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Maneuverings: The Prisoner's Tattoo as Signifying Practice

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ABSTRACT

Maneuverings: The Prisoner's Tattoo as Signifying Practice

Elizabeth P. Seaton

This thesis examines the prisoner's tattoo as a signifying practice which subverts and maneuvers through the normative discourses and meanings of society. It considers the prisoner's tattoo as a polysemous text which shapes and positions the prisoner, while always itself remaining in process; generating a multitude of diverse meanings which break with the fixity or unity of society's normative meanings.

Towards this end, the thesis examines the nature of society's normative discourses and of how they interpret meaning for individuals. It then inspects the prison as a specific institution whose punitive practices are resolutely caught up and maintained by these discourses and meanings. The positioning of the prisoner within these discourses and these practices is then identified with the intent of demonstrating how the prisoner's tattoo acts as a signifying practice which breaks with this positioning.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Why does the prisoner tattoo his body? What is the nature of this colorful imagery etched across the skin, these epidermic inscriptions which move so incongruously against the closed and grey architecture of the prison. Why, when the public spectacle of physical punishment has been abolished for the sober and hidden operation of the penal institution, do these infamous marks reappear on the body? Why this return to pain which the needle imparts and makes pleasurable to the eye?

All of these marks signify; some tell a story of lost love or announce a membership. But many other tattoos of the prisoner are simply inscriptions, not yet a meaningful symbolic, " not yet despotic, not serving oral speech" (Lingus, 1983: 24). This is inscription without transcription; without the imitation of language. These are marks not yet subordinated by the logic of grammar, yet marks which are of a presence that remains expression. These are the collages of color and line which descend from the prisoner's crown, sheilding his eyes from the figuration of his face,

extending down his neck, heeding to no borders.

Here there is movement.

Alphonso Lingus writes:

> It belongs to the nature of graffiti not to pay heed to borders, to spread right over obstacles, to make walls of different angles, doors, openings, all the support of one inscription that pursues itself. The inscription extends the erotogenic surface (1983:37).

The tattoo of the prisoner also ignores borders. Within our culture, the tattoo is still largely taboo, a 'non-thing' which refuses to bow to taxonomic contraint. It defies the most obvious catagories: it is niether wholly natural nor wholly civilized, niether all skin nor all sign. Instead it inhabits the interstices inbetween. This tattoo is ambiguous.

It is the ambiguous which "stands between the catagories of an existing classification system ... which cannot be defined in terms of any given catagory ... which belongs to more than one domain at a time" (Stewart, 1979:61). Rather than obey the catagories of meaning, the prisoner's tattoo confuses and mixes them, creating a potion of its own which consists of bricolage, rather than a purity of type. Hence society's condemnation of the tattoo as taboo. Taboos are "unclean", matter out of place, "imperfect members of their class, or whose class confounds the general scheme of the world" (Douglas, 1966:55). Is it not suprising then that the prisoner should mark himself with the tattoo? For the prisoner is taboo too, the deviant banished from society,

who nevertheless serves society's normative function in his banishment. Outcast from the body of society, he is as if the outcasts of our very bodies; "those exudations of the human body that mediate between self and non-self, the magical outcast ingredients of witch's brews such as feces, urine, semen, menstrual blood, nail parings and spittle" (Harpham, 1982: 4). Fascinating and yet horrifying, the prisoner and his tattoo are as alien beings, inhabiting the interstices between society's limits.

And yet this presence between limits is not simply a vague and inconcious suspension without consequence. The prisoner does not tattoo his body out of a resignation to his predicament, as if a powerless dissent was all he could ever wish for. Instead, his tattooed body is an attempt at alteration or change, for while it floats and slides between society's limits, refusing to be caught within its boundaries, it also punctures these limits, fracturing the frames of knowledge and discourse which power operates from. There is a subtle violence within this tattoo which attempts to match and subvert the potential violence invested within the symbolic powers of society. The prisoner's tattoo is a deliberate testing of the salience of society's limits, of the walls which not only physically imprison, but those walls which define, clasify and control. It attempts to make chaos out of the symbolic order, to subvert its manifest meanings and to confound its cherished catagories.

There are a number of institutional discourses and practices which lay claim to and inscribe themselves upon the prisoner's body. And yet it is the prisoner's body which is located as the site for denying and subverting these discourses and practices. His body stands at the nexus between the competing discourses of the prison, the law, and a 'democratic and free' society, and it is only fitting that his inscriptions of dissent and resistance should appear on this site. One may consider his marked or 'written' body as the utterance of a discourse which has not yet departed from the grounded site of the corporeal, but which at the same time enters into a process of substitution and transference. In this sense the marked body may be designated as an oxymoron; a figure which stands at the equator of the contradictory discourses and practices which compete for control of the body. For the inscribed body cannot ever be fully subsumed into that ideology of representation which supports society's institutions of power. It "cannot be brought to the level of illusionist transparency" (Thevoz, 1984: 8). The marked body of the prisoner utilizes its own skills of conduct: instead of yeilding to a prescribed function, its images stand upright, permanently inscribed and unswaying in the face of what they may be <u>supposed</u> to represent. It constantly recalls representation to its own corporiety, to its own original and initial epicentre - the body itself.

This thesis attempts to examine a practice of marking the body, the tattoos of male prisoners, as a "movement that eludes the dominant means of identification, that produces [its] own referential axis (Guattari, 1984: 269). For the tattoos of the prisoner are essentially the marks of a 'deviant' culture, applied defiantly to a surface which our culture considers taboo. They serve to symptomize and symbolize the contradictions and tensions inherent within the power apparatus of the prison in particular, and society in general. As such, the tattoos of the prisoner act as "strategies for control". These marks upon the body encompass a semiology which both enlightens one to the contradictory nature of discourses and apparatuses of power, and which poses a particular practice of resistance against them. These marks upon the body are an important symbolic strategy in which the prisoner makes the unseen seen, and makes power his own.

Many methodologies for studying the prisoner's tattoo can be justified. Communications and social theory, semiotics, aesthetics, and cultural studies all contribute interesting perspectives by which the tattoo can be considered. But even if the study is confined to these five, one still confronts an array of possibilities. The tattoo may be the stigmatic mark of the convict, or a mark which denies stigmatic meaning. It may harken back to the primitive, or impale the spectator on the present moment,

drawing one into the prisoner's experience of contradiction. It may be irony, satire, parody or pathos. All of these tributary ideas may be valid, but they don't necessarily funnel into one cohesive statement or pronouncement about the prisoner's tattoo.

Because one action of the prisoner's tattoo is to draw the spectator into gaps of ambiguity, its very action is often confused and incoherent. For this reason, this thesis does not attempt to locate a unified structure beneath the spectacular style of the prisoner's tattoo, but rather endeavors to bring a multiplicity of possible interpretations to the fore. For the prisoner's tattoo stands as a "species of confusion"; an "obstacle to structured thought" (Harpham, 1982: 56), which contorts logical or ontological categories and displaces hierarchy. And for this reason, it will not submit to an orderly and progressive interpretation which would wind the prisoner's tattoo up into a neat conclusion after subjecting it to analysis. The very action of the tattoo escapes categorization.

In view of the multiple and polysemous nature of the tattoo, this thesis presents the reader with several examples of its action. The examples are limited; necessitated out of restrictions of space and time. But the examples chosen are by no means meant to be exemplary examples. They are meant as perhaps merely instances which hopefully show the myriad qualities which may be attached to

the tattoo. By no means do the limited examples here do justice to the plethora of possible interpretations by which the tattoo can be viewed.

If any one thing can perhaps be attributed to providing the practices and assumptions which may determine the prisoner's tattoo, it is society. For society establishes the conditions of order and coherence, and the discourses and practices which specify who we are and what we meant to be. In order to fully comprehend how the prisoner's tattoo subverts and resists institutional discourses and practices, one must first understand how and why these discourses are constructed, and how they impinge upon and penetrate all of our bodies, prisoner or not. This questioning is to arrive at the very locus of meaning itself; of how meaning, our construction of it and our obedience to it, locates and positions us all. We must first come to understand the nature of society's fictive and constructed limits; of the meaning contained and the power invested within them, and the positioning and positions which these limits demand. This is the intent of the following chapter.

Chapter Three narrows the previous chapter's discussion of power, knowledge and meaning to the specific site of the prison. Using primarily Foucauldian descriptions, this chapter examines the intrinsic relationship between the prison and disciplinary society. It also brings to light the specific historical and societal discourses which acts to

support the institution of the prison and how these discourses extend throughout society, creating in Foucault's words, "the carceral continuum".

Chapter Four examines the prisoner's experience of incarceration, attempting to ground the previous theoretical representations of disciplinary society into the concrete realm of the prison. Of particular emphasis in this chapter is the manner in which the prison attempts to delimit the social communication of the prisoner in order to assure its primacy of meaning and experience. Towards this end, descriptions of this specific mechanism of control are spoken as much as is possible, from the prisoner's own interpretations, rather from abstract, theoretical propositions.

