawares, that make me feel so grateful, so relieved. That I've made it, survived the

experience. I endured every single thing the system could throw at me, yet I'm still here, and not only here but in about the best place I could want to be. Will I ever stop being surprised at my freedom, finding little moments where I marvel at it? Probably not, such is its miraculousness and the price that's been paid for it.

Pulling myself from the moment, I stood and resumed removing boxes. Next came my set of drawers. I've owned those drawers a very long time – years before I went away. Pulling stuff away from them and seeing the Mack Truck sticker on a drawer, the hole in another from where I'd once attached a lock... Such strong reminders of wee moments in my former life... Moments I'd never have remembered, and thus not been able to revisit, ever again, had these memories not been preserved. Seeing the botched drawer reminded me of my youthful tendency to lock everything. To, as talked about in the last chapter, seek security and safety in the small bit of control and self-determination that I felt locks and locking gave me. Hmmm, and that leads to ponderings of why I felt a need to lock... Don't really like thinking about that... I also found, as I removed the drawers and laid eyes on clothes folded and put in there by me, twenty two years ago, that I'm not wanting to think about them either. Too many memories to deal with and, bearing in mind today's goal, there is no room for anything else. And so, having carried the drawer-chest outside, I promptly stuffed the drawers back in their holes and turned my attention to the now-exposed Landrover.

It looked forlorn, what I could see of it, anyway. The old green paint was peeling, and crouching down to look underneath, it appeared all four tires were dead flat. Witnessing this condition hurt. But I guess I shouldn't be surprised. After all, over twenty years has passed... Getting it out would be a team effort, and I wanted to feel a sense of having come full circle. For me, that meant involving my family. It also meant towing it out with the Landrover I have just spent the last year restoring. Have I

mentioned this before? Not long after coming home, I bought an old, derelict v8 Landrover. Over the following year, I meticulously restored it. I don't think there is any coincidence here – that one of the first significant things I do, upon leaving prison, is to do something I was doing before going in there. Indeed, I had always wanted, one day, to build a Landrover with a big v8 engine in it. It was a dream I took to prison with me. And, in there, I must've planned, and replanned, the build a hundred times over. At times it became deeply depressing because I could never know, for sure, whether I'd ever be free to make the imaginings real. Coming home I wasted no time and, yeah, it has been another dream realised.

Mind and body in several realms, I got my new Landrover, 'Hazel,' and drove it over to the container, reversed up, got a tow rope out... But I still wasn't quite ready. I needed time to process, to try and reconcile the seeming impossibility of what was about to happen, of the distances that exist between then and now. I needed to be able to be in both places, at once, and to be okay with that... And so I had asked everyone to not come down to the container, not yet. I felt so close, yet so far. Grabbing a can of coke, I shimmied up beside the old Landrover, between the driver's door and wall of the container, and climbed in. For the first time...since, since *then*...

And then, the memories...

It is pretty dark in the cab, so I turn my phone's torch on...

History begins to emerge out of the darkness...

My old 'Swandri' bush jacket. There. Albeit only half of it, the rest long eaten by moths. But there nonetheless...

The seat. Oh yes, the seat. The tear in it still there. The seat reminds me of Tom. The owner of our local garage, he used to let Mum slowly pay off the bills for our car warrant checks. And he'd put that seat in for me, free of charge, one Saturday

afternoon... Funny, now I remember: I was heading to Tom's garage for a warrant on the Landrover, *that* day. I was booked in for 1.30pm.

Never made it...

Tom, sadly, is no longer here. He passed several years after I went to prison. But not before responding to media enquiries with a deep, real, empathetic account of me.

I sat back in the seat, began to ponder, then remembered I just needed to be in the moment. To trust the process...

I glanced up. There looked to be some notes, written on the frame above the windscreen. *'What on earth is that?'* I thought. Tried to fold the sun-visor out of the way to see better, but couldn't: it was rusted, seized in place. Peering in at an angle, I was able to make out a series of numbers, an arrow, then another set of numbers. And, off to the side of them, '\$30.' I sat and thought... Then looked at the speedo. Then remembered my seventeen year old self, taking note of how far I could get on a tank of gas. And, you know, the main reason I remembered is that I still do it, to this day. Only difference is that, now, I take a photo of the speedo with my smartphone. How some things change, some don't? It used to cost \$30 to fill the Landrover's tank. Fancy that...

What's that sitting on the dashboard...? Leaning forward, reaching across to the passenger's side... Pulling, unfolding, tearing... Ah, yes, an old Hunting permit, granting my seventeen-year-old self access to a local Government Forest. The pages almost completely moulded into one hardened mass of cardboard. But still legible, just. The memories emerging are a bit like that too – only faintly recognisable, coming forth out of the murky depths of time to linger only a moment... It's like that permit, the bush shirt, even the Landrover itself, have all held on just long enough for me to be able to come home and re-see, re-connect, with them. To be able to part ways, for the final

time, *willingly*, with a sense of peace and process... A consciousness envelops me, an appreciation that this is such a unique time, being able to revisit my past in a way most never can. I must embrace it fully and absorb the memories because I suspect that, as the disintegration of the artefacts becomes complete, and as the rigours of daily life increasingly occupy my body, many of those connections to the past will disappear forever.