Chapter Five is the most speculative. It attempts to explore the range of the prisoner's tattoo from its position within the prison culture, and how it is used by this culture to break from the positioning of the prison. The chapter looks at the signifying practice of the tattoo, and of what this signifying practice means to society and to the prisoner. It outlines several examples of how the tattoo 'works' for the prisoner in repudiating and confusing those meanings which imprison him. Each of these examples are intended to serve as arguments for the signifying practice of the tattoo, but no one of them is prioritized over the other.

This thesis thus spirals in from a general description of the power of meaning in society to the prisoner's specific practice of subverting meaning. In one sense, this movement attempts to be faithful to its subject, for the prisoner's tattoo also calls attention to meaning, to its inconguities and contradictions, and then deconstructs meaning. It moves from that which is confined and enclosed to an expression of non-closure, of a floating within the margins of ambivalence, spiraling in and out among society's meanings.

Chapter Two

Censorous Limits: The Power of Positioning

> There are many kinds of eyes. Even the Sphinx has eyes. And consequently there are many kinds of truths, and consequently there is no truth.
>
> F. Nietzsche
> The Will to Power

Society has its limits. Everywhere there are imperfectly structured thresholds which tenuously demarcate territories of thought and action. Like the maps of ancient cartographers whose drawings depict the boundaries of the known world against a vast unknown teeming with grotesque beasts, our constructed and fictive Mason-Dixon lines act in much the same manner. The boundaries run through and slice the whole; separating one side from the other and identifying both as opposites. In identifying what has been rejected and excluded on one side (the unknown world, the prison), the boundaries thus establish what is acceptable within the other, (the known world, the "land of the free"). Nothing "real", "true" or tangible lies on either side of the boundary line; both lie vacant until one side is occupied at the direction of the other. The "real" side can only be made conceivable with the complicity of the "false" side, the presence with the absence, human order with natural chaos. These binary oppositions which we have constructed signify

conflict, but as Heidegger tells us, "The conflict is not a rift as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other " (Heidegger, 1971: 63). Such is the manner in which meaning and sense is conferred upon reality: by asserting what it is not, the world thus asserts what it is.

Philip Daudi writes:

> The face of the world is illegible. So too is the face of power. The legibility of the face is made possible by its reverse image - the invisible in the visible. The former constitutes the basis for the latter (1982: 276).

Thus we stand enclosed within an invented binary world, a "world structured like a cognitive arena" (Levin, 1986: 32), where seemingly there is no perception without the reverse image of the mirror. Somewhere within this map of contradictions, power lies; the power which confers meaning by use of this "epistomology of separation and difference"[1] the logic by which the production of understanding, knowledge and culture is governed. This power has no center; instead it invests itself in meaning and discourse, in the representation of what shall be and what shall not be. Power draws the map; the map which acts as the surface structure for institutions of rationalism and their correlatives -- abstraction, specialization, fragmentation, catagorization -- and for the social institution of language, whose laws organize the economy of meaning into discourse, marking the outer limits of thought and experience for society, those

rational limits beyound which meaning and experience dissolve into nothingness.

In drawing the map, the immediate and physical world which lends no totalizing perspective is abandoned for an abstract level on which "truth contradicts falsehood, and meaning is confined to the immaterial" (Harpham, 1982: 54). From this autonomous site, meaning is charted: distinctions are defined, categories are constructed, and disciplinary frontiers are set up in an assertion of dualist values; an assertion of what is properly the inside and what is properly the invader outside. Here boundaries are well-defined and identities clearly distinguished, and yet these boundaries are but semantical metaphors, convenient fictions from which we may know the world by separating ourselves from it. It is this distance which objectifies and masters our meanings and hence our reality. In removing ourselves from the world we represent it: it is ours to draw and ours to control. But we all don't get to draw the map, certainly the prisoner is meant to have little hand in it; that task has already been done or is being done by someone or something else. "The establishment of meanings, of what is to be understood, has to remain the business of authority" (Guattari, 1984: 88). Hence, power manifests and invests itself within the order of representation, the recreation of a world wherein, "we are coded by the false appearance of antinomic reciprocities between nature and culture" (Kroker, 1986: 58), between true

and false, between the bad and the good, between the prisoner and the Just.

Caught within the thought-cage: Powers of categorization

> A frame is in essence constructed and therefore fragile, this is the essence or the truth of the frame.
> Jacques Derrida
> 'The Parergon'

But we can conceive of the power invested within this logic of separation and difference and the visual representation of meaning in other than abstract terms. An imagination may conjure up the image of a world positioned as spectacle, packed tight with a multiplicity of varying frames and categories, but the eyes may also see these objectifying frames and categories for themselves. Within the plastic arts -- paradoxically a 'discipline' wherein sanctioned subjectivities may flow and inflame -- the rectangular frame has long proclaimed itself as an arbitrary convention. The frame's power lies in its construction of each work of art as an autonomous object, announcing its separateness and individualism, and hence its alienation, from the world at large. In marking off the boundaries of a work of art, the frame also demarcates a formal schism between the participant and the work,[1] preventing the active participation between the two which could possibly yeild to the creation of "intensive multiplicities"[2] of meaning. Instead, by removing the

work from the temporal and spacial specificity of its site, and hence the participant's site, the frame articulates a logic of separation and difference, and demands that any understanding or interpretation of the work must stem from a "pre-established area of exclusive bi-polar values" (Guattari, 1984: 105). Hence, the frame demands that the work of art become as object, within the realm of the abstract, and the participant become spectator/subject, within the realm of the concrete. This is the function (and the power) of representation and its accompanying frames: to render impotent connections between a multiplicity of meanings and expressions which normally overlap and flow onto one another. The frame fixes these fluxes of meaning by means of separation: the work of art is placed upon an autonomous level, removed from the ground which the spectator stands upon[3]. In sculpture, this fictive and constructed separation resides within the base or pedestal supporting the piece, lifting it from the earth in opposition to the space of the spectator. "The very axis of verticality declares the apartness of the sculpture's representational field from the world of actuality" (Krauss, 1983: 73).

Society's institutions answer to this logic of representation. Whether insects under a microscope or planets through a telescope, indeed for all beings, social or natural, the world is perceived and made known from a distance. Here there is no visibility without the separation

of the watcher from the watched; no representation without the imposition of a frame. In these circumstances, within art and science, within all of our institutional contexts, there are no known things other than represented things; that is, entities which have been exempted from their own substances, rendered as autonomous fragments which can be manipulated and controlled. The categorization, objectification and distance which our constructed frames imply, be they artistic, scientific or carceral, apprehend people and things as nothing but that type which the frame defines. Categorization bestows an ontological and total status upon humans and things - a typification which objectifies but a segment of the whole self. Its goal is to render whatever caught within its limits as unidimensional.

And yet the substances of life are always in flux, always embodying a kinetics of motion which refuses to be held stationary. This life is formless, ambivalent and elusive; based upon a cyclical time which can't be caught. It is full of dirt, disorder and decay, as well as beauty. It is a world which is constantly 'becoming'[4]; where the difference between nature and culture, the grotesque and the sublime, true and false, inside and outside, are not placed as fixed abstractions, but are constantly in flux as befitting a union of opposites. The lines of demarcation between the two are forever shifting, the mirrors forever tilting to accomadate the reverse image.

We have constructed a symbolic universe in order to keep the chaotic flux of life at bay. It polices and disciplines all the "intensive multiplicites" of a perplexing and complex world. Classifying, categorizing and controlling them, it regiments them under an aegis of strict definition and specified objectification. Our fictive and constructed universe reduces the myriad qualities of a life constantly in flux to a stable and conventional order where everything and everyone has a proper place. The frames we construct reassure us that what is caught inside corresponds to our assumptions of orderliness and can be rationally tested. Apples are not to be confused with oranges and the square will not fit inside the circle. The world of flux shall be made to mean, to be. And, "To impose upon becoming the character of being, that is the supreme will to power" (Nietzsche, 1968: 330).

Reductive visions: The power of language

In a world of flux, language is one mechanism of fixity, which occupies a place of primacy in the framing of symbolic systems. It is the architect which designs and places becoming, and within whose dwelling we define and name our reality. Language follows the functioning of the semiotic of representation, in that it works from the same procedure of distancing and enclosure, but it also extends

further. Like the frame, language marks off and borders the fluxes, the "intensive multiplicities" of a world in becoming, yet it does so, as Felix Guattari explains:

> by means of a limited collection of discrete 'digitalized' signs -- and retaining only fluxes of information that can be decoded. The role of the sign machine is to produce, in Hjelmslev's terms, 'semiotically formed substances', that is to say strata of expression which form connection between the two domains formalized at the level of expression and that of content; for linguistic analysts, this operation produces an effect of signification. The totality of intensive reality is then 'processed' by the formalizing duo, signifier/signified; the totality of fluxes is held in the 'snapshot' of signification which places an object facing a subject; the movement of desire is sterilized by a relationship of representation; the image becomes the memory of a reality made impotent, and its immobilization establishes the world of dominant significations and received ideas (1984: 87-88).

And yet signification does not act as a convivial bridge upon which the subject described (the signified) and that which describes it (the signifier) connect and co-join to form meaning. There is no rendezvous between the ground of actuality and the sign, no direct contact of the material with the semiotic. In fact, the signified has already been ordered into the dominant reality; its "intensive multiplicites" have already been bordered off and emptied by a formal representation. There is then only the "signifying semiotic" which "sustains the illusion that a level of the 'signified' exists in order to delay, or interfere with, or even prevent a direct conjunction between sign machines and real machines" (Guattari, 1984: 91). It is signification which conceals the erudite incongruity between content and

form and between signified and signifier, and which masks the fabricated nature of social reality.

Signification then, operates from a relation of representation to representation; a constant routine of redundancy which enables anyone to see any sign as identical to any representation. By first reducing all the intensities of a life in flux to conform to a represented version of itself, and then demanding that this representation conform to the signifier, "whose despotic ambition is to put everything that could represent it through a process of repetition that always brings it back to itself" (Guattari, 1984: 92), the intensities are controlled, emptied and flattened. These intensities can now only be addressed from a distance, "connoted as having to remain outside the semiotic sphere, which means, in the last resort, outside the political sphere" (ibid).

This is language - a system of signs which are detached from the real and which function only by operating as an "autonomous semiological substance". By operating at an autonomous and distanced level, by claiming the power to objectively describe, language may implicitly sanction norms, codes to follow and rules to abide. It proclaims itself as universal: that all must fall under its direction; that all symbolic expressions will be made translatable beneath its explanatory net. All expressions must conform to its constructed world of dominant significations.

Thus we may understand the primacy of language as both the expression of meaning and the logic by which the production and reproduction of meanings is governed. While it would be "naive... or brash to assert that 'language as a whole' is the exclusive determinant of perception" (Levin, 1986: 28), we can conceive of the far-reaching political power invested in language in its capacity to produce meaning via a formalization and separation of the "intensive fluxes" of expression. With language, the polymorphous and multiple characteristics of symbolic expression become reduced to an annotation, in which one signifier may act as the priviledged sign for an ontological presence. Naturally, such a reduction entails a hierarchy of meanings, for those meanings which refuse to be indexed or catalogued are either treated as minors or are excluded from the confines of language, left on their own to flounder. Similarily, this hierarchy implies a subjection to meanings which may or may not be meaningful to us. Hence, the so-called "despotism of the signifier". The capacity to translate experience into discourse, to reduce a myriad of meanings and expressions into an isolated and autonomous economy of signs is a very powerful one indeed. Language is both beautiful and creative, it is those important words wherein we may express our subjectivities in this world, but it is also those authoritative words which can be spoken from the oppressor's point of view rather than our own; it is also

an intrinsic element in the political and ideological power of rulers. As Guattari tells us, "This operation of controlling all the intensive multiplicities constitutes the first act of political violence. The relation between the signifier and the signified (which Peirce sees as conventional, Saussure as arbitrary) is at root merely the expression of authority by means of signs" (1984: 88). Signification, like the frame, appears to be arbitrary only because "power manifests itself arbitrarily".

It is not easy to ignore or negate one's involvement within the political domain of signification and representation. We are all "subjects imprisoned in a signifying ghetto" (Guattari, 1984: 92), born into a world of voices that never cease to bend the ear and signs that never cease to puncture the eye. Nietzsche has told us that "our being is the product of classification"; from the first recognition of the object within the frame; from the first gaze at the reverse image. Language, like the mirror in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, stands as the threshold which demarcates the real from the unreal, and the known from the unknown. The meaning of things -- tree, book, pipe -- is not resolved by their bearing to any physical ground of the real, but by an immaterial system of language which is directed by rules of likeness and difference: "This is not a pipe"; I am a woman because I am not a man. To question these definitions, to attempt to draw attention to their

ambiguous and contradictory nature, to point out the political issues at stake, or to simply refuse to operate under dominant significations is to be seen as either actively rejecting the Law, or to be condemned as deficient and dismissed as nonsensical. To return once more to Guattari:

> Tools of expression are provided for those who use them in the same way as picks and spades are handed out to prisoners. The pens and exercise books given to schoolchildren are tools of production, and teaching is programmed to produce only a certain type of significations. There can be no escape. The first commandment of the law, of which no one may plead ignorance, is based above all on the need for everyone to realize the importance of dominant significations. All the intensities of desire must be subject to the rule of the formalizing duo, expression and content, as elaborated in the context of prevailing production relations. Apart from madness and other escapes from the meaningless of the system that is. (1984: 88).

An understanding of and compliance to language is essential for anyone to exist "normally" within our society. In this manner, language becomes a cardinal constituent of the realities of everyday life and of the customary comprehension of this reality. Language is normative; it specializes and directs the unfolding expressions of subjectivity into the stable enviroment of the social order. It also maintains and transmits these expressions as objectively available to others, linguistically integrating subjective experiences into the social reality. All these subjective experiences, now made objective and available to others, are frequently repeated, shared and cast into a pattern, they become habitualized and incorporated into a

general body of knowledge, or "dominant significations". They become institutionalized; typified meanings that require a minimum of reflection or analysis.

Society is in fact an assembly of institutions. By their very nature, these institutions embody habitualization, historicity and control. The habitualization of shared meanings of which I just spoke is not created out of thin air, but is built up in the course of a shared history. "Institutions always have a history, of which they are the products" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 54). It is impossible to understand an institution sufficiently without an understanding of the historical context in which it was produced and continues to produce itself. In a later section of this thesis I shall be examining the specific historical process of the prison, but for the moment I wish to stress the controlling characteristics inherent within institutionalization. As Berger and Luckmann point out, "To say that a segment of human activity is institutionalized is already to say that this segment of human activity has been subsumed under social control" (1967: 55). It is to the social control manifested by institutions that I shall now turn, in an examination of the constructed realities or truths of institutions and how these realities confront the individual as coercive and external facts. In this manner, it is hoped that the particular positionings, discourses and histories experienced by prisoners in regards to the

institution of the prison will be better understood.

Established rhythms: The power of institutions

"This is how things are done here". A world so regarded appears as given, unchangeable and self-evident. It is an institutional world, experienced as an objective and external reality, an undeniable fact.

It is important to bear in mind that despite this objectivity that marks the institutional world, it does not acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produces it. The relationship between human beings and their constructed institutions is a dialectical one, in that each acts upon the other. There are three moments in this dialectical process, each one corressponding to an essential disposition of the social world. "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Human beings are social products". (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 61). An analysis of the social order that does not include all three of these moments would be misleading.

These three moments are of importance when we consider the prisoner's relationship to institutions, particularly the institutions of the law and the prison. While an institution may appear immutable and tenacious, it is only as strong as people believe it to be. This is why the discourses and practices produced by an institution are of crucial

importance to its survival. The discourses and practices locate and incorporate each individual's personal biography into the larger historical chronicle of society. They embody meanings and reproduce meanings. For the male criminal, prisoner or released prisoner, this positioning is problematic, for while society stands as an objective reality for him, by virtue of the fact that he is a social being, it also designates him as a social product which is a threat to the orderly functioning of society. This incorporation/exclusion is at the very heart of an institution's existence. In order to justify, to legitimate its presence, the institution must pose itself as an irrefutable necessity: prisons are needed to reform bad people back into being good people and the law shall attempt to determine who is good and who is bad. The institution operates from the necessity to know, and the necessity to act or protect against something. Gradually, what is protected against becomes as known and as real as society itself. The irrefutable necessities become irrefutable `truths'. Prisons keep bad people away from good people. The law knows who is good and who is bad.

We are born into a world which has a seemingly objective history, for it is constituted out of institutions which both preceed and overtake our individual lives. Taking on the nature of historical and objective certainties by means of their discourses and practices, the institutions

confront us as undeniable and coercive facts. They become as real and as true as our very selves. We may attempt to evade or deny them, but by the sheer force of their facticity, the institutions prevail. As our very natures are constructed out of an agglomeration of institutions, we find it extremely difficult to refute these same institutions, for to refute them would be as to refute our very selves. But for the prisoner, to not refute these seemingly immutable truths is also to refute his very being as a sovereign individual within society. He must somehow maneuver around the institutional discourses which attempt to pin him and place him on display as example. He must attempt to either alter the immutable truths, the legitimations, of these institutions, or he must embrace his status as prisoner, and hence unconditionally support those same institutions which imprison him.