After maybe an hour or so, I was ready. Mum wandered down, then Nan and Tim: this was very much a family affair. It only took a moment to tether the two Landrovers' together. I drove Hazel, and Mum steered the old one. Tim gave directions, and Nan filmed. Yes, filmed – like I said just before, I'm aware that this special moment will, eventually, become lost in time. So I want a record of it, something that will preserve it beyond the limitations and subjectivity of the human mind.

I don't know how to narrate such an embodied, out-of-it moment. In short, with a thump, as the flat-tired Landrover rolled down over the edge of the container, it was out. I got out, and we swapped places. I'm very guarded as to who gets to drive Hazel. But Mum deserved to be able to – our relationship was very strained during my childhood, right up until I went away. And she lost and suffered, albeit in differing ways, every bit as much as me during my imprisonment. It is thus that, in doing this today, I'm communicating to Mum that it is okay, that although we are pulling out the past, we are not captive to it anymore. Instead, we are here, everywhere, connecting, together.

And in spite of all that has been...

Steering the Landrover, as Mum slowly towed it over to the shed, I spoke quietly, to myself, to those I've hurt, to God. And something shifted in me. I felt... Hmm, I'm not exactly sure. But I felt okay, which surprised me a bit. Back in prison,

many a day was spent thinking about how life could have been. And I'd wondered if a terrible sense of loss, loss of that potential life, would be waiting for me inside the container. Instead, right now, there is a... a peace. And, if I work hard enough to feel it, a sense of justice, that I have done, and am doing, right by myself and others. I'm engaging in a process of healing and, together, with my family, today, we are taking a significant step in that journey.

A week or so has passed since we got the Landrover out. In that time, I've not been writing. I tried, but just couldn't. Struggling within that, I had to bring myself back to the heart of my epistemology, to an understanding that I cannot write about my body's movements before those movements have occurred. I shake my head at that – even now, nearly seven years after I began this doctoral journey, it still requires heavy lifting to be able to move, in deep tune, with the knowledge principles informing my research. Perhaps, though, the lifting is of such a magnitude because those principles are so much a part of my life course now. Certainly, they guide my life in so many ways, and provide such a kaleidoscope through which I can move, and live. Through them, I have been unpacking and troubling a belief I have long had, that opening the container would fulfill a goal of having come full-circle. Reflecting, staying, even at this late hour, with those who helped me embrace my methodology (*Yes, Lisa, I've been near you all this time*), I see, now, that I have not come full-circle at all. To have made such a movement would have meant returning to where, and who, I was then. And that, most certainly, is not what is happening here. Rather, a visceral process of transformation, for one and all, is underway...

Just the other day, something Mum said communicated to me, yet again, the movement that has, and is, taking place. We'd been talking about, and reflecting on, the

old green Landrover. It had never been given a name. All the other Landrovers I've owned, including the one I've just finished restoring, have been named. But, and I'm not sure why, I could never think of one for that old green truck. And, even now, home and reunited with it, all these years later, I still couldn't think of one. I pondered the meaning of that. Mum did too, it seems, because, a few days before she was due to fly home, she popped her head into my room and said she knew the Landrover's name...

Boy.

Somewhat appropriately given their longstanding significance to my self, the Landrovers are helping me understand the extent of my becoming. Once we'd towed Boy to the shed, I parked him and Hazel side by side. Old and new, then and now... In so doing, I am able to see so many things about myself, and about life. Looking at the similarities between them, I can see that I am still me – prison didn't win. I can also see, however, that there are parts that have changed. There are new threads and tunes... For example, where once I went driving on my own, wandering, I now drive with purpose, and with Hope... Then there are the mechanical differences between the two vehicles... In them I see that I am more patient now, more particular. It might be said that these changes are simply the product of age and maturity – a forty year old self having blossomed from its seventeen year old, boyish body. But, no; my hunch is that, had I spent my life outside, I'd be a very different person to now. More than likely, I'd have become ensconced in an inherently positive, 'She'll be right,' 'all will be well,' attitude. I'd have been content with just getting things done and so, amongst other things, would not have been so careful in my restoration of Hazel. Of course, I haven't spent my life outside, and so, for reasons previously discussed, it would not be wise to adopt relaxed or casual attitudes. No, the conditions governing an ex-con's life do not permit such freedoms. Awareness of that can be a struggle – especially when I

encounter barriers due to my past. The pain and anxiety of them leads, every so often, into contemplation of how life could have been. But when I feel myself starting to slip into doubtful musings, I look toward the two Landrovers. Boy, and Hazel. Each built at opposite ends of a life, they provide tangible representations of the person that was, and is, at each end. In that, they help reassure me. Indeed, they remind me that I haven't always been a convict. And they show me that, no matter what the world may sometimes say, I'm not one anymore...

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