For its part, the institution must interpret its meaning by way of legitimating formulas in order to evade and resist the dissenting voices which may shake its tenuous foundations. It must articulate discourses and practices which are consistent and comprehensive and which correspond to other institutions within the social order. The priority of its definitions is of utmost concern, for any deviance away from the institutional definition or any attempt at redefinition is extremely hazardous to the authority and functioning of the institution. People must understand,

accept and follow the conduct prescribed by institutional meanings. While the "establishment of meanings remains the business of authority", this authority must rest upon socialization rather than coercion. The proper conduct fitting to institutionalized meanings must be taught and occur "naturally" rather than be made to occur by coercive measures, for the institution would be taxed and its tenous foundations would soon give way if it had to rely upon force and compulsion to institute its meanings. Force and compulsion by their very nature deny the "naturalness" of institutional meanings. Hence, any outright coercive measures that are applied are done so economically and discriminately. "The more, on the level of meaning, conduct is taken for granted, the more possible alternatives to the institutional `programs' will recede, and the more predictable and controlled conduct will be " (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 62).

We are all, in a sense, "manufactured" by institutions to satisfy the orderly demands of society, and the prisoner here is certainly no exception. Yet, in that he is one individual who suffers the coercive application of society's meanings, he stands as an example to all of us. The prisoner functions as the representative, the typification, of the threat of deviance from the social order; he is the differentiator, the causal break. In not learning society's lessons properly, in resisting or deviating from the social

conduct prescribed by the dominant significations of a capitalist society, he is treated with the `last resort'. He is imprisoned and exiled. Paradoxically, in having to be dealt with by the `last resort', he stands as both a testimony to the tenuous nature of society's institutionalized meanings, and as proof to the tenacity of those meanings, for his very status as prisoner is indispensible to the legitimation of the `logic' of institutions such as the prison. Thus we are all intimidated by images of the physical doom that follows from deviating from society's laws. We are persuaded not to do so by the pragmatic benefits of compliance and our own horrors of imprisonment. Furthermore, we are offered up a whole body of discourses which attest to the knowledge, the `scientific proof', of the folly and the wickedness of the type of people who deviate from society's laws.

It is interesting to note here exactly who is singled out as a typification or representation of the deviant, specifically the `deviant' found within Canada's prisons. Given that within the Canadian legal system no more than 10% of the prison population is accounted for by mandatory sentencing laws[5], the remaining 90% of offenders are imprisoned in circumstances in which the judges not only had the legal option of not sending them to prison, but also had wide discretion as to the actual length of sentence. This points to a definite process of designation on the part of

the judges. As proof of point, John Hogarth's study of the sentencing behavior of Ontario magistrates (Hogarth, 1971), found that the length of a prison sentence can be predicted five times more accurately by knowing something about the judge and nothing about the case, than by knowing everything about the case and nothing about the judge. Futhermore, when one considers that the Canadian prison population is : 1) markedly overrepresented by age groups 18-29; 2) underrepresented by those in high status occupations; and 3) overrepresented by a factor of one to six by Native people, we are faced with the actuality that prisoners are in fact selected from a pool of eligible behaviors, and that this selection is "determined at least as much by who one is as the particular law one has been found guilty of breaking" (Mandel, 1983: 23). Law professor Micheal Mandel finds that the most important aspect in regards to who one is, is the extent to which he or she has broken laws in the past, together with his or her occupational or employment status. And yet, when we consider the underrepresentation of women in proportion to men within our prisons, we are forced to discard any theory of incarceration which is based solely on economic disadvantage. The fact of the matter is that there is a much more sophisticated and integrated selection process going on here than meets the eye, and what this selection process entails is an assessment of the offender's social values. It is not only the nature of the offense, but more

importantly, the nature of the offender as social being -- which to a great extent is dependent on how well he or she fufills a role within the productive apparatus of society -- which is at stake in determining a prison sentence. Crime in Canada is treated as a clash of social values rather than a clash of social interests. It is the individual's worth, rather than the crime committed, which is the prime factor for consideration, for judgement. A particularly striking case in point is that of former Solicitor General Francis Fox who was not prosecuted for forgery on the grounds that he had suffered enough. Not long after, he was re-elected and once again made a cabinet minister with a cabinet minister's salary. Who was responsible for the judgement of Francis Fox? Was it solely the presiding judge in question? Or did this judgement stem from the whole of Canadian society revenging the authority of the status quo? As Foucault has told us, "The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the `social-worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects it to his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his acheivements" (Foucault, 1977: 304). We all take part in recognizing, assessing and judging the `normal' from the `abnormal' and participate in the task of punishing and `rehabilitating' those that we find to digress from the

bounds of normality. We are all subject to the normative powers of institutions and in turn we subject these powers over others.

Thus, an entire legitimating and normalizing machinery is at work which does not find its center within the institution, but which is transmitted and communicated throughout the entire socius. It is maintained by people's reflection of the institution, a "reflective conciousness [which] superimposes the quality of logic on the institutional order" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 64). We reflect upon and confirm the necessity and truth of institutions such as the prison and the law because they conform to that stock of knowledge and language which we have been taught throughout our lives by an agglomeration of institutions and which have become crystallized meanings for us. The prisoner, like any other entity made distinct by a separation, an otherness from the status quo, becomes a reductive representation in accordance to the categories of the prevailing society, the prevailing order: that schema of dualist values which distinguishes good from evil, normal from deviant, etc. Hence, this "reflective conciousness" of which Berger and Luckmann speak is not the conciousness of the individual per se, but the conciousness of the socius which buries itself within the individual. As Michel Foucault tells us, "Prison continues . . . a work begun elsewhere, which the whole of society pursues on each

individual through innumerable mechanisms of discipline" (Foucault, 1977: 302-303).

As we have seen, the operation of institutions is nomic, or ordering in character. Experiences belonging to various sections of reality, all those "intensive multiplicites" which are in flux, are integrated into the same overarching canopy of meaning, a canopy which retains a paramount status by making all of these alternative and diverse subjective meanings knowable, intelligible and hence less terrifying. For it is the terror of the unnamable, the undefinable, the unknown, which poses the greatest threat to the social and institutional order. These unnamable "intensive multiplicities" of alternative meanings keep popping up, whispering in suggestive tones that perhaps this stable and orderly reality of ours is but an illusion, that at any given moment it may be swallowed up by our chaotic desires. In order to counter this threat of realities that are meaningless in its terms, the institutional order must incorporate and order these alternative and deviant realities into a cohesive unity. Thus we see the unintelligible enclaves of dreams and madness ordered by the institutional explanatory realm of psychoanalysis, and the deviance of criminals explained and ordered by the institutions of criminology, psychology and the law.

The fact that the institutional order is constantly faced with keeping the threatening choatic fluxes of life at

bay brings us back to recognize again the deeply embedded relationship between signification and power. "All stratifications of power produce and impose significations. In certain exceptional circumstances people manage to escape this world of dominant signification. . ." (Guattari, 1984: 84), but generally the legitimating function of institutions catches them up and fits them once again into the context of the institutional order. The one who escapes is brought back and rendered harmless by means of either one of two mechanisms: therapy or nihilism[6]. Therapy entails the development of conceptual and institutional machineries which account for and explain away such deviations, and hence maintain the primacy of the social world thus challenged. Thus, institutions such as psychoanalysis, penology and the law have developed a body of knowledge which includes a "theory of deviance, a diagnostic apparatus, and a conceptual system for the `cure of souls'" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 113). A conduct of deviance which challenges social reality and puts into question its cognitive and normative operating procedures is seen in need of therapy. In order for this therapy to `work', it must account for abberant behavior by means of a theory of deviance, a pathology which explains deviant behavior away (say, by positing poverty and social maladjustment as explanations for the preponderence of inmates from society's marginal groups). There must also be a diagnostic apparatus which specifies and

detects deviant behavior and ensures the prompt dispensation of preventive or corrective measures (such as the courts of law). Finally, there is the curative process itself (the prison).

In opposition to therapy which conceptually attempts to keep everyone within the confines of the social order, nihilation conceptually attempts to liquidate everything which stands outside the social order. Berger and Luckmann describe this procedure as a kind of reverse legitimation. "Legitimation maintains the reality of the socially constructed universe; nihilation denies the reality of whatever phenomena or interpretations of phenomena that do not fit into that universe" (1967: 114). Nihilation operates by assigning the deviant subject a negative ontological status, regardless of whether or not the subject has been or is subjected to a therapeutic intent. In this way the threat to social reality is neutralized, for the individual who deviates, by means of an inferior ontological status, is not to be taken seriously. The individual is made to be less than human; he is a barbarian, he is not civilized; he is a prisoner, and who should believe a prisoner?

The inference is that the deviant or the dissenter is not to be listened to on his or her own terms, via his or her own semiologies and actions. Instead, any statements made by the deviant must be translated into more proper terms; that is, terms deriving from those same dominant significations

that were dissented from or resisted in the first place. In this manner, deviant conceptions can be incorporated into the symbolic universe and thereby ultimately rendered harmless. Basically, the edges are taken off them and they are destroyed, or at least the power of their meanings is destroyed. Even the atheist is really deep down a believer. Even the most hardened criminal is guilty and repentative of his crimes.

The confrontation of alternative semiologies with the universe of dominant significations implies a problem of power. Berger and Luckmann tell us quite crudely that "He who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality" (1967: 109). Therapy and nihilation are two big sticks utilized by the symbolic universe in order to keep us all within its scope of meanings. The prison is another.

> There is no moment when we are not encircled by power formations. In our societies people must not gesticulate overmuch; we must each stay in our proper place, sign on the dotted line, recognize the signals we are given - and any failure may land us in prison or hospital (Guattari, 1984: 172).

It is within institutions such as the prison that the potency of dominant significations manifests itself most clearly. Similarily, it is within such institutions that the fundemental character which denies and repels the terror of alternate semiologies is revealed. For this reason, it is important to see how the prisoner functions within such a

situation of dominance and how he poses a fundamental threat to it. In examining the history of the prison and its dominant significations, discourses, and practices, we may better understand the specific capacity of prisoners to dystroy these significations, to open up language to otherwise different interpretations and to create different meaningful realities. We will perhaps understand better why the prisoner shifts and plays with alternative meanings, while the rest of us "each stay in our proper place, sign on the dotted line" and are content to let well enough alone. Furthermore, we will begin to understand the importance of the body within the prison; for it is both the site wherein power is acted upon and where the alternative semiologies of the prisoner are acted out. The body within prison is both instrument and intermediary; caught up in a system of discipline and constraint, yet the medium of dissention. In the following chapter I shall attempt to explain the history of the prison against a background of a history of bodies, in order to account not only for the political powers invested upon the body, but to examine the "revolts, at the level of the body, against the very body of the prison" (Foucault, 1977: 30).

Endnotes for Chapter Two

1 see Edward W. Said's "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" in The Anti-Aesthetic, Bay Press, Port Townsend, Washington, 1983. pg.155. Said speaks of "an epistomology of seperation and difference" when describing the intellectual center of the U.S. as based upon an "unquestioned ethic of objectivity and realism". The same, of course, could be said to describe how our meanings and realities are mapped and asserted as true, for the social sciences have traditionally patterned themselves after this epistomological construction.

2 see Felix Guattari's Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics, trans. Rosemary Sheed, Penguin Books, New York, 1984, pg.84.

3 much has been written on the objectifying function of the frame. see for example Reesa Greenburg's "Moma and Modernism: The Frame Game" in Parachute 42, 1986, pg.21-31. or Micheal Fried's "Shape and Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings" in Artforum Nov. 1966, pg.18-27.

4 see Friedrich Nietzsche's The Will to Power for his treatise on "being" and "becoming".

5 mandatory sentencing laws are those that are applied to an "unquestionably" serious crime, such as mass murder or the assasination of a top-ranking politician. They are a decision of legislature, and therefore require no discretion on the part of the judge.

6 this is Berger and Luckmann's definition of two strategies of power which act on behalf of the institution. See Berger and Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality pg. 112-117, where they go into greater detail on the specific conceptual machineries of universe maitenance.

Chapter Three

The Carceral Order

Near Kingston, Ontario, the train which travels along the Windsor Corridor from Toronto to Montreal passes Collins Bay Penitentiary. Onboard, eyes turn with a mixture of fascination and revulsion towards this forbidding stone structure, a gloomy castellated folly of turreted gun towers and fortified entrance gates. "Disneyland", one pasenger observes, and there are knowing and nervous laughs at this metaphorical reading. Indeed, the mock Romanesque edifice does look as though it may belong to a perverse Draconian amusement park to which no one wants to gain entrance. We, the respectable and conforming population pass by, and while the horrors of that place visually recede in the distance, they have been made more vivid in the mind.

Surely here, "the frames of our thinking have been translated into actual bricks and mortar" (Hebdige, 1979: 13). The design of Canada's penal institutions, be they Victorian or Modern, literally embody within material terms our ideological assumptions about what imprisonment is. They stand as the incarnate icons of society's disciplinary powers. The grand scale and formidible appearance of a bleak

Victorian `Big House' such as the Kingston Penitentiary, while now functionally anachronistic, still plays a crucial symbolic role in representing an image of the sociopathic criminal set against a normal and `just' population. While the high stone walls which surround it may have outlived their original function, their symbolic qualities continue to underscore the fact that this building is indeed a prison and one should behave accordingly. The structure still signifies `prison'; it reminds us and reaffirms to us our beliefs of what prison is, and should be.

Like an oratorical discourse, prison architecture is structured for maximum rhetorical effectiveness. It communicates messages which we, the audience, come to expect. It dramatizes a silent power to punish, and for the most part, evokes the proper response of fear and awe from us in regards to that punishment. In addressing this analogy between oratorical and architectural composition, Umberto Eco writes that, "architectural discourse starts with stated premises, builds upon them well known or readily acceptable `arguments', and thereby elicits a certain type of consent" (1980: 41). Thus, prison architecture articulates society's ethos and morals concerning carceral punishment and encourages its viewers to either change or reaffirm their behavior or beliefs. The Kingston Penitentiary, Collins Bay, or the new Special Handling Units are examples of a `moral architecture' par excellence: their signifieds carved in

stone or moulded in concrete speak to us of exclusion and segregation; their ritualized surroundings and austere entrances voice a terrifying language of alienation and powerlessness; and their high towers from which unknown eyes survey suggest the existence of an omnipresent divinity above, to which all must eventually repent.

> We are dealing again with the emmense abyss which separates the two worlds, and the apparent impossibility of throwing a bridge (brucke) from one bank to the other. Jacques Derrida 'The Parergon'

The ideological accomplishment of prison architecture is further aided by the fact that prisons are largely set off from major centres of the population, to be witnessed only occasionally by the majority of people in the course of their travels. We discern the prison from afar, secure in our knowledge which the discourse of the prison's facade has spoken to us. We all know about prisons: we have seen them from the outside and we have learnt about their insides from the second-hand media interpretations of politicians, the press, the cinema and television [1]. And as we pass by on the train, our beliefs and values are confirmed once more; our knowledge of this place is comfortably reaffirmed and strengthened.

And yet this 'knowledge' is but the knowledge of a myth, a fabricated reality, for as the prison is strategically placed beyond people, (and hence their questions), it appears as an immutable and portentous given, an awful but necessary

truth dressed in heavy stone. Since the halls of the prison are largely untrodden by and rarely visible to the scrutiny of outsiders, it is able to proclaim itself as a warehouse for dangerous deviants of all kinds without contradiction. And like a myth, it appears timeless: the prison has always existed and will forever exist as long as there are anti-social offenders who must be segregated from the rest of society. As Michel Foucault has written, "It is the detestable solution, which one seems unable to do without" (1977: 232). The prison has become `natural', and this self-evident character is so strong precisely because the prison is intrinsically bound to the `natural' workings of the social body. And it is only `natural' that the prison should sit at the edge of society, for it houses those bodies who have tred outside of the social pact.

Yet the symbolic communication of the prison rests upon a greater ensemble of society's ideological operations as a whole. One must be careful not to emphasize too greatly the disciplinary practice of the prison without paying careful attention to the ideological[2] parameters which proliferate past that practice. For in fact the prison does not sit at the `edge' of society -- it is located within the very heart and muscle of the socius. It is sinew and structure of a web of power and knowledge which permeates the depths of society, each strand of which catches each individual and each institution. We must recognize the

prison as a "micro-physics of power" (Foucault, 1977: 26); a strategy of political power which is "exercised rather than possessed" (ibid). It is not only the material substances of stone and mortar, nor the psychological deprevations of isolation and overcrowding which distinquishes the punitive power of the prison: there is no exemplary or definitive centre of power housed within its Panoptic eye. Instead, the prison stands at an intersection of relations of power and knowledge; which - while these may differ in form, organization, function or origin - overlap and interact to produce a certain institutionalized power which refers to a particular type of rationalized knowledge. The punitive power of the prison is one which punishes in secret. It cannot be seen from behind the prison's walls, nor heard from its barred windows, for it is a power which conceals itself behind the forces of knowledge. It is a masked power which speaks in the faceless voice of mute stone, a "bodiless reality" (Foucault), which, while shadowy and indefinate, nonetheless exists.

The Leviathan wears an iron grin: The prison and society

> It's no longer the criminal mentality which abounds, but the police mentality, and all the powers of detection, of prevention, of dissuasion, that spread their net of repressive anticipation over states and minds.
>
> Jean Baudrillard
> "The Child in the Bubble"

Several publications on the prison devote their opening remarks to a graphic account of the barbaric punishments which were once metted out upon the body of the condemned. The reader is treated to a host of diagrammic corporal torments: the convicted criminal is "flayed, impaled, crucified, burned, drawn and quatered, beheaded, strangled, buried alive, pressed to death, boiled, broken on the wheel, shot, starved, and blown out of the mouths of cannons" (Correctional Services Canada, 1985: 1). These horrific descriptions are then followed by an attibution to the way in which, with the growth of rationality and humanity, we have moved so gracefully away from the cruelties of public torture to an enlightened era of modern `corrections'. The author appeals to the slide-shows of our morbid imaginations in an attempt to foster feelings of superiority in relation to the brutalities of the past and the easiness of apathetic virtue in regards to the present. To paraphrase E.M. Forster, it is as if `we can recover self-confidence by snubbing the dead'.

We are told by corporate offenders such as hockey club owner Harold Ballard that time spent in the Bath minimum is "better than a holiday at the Ritz" (MacLeans, June 6, 1983). We are meant to rest easy in a state of complacent humanitarianism: secure in a faith of science to cure the evils of crime and the capacity of the penal system to infinately adjust its rehabilitative techniques to those who

are `maladjusted'. And the power of the `system' language used by penal authorities further serves to distort and disguise the realities of a life behind prison walls. Thus, the Correctional Service of Canada is the new name for what was once the Canadian Penitentiary System, despite the fact that its main modus operandi is still to imprison people within penitentiaries that "fail dismally to `correct' even the most outrageous features of the System or Service" (Culhane, 1985: 20). Prisoners, meaning people who are held in captivity and denied freedom and liberty, are called `inmates', an institutionalized nomenclature defined as "occupant" (Oxford English Dictionary), and stripped of political connotations. Guards, the watchers and keepers of these `inmates', are now called Correctional Officers, Living Unit Officers or Case Management Teams, even though their function as watchers and keepers remains unchanged. And the prison itself, a place of confinement, is now termed a Correctional Facility, Centre or Institution, names which "only camouflage their restrictive and secretive role" (Culhane, 1985: 20). It appears that only the most severe of the federal prisons, such as the maximum B.C. Pen., Dorchester, Millhaven or Archambault, still retain the nomen of penitentiary.

Found within generally all of these prisons is a cell of solitary confinement, aptly named by the prisoners as the `hole', but referred to by correctional authorities as

Administrative Dissociation, Segregation, or the Quiet Room (for juvenile detention). The rationale behind these Quiet Rooms is carried to a perverse extremity in the newly created Special Handling Unit (S.H.U.), a "minimum two-year programme of regulated solitary confinement in top security, heavily guarded, specially constructed prisons" (ibid: 19). The horrors of twenty-three hour days spent in solitary confinement lie concealed behind a pseudonym which implies care rather than neglect. And the S.H.U.s are not only symbolically, but physically hidden, such as the one near Montreal which is enclosed within the Correctional Dvelopment Centre at Archambault.

This change in penal denomination points to something much more profound than simply its denotative capacity. For it represents not only a substitution of definition, but ultimately a substitution in the object of punishment - from the offender's body to his mind; from that which could once be seen to that which is now hidden. The function of this prison `newspeak' is two-fold, for while it serves to further mystify and conceal the "cruel and usual punishments" (Mitford, 1979) of the prison, it also renders these same punishments much more palatable, dressed as they now are in a rational, scientific language. In the same sense, these punishments appear to be less violent and more humane as the prisoner's body - indeed, the prisoner himself - is largely absent from the discourse of the prison. As Foucault writes,

"Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty" (Foucault, 1977:11). In leaving the domain of the body, punishment is now understood not by visual perception, but enters the hidden realm of the subconcious. It is there, but its visible intensity is kept at a far distance, and thus our understanding of its depth and force is kept at a minimum perception as well. We might well boast of surviving a prison term relatively unscathed, but we would never dream of extending that same boast to the corporal punishments of the past.

And yet there remains the horrors of torture within our modern and sanitized prisons, tortures which are no less inhumane than their predecessors, but which are "enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporal nature of the penal system" (Foucault, 1977: 16). The contemporary torture of the modern corrections system is based upon non-physical punishments: punishments which no longer scar the body, but the mind; punishments which no longer involve the iron fist, but the velvet glove of surveillance, segregation and isolation. It is a disciplinary power which "is exercised through its invisibility"; yet, contradictorily enough, "it imposes upon those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (ibid: 189/187). Thus we have Administrative Dissociation or 'the hole'; a prison cell of constant isolation and surveillance which is characterized by the non-corporal tortures of madness, fear and self-mutilation. Dr. Richard

Korn has described its effects while testifying in a Canadian courtroom: "This process is foolproof ... if you keep it up long enough it will break anybody ... It is a form of murder" Culhane, 1985: 21). It is a form of murder committed on the mind; one which is so cunningly disguised behind a complexity of discourses and practices that the contradictions behind it, like the many contradictions existent within power, lie obfuscated. It is a tortuous murder, which, while not as spectacular as the public agonies of the past, remains murder nonetheless. It is not a form of murder for which the executioner, the expert of pain, is responsible, but a multitude of other experts of multiform kinds - the doctor, the psychiatrist, the sociologist, the penologist, the criminologist, the architect, the social worker. "By their very presence near the prisoner, they sing the praises that the law needs: they reassure it that the body and pain are not the ultimate objects of its punitive action" (Foucault, 1977: 11). These are the new executioners of penal discipline, and their duty and justificatory objective is not to inflict pain against the body, but to cure, correct and rehabilitate the soul, as befits an ideology of humanitarianism.

These are the experts of complexity who help to conceal and disguise, and yet extend, the powerful punitive nature of the prison and society. They are the intermediaries who act to protect society from a guilty complicity with the

punishments it imposes; the people who make up the dense monkey-fist of knowledge from which "the power to punish derives its bases, justifications and rules, from which it extends its effects and masks its exorbitant singularity" (ibid: 23). It is from their numerous voices of authority that the prison, as the primary instrument of society's punitive power, attempts to distinquish itself from its barbarous antecedent. It is from their scientific discourses, techniques and actions that the punitive power of the prison is located; an intricate and manifold machine whose operations are based upon power and knowledge rather than power and pain; a vast corpus of knowledge whose limits extend far beyond the prison's walls to create the "carceral archipelego" (Foucault, 1977: 297).

Jacques Donzelot (1979) has called them the "specialists of the invisible"; a cadre of professionals who march under the banners of reform, mercy and compassion, while evermore extending the power to control and punish. One way to understand this apparent contradiction is to perceive the penal system's inherent need for failure in order to rationalize and gain stronger, albeit more subtle, means of control. Michel Foucault (1977), Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer (1939), and other historians have alerted us that reforms in punishment must be seen as little more than a turn to a different and more powerful punitive strategy:

> The true objective of the reform movement, even in its most general formulations, was not so much to establish

> a new right to punish based on more equitable principles, as to set up a new `economy' of the power to punish, to assure its better distribution so that it should be neither too concentrated at priviledged points, nor too divided between opposing authorities; so that it should be distributed in homogenous circuits capable of operating everywhere, in a continuous way, down to the finest grain of the social body (Foucault, 1977: 80).

The `reform' of social control has meant a continual evolution away from physical coercion to a more subtle and systematic method of surveillance and normalization in order to better produce docile and `normal' citizens. Similarily, the `reform' which led away from the old system of torture and execution to the model of the prison "must be read as a strategy for the rearrangement of the power to punish" (Foucault, 1977: 80); a shift away from what was seen as a `bad economy of power' to a more even-handed, rational and acceptable (ie - more economical) technology of punishment. With each new reform comes a multiplication of the devices of control, and agents who control these devices. When these devices or technologies fail, as they inevitably do, the agents of control, "specialists of the invisible", are given even more resources to control, in an escalating spiral proliferating in technologies of punishment and control which involve varying degrees of classification, segregation, surveillance, and confinement. As Chan and Ericson write, "This spiral is fiscal [as Rusche and Kirchheimer argue], but it is also more generally reflective of the `economy of power relationship' (Foucault,1977), by which the state serves its

reproductive needs for discipline and punishment" (in Fleming (ed), 1985: 225).

`Positive and useful effects': Port Cartier's new prison

The effects engendered by the refinement of a technology of power are not solely negative. Behind the repression and punishment involved in a punitive technology, there is also a corresspondence of `positive and useful effects' (Foucualt, 1977). This in fact is at root in the success of an `economy of power': it must be creative, a Dionysian Leviathan of sorts. To this end, Rusche and Kirchheimer argue in their classic analysis, Punishment and Social Structure, that penal measures are inextricably linked to the economic system. "Every system of production tends to discover punishments which corresspond to its productive relationships" (Rusche and Kirchheimer, 1939: 5). And a contemporary example of the positive effects of punitive power may be found in Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's recent announcement of his intent to build a new $60 million prison in the depressed and isolated community of Port Cartier, Quebec.

This prison, scheduled to open in September, 1988, will be a protective custody penitentiary, housing 240 child molesters, rapists, informers and convicted police officers. It is indicative of the new prisons now being built in

Canada; prisons which increasingly differentiate, define and distinquish between varying types or classifications of offenders. The Special Handling Unit is another example of the widening classificatory scheme of the "carceral continuum" (Foucault, 1977); a prison which is wholly devoted to the powers of surveillance, supervision, assessment and discipline, assuring "both the real capture of the body and its perpetual observation" (ibid: 304).

Certainly neither the punishment of crime, nor concern for the lives of prisoners in need of protection is the sole warranty which justifies the construction of this new prison. Its primary rationale can be found in the astute statement made by the mayor of Port Cartier, when he observed that, "It is comforting to know that prisons don't go bankrupt" (MacLeans July 7, 1986). The new prison is in fact the Prime Minister's settlement of a pledge he made in 1985 to strengthen the economy of a town with a 30% unemploymnt rate. This example of prison as employment project certainly corressponds in part to Rusche and Kirchheimer's thesis that the origin, use and intensity of specific penal systems or punishments is determined by economic or fiscal forces. But the birth of this new prison cannot be said to rest solely upon its perceived economic productivity. Such a strict correllation escapes the intricate network of relationships involved in an economy of power. Materially, the new prison's corpus may be built from

the financial support endowed by the federal goverment, but its intrinsic essence,[4] that which is more powerful and substansive than its physical being, will be established from a much larger and complex confluence of discourse, power and knowledge which emanates from the heart of society. It will be the silent assent of a manifold power which will ultimately sanction the birth of this prison. Similarily, the new prison's `positive and useful effects' will not be limited to its fiscal production -- nor for that matter, to the `correction' or protection it affords its inmates -- but will extend throughout the entire society, broadening and increasing the micro-powers of the `carceral network', while augmenting and further expanding the knowledge which these micro-powers are intrinsically related to. In short, its `positive and useful effects' will not only be the strengthening of an economy, but an `economy of power'.

As stated before, the proposed prison is to be a Protective Custody Penetentiary. Basically, this is an entire prison modeled upon the Protective Custody Units (P.C.U.) found in nearly every maximum security prison. Ostensibly, these P.C.U.s are prisons within prisons, separating prisoners who are presumed in need of protection from the larger, `general population' of prisoners within the entire institution. But P.C.U.s serve another, much more intrinsically political, function other than solely the protection of prisoners from prisoners. They act to "divide

the prison population to a degree that prevents them from being able to cope with the hopelessness of their incarceration" (Culhane, 1985: 168). The P.C.U. works upon the 'divide and conquer' rule; separating people who fear violence from one another, which only acts to exacerbate more fear and violence in an unending vicious circle. For once inside a P.C.U., regardless of whether or not he is one of the despised rapists, child molesters or informers, a prisoner is always suspected of being one. An ex-prisoner describes this process:

> There are alot of youngsters, who upon entry, are virtually scared into P.C.U.s by the Administration. They've never done time in a pen before and when confronted with these solemn-looking people and told they will be raped, killed, etc., they check in, out of fear -- not realizing that once inside there they are branded by the population 'dead man' -- inside and outside those walls (in Culhane, 1985: 166).

This is the logical proliferation of a control factor which starts with the classification of prisoners into minimum, medium and maximum security prisons, and ends with the evermore specified classification of Protective Custody Units and Special Handling Units. It is the 'Chinese box' effect; a scheme of hierarchical classification and division which is of extreme importance to the maitenance of control within a prison. As Claire Culhane writes, "No prison system can function without a P.C.U. or its equivalent" (1985: 165). The success of a prison's disciplinary power is dependent upon the capacity to seperate, classify, analyse and frame its captive bodies into segregated units and catagories.

"Discipline `makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards both as objects and instruments of its exercise" (Foucault, 1977: 170). The disciplinary power of the prison works upon the "ever more subtle partitioning of individual behavior" (ibid: 173), in order to ever more finely measure inconsistencies and unconformities. The hierarchization of categories within the prison system makes it possible to mark slight variations in `correct' behavior, and additionally, to play these artificial categories against one another.

The techniques of classification, differentiation, documentation and surveillance used by the prison are disciplinary mechanisms which work in conjunction with an other, more equally powerful mechanism: normalization. It is normalization which acts to supply the reference point against which all are measured. "Borne along by the omnipresence of the mechanisms of discipline, basing itself on all ther carceral apparatuses, it has become one of the major functions of our society" (Foucault, 1977: 304). It is through the fabricated measurement of the `norm' that one is able to distinquish and differentiate the normal from the deviant and "claim the honour of curing or rehaibilitating" (ibid). The individual who is described, classified and assigned a place within the categories of minimum security or Special Handling Unit is also the individual who has received a judgement based upon the

normative power. He is judged via a "mixture of legality and nature, prescription and constitution" (ibid: 304), and subjected to a constant disciplinary gaze of supervision and assessment. He is held under the constraint of the normalizing power, a mechanism which mingles gracefully with the vast disciplinary powers of the carceral apparatus.

Yet the disciplinary gazes to which the prisoner is subjected are not only those of the prison guards, but emanate from outside the prison as well, and it is here that one may discover both the primary justificatory objectives and the positive and useful effects which the proposed prison at Port Cartier engenders. It is the silent assent of a normalizing judgement which will sanction the birth of this new prison, and similarily, the new prison's positive and useful effects will be the extention and attenuation of the powers of normalization and discipline throughout society. The very fact that this new prison will be a Protective Custody Penitentiary is extremely important here. For those individuals who will inhabit this prison stand at the most extreme negative pole in a normalizing spectrum of knowledge which ranges from `evil' to `good'. Theirs is the most negative classification in a "micro economy of a perpetual penalty" which "operates a differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value. By assessing acts with precision, discipline judges individuals `in

truth'; the penalty that it implements is integrated into the cycle of knowledge of individuals" (Foucault, 1977: 181). The whole of society judges child molesters, rapists and informers as harshly as that society within prison walls. And this judgement is founded upon a `truth' which has been established via a knowledge "that is once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation, and the principle of a rule to be followed" (ibid: 182). This is in essence `the power of the Norm': a disciplinary power which is intricately woven within a field of knowledge and hence constitutes the `truth' upon which this normalizing judgement is based; a `truth' which at once justifies the disciplinary power of the norm, and extends and strengthens the field of knowledge upon which it is based.

Foucault observes that "disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects" (ibid: 187). Hence we have a whole series of graduated arrangements: prisons which are hierarchically placed from the minimum security work camps to the Special Handling Unit inside a `Super Max.' Penitentiary, to the Protective Custody Penitentiary itself. Within each of these institutions are confined individuals who are described, judged, measured and compared with others. They are individuals who have been made visible in their classification, and thus have been made as objects in their subjection to this classificatory knowledge. It is their visibility which ensures both the

knowledge of them and the power which is exercised over them. Each and every one of them becomes a "`case' which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power" (Foucault, 1977: 191). It is in this sense that the micro-power of the prison produces: it produces objects, it produces knowledge, it produces `truth'. And in producing objects which are examined and classified in the pursuit of knowledge, and ultimately in the pursuit of `truth', power reproduces itself.

This is the central contention of Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish: that prisons do not repress delinquency, but create it, in an ongoing strategy which strengthens the disciplinary mechanisms utilized by an economy of power. By classifying individuals in varying degrees as a threat to social stability, the prison provides the rationale for the construction of a vast apparatus of control and discipline that permeates the whole of society. This is the prison's creation.

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it `excludes', it `represses', it `censors', it `abstracts', it `masks', it `conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault, 1977: 194).

It is not only those individuals who are held captive within prisons who "belong to this production", but ultimately all individuals. For the prison's creation is our

creation; and the prison's power of objectification and subjection is also our power, and, at end, our objectification and our subjection. This is not to posit the prison as a general metaphor for all of society, nor is it a brash attempt to assert that we all share a prisoner's life. Yet, we are all caught, in a manner of speaking, within a network of carceral micro-powers in which we ourselves are the bearers: each acts as a functional member in an arrangement of power-knowledge which in turn extends over each. The regime of observation, surveillance and classification found within the prison is not the same regime found without; we are not all physically enclosed nor mentally imprisoned. But we do, as Foucault has so penetratingly shown, live within a disciplinary society, and the workings of this society are intrinsically related to the prison and its workings. This is what is meant by the 'carceral continuum'; a vast network of devices of control which act so subtly as to be barely perceptible; which operate with the greatest economy. It is with the ease of an economy of power that the new prison at Port Cartier will be built.

Endnotes for Chapter Three

1 as Stuart Hall argues, "As social groups and classes live, if not in their productive then in their `social' relations, increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes . . . " Hall, 1977: 340).

2 following Foucault, `ideology' is not to be taken strictly as a reflection of the interests of some particular class, but in the more general sense that it is resolutely caught up within relations of power and particularly the triad, `power, knowledge and discourse'. It is ideology which frames our meaning of `normal common sense'; that which lives beneath the conciousness.

3 "An authoritative definition of classification endorsed by the Manual of Correctional Standards (1966) : `Classification may be conceived of as the process of pooling all relevant knowledge about the inmate so that important decisions and activities affecting him may be better coordinated . . . Classification contributes to a smooothly efficiently operated correctional program . . . Through its diagnosis and coordinating functions, classification not only contributes to the objective of rehabilitation, but also to custody, discipline, work assignments, officer and inmate morale and the effective use of training oppotunities'" ([American Correctional Association, p.353] in Toch, 1977: 286).

4 Foucault writes of the "omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it produces itself at every moment, at every point, or rather in every relation to one another. Power is everywhere" (1978: 74).

Chapter Four

Inside: The pains of imprisonment[1]

Thus far I have spoken generally of the prison in terms of its political relationship with that greater society which surrounds it. The Foucauldian descriptions of disciplinary power which I have heretofore utilized to represent this relationship have tended to locate power in some anonymous place: power in these terms is as a ubiquitous entity which subtlely and homogenously extends its effects throughout the whole population. But what of that power which directly affects the prisoner? Surely the forces of disciplinary power under which he is held are of a much weightier and substansive vein. If one adopts in a resolute fashion that everything is power or discourse or mechanisms of control, than what becomes of the 'realia' of the prisoner? Just as there are ordinary lives which Foucault neglects for the sake of his arguement, there are also the (extra) ordinary lives of those who inhabit the institution upon which he bases this arguement.

Foucault, and Rusche and Kirchheimer use the prison (and punishment in general) as the site upon which a critical and analytical study of the realities of disciplinary society is

based. Yet neither investigate the realities of life inside the prison beyond this intent. The prisoner as an individual, inhabiting a real world within a very real institution, is lost among the intentions and inventions of Foucault and Rusche and Kirchheimer. He is an `as if', instead of an `is'[2].

On the other hand, there exists a plethora of sensationalist stories written by or about a prisoner and his life inside which do not in any way attempt to address the political nature of the system which imprisons him. Equally, there are a large number of sociological, psychological, psychiatric and criminological studies which utilize the prisoner and his plight as a form of ready-made experimental cases upon which no concern is given whatsoever to the strategic political consequences of either the prison in general, or their own scientific studies in particular[3]. In order to remedy the imbalances of either type of literature addressing the prison, this thesis attempts to explore the ramifications of disciplinary power inside the prison as well as outside.

Historically, the use of prison as a tool of rehabilitation was based on the premise that enviroments which isolate people can also change them. The modern model penitentiary as John Howard[4], the Quakers and the religious idealists conceived it would be a place of spiritual regeneration through the mechanisms of solitude and strict

discipline. The inmates were isolated in their cells, where they would be sheilded from all corrupting influences and able to repent their past crimes in utter silence: to surrender to the 'lash of remorse'.

The institution of the monastery, whose ascetic practices were based upon the denial of the flesh and the control of emotion, became the basis for this modern prison. Indeed, the Medival Church is known to have sequestered its errant clergy within cells of solitary confinement. And it was not only the monastery's technique of repressing the bodies of its subjects which was adopted by the penitentiary, but also its technique of rendering these same bodies ever more productive. Within the walls of the monastery the erratic flucuations and irregularities of the outside world were held at bay by the repetitious punctuations of the monastery bell, marking off the canonical hours. So it became too with the modern penitentiary. The denials of the monastery were brought into the prison, disciplining and developing the bodies of the convicted in order to make them more productive to society. The monastic cell became the prison cell; the canonical hours became the prison timetable. The prisoner would be made to march in step, to work in isolation, and to pray in silence. It was an ascetic practice of discipline which was rationalized not only by the discourses of religion, but of science and a modern morality as well. And like the monastery, it was a concept based upon

the notion that one could order men's minds by regulating their bodies.

Yet this form of 'redemptive penitence' ordered men's minds to such an extent that it often virtually dystroyed them. In 1829, the Eastern State Penitentiary was built at Cherry Hill, Pennsylvania. This American prison was intended as a showplace for the 'separate' or Pennsylvania system, wherein all prisoners were kept in solitary confinement twenty-four hours a day without any communication with other human beings. But those that had travelled from both near and far to witness this miraculous new prison were often dismayed by the results of its revolutionary methods. Charles Dickens, who toured Cherry Hill in the 1840's, later wrote that "this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain is immeasurably worse than any torture of the body" (Correctional Service Canada, May 15, 1985: 3). In 1849, members of Canada's Brown Commission who visited the prison in the interest of building what would then be Canada's first penitentiary (the Kingston Penitentiary), found that, "the prisoners as a class have a sallow, worn out appearance: the eyes are deeply sunken and the eyeballs glare with feverish brightness" (ibid). The prison authorities of Cherry Hill later reluctantly admitted to the Commission members that 50 of the 300 prisoners were indeed mad. Clearly, such uncompromising seclusion proved an invincible and detrimental hardship for prisoners. The penitentiary, as

Howard and others had conceived it, had unquestionably failed, yet in principle it continues to thrive, long after its original practices and rationales have been abandoned. `Rehabilitation' may now be spoken of in hushed or embarrassed tones, but the original technology and intent for this `rehabilitation' is still used with frequency. As William Nagel writes of the prison, "The endurance of these monolithic structures is surpassed only by the tenacity of the assumptions and attitudes on which they were founded" (1973: 10).

Thus, "Long before recidivism figures cast doubt on prisons as rehabilitators, less inaccurate but more dramatic statistics raised questions about jail cells as settings for survival" (Toch, 1975: 4). And, given sociologists' and psychologists' ongoing interests in survival under extreme situations, it is of little surprise that they should naturally gravitate toward the prison as a setting for their studies. The notion that the isolation of the prison rehabilitates may have been abandoned, but the premise that a segregated enviroment changes people has not. Furthermore, the people who are subjected to this isolated and segregated enviroment are those who have been labeled as `social deviants'. It is most likely that for these reasons the prison as a "total institution" (Goffman, 1961) has garnered much attention in the writings of sociologists and behavioral psychologists. Within these writings, the prison is

generally presented as a microcosm of the greater society, with its own culture, rules, roles and language. A central concern is how the prison culture adapts and accomodates to the prison's disciplinary powers of segregation, isolation, surveillance and overcrowding. Many such studies are of a deterministically bleak nature, couching descriptions of prison culture in terms such as "institutionalization" which,

> refers to a state in which the individual literally cannot survive outside the institution. While inside the walls, his behavior is characterized by regression, apathy and listlessness. Everything is done for him and to him and in this childlike state, he cannot make decisions anymore (Cohen and Taylor, 1981: 65).

Such terminology almost acts as an apologia or justification for the existence of the prison, for if a prisoner cannot exist without the careful control of the prison, he will not exist at all. Prisoners in this sense are characterized as suffering from severe psychotic neurosis or a pathetic state of dependency and helplessness; as passive respondents to the forces of the prison. The prison culture as a whole stands as an interesting 'case' in which classifiable inmate codes, roles and patterns of leadership are tied up with perscriptive therapeutic treatment or rehabilitative interests[5]. Most of these studies are 'positivistic' in their approach, imitating the research model of the physical sciences and proving unresponsive to any semblance of human autonomy or uniqueness. The fallacy of such a perspective becomes clear when one considers Gordon

Hawkins' statement that, "The belief that all who enter prison are ineluctably doomed to deterioration proves, on examination, to rest on no more rational basis than the antithetical idea that, if only we knew how, panacean programs could be devised which would transform all offenders into model citizens" (1976: 80).

Other studies are less negative and severe, and allow for a modicum of creative movement or resistance on the prisoner's part. In his classic 1940 study of an American prison[6], Donald Clemmer coined the term "prisonization":

> a form of secondary socialization in which the inmate has to learn to adapt to prison as a way of life. Old definitions are shattered and he has to learn how to adjust himself to the deprivations of the prison. He might do this by withdrawing or, on the other hand, by continual rebellion (Cohen and Taylor, 1981: 66).

Still, the variation of such adjustments are again understood in terms of static and classifiable inmate roles and typologies, "rather than through any understanding of what such adaptations mean to the individual" (ibid). As well, this perspective again retains the single-minded view that prison culture is largely a reaction or response to the prison, or the pains of imprisonment.

A much better understanding of inmate culture is gained when looked at through a phenomenological perspective; that is, one which stresses the creative and meaningful elements of the culture rather than simply its prescriptive or reactive roles. Certainly, as institutional researchers such as Gresham Sykes (1958), Erving Goffman (1968) or Clarence

Schrag (1954, 1959, 1961) have shown, the inmate culture, or more particularly the inmate 'code', does serve as a partial solution to the problems of the pains of imprisonment. But the existence of this culture is not simply a response to the deprivations of the prison. While the inmate code is primarily a value system stressing loyalty, coolness, fairness and strength and dignity in face of the disciplinary forces of the prison, it is also a value system which stresses cohesion, meaningfulness, identification and pride in a collective struggle. It is a struggle of a concious and creative nature implemented by a culture which is concious of its existence and strength and creative in its development of "conceptual machineries" (Berger and Luckmann, 1971: 104).

Furthermore, prison culture is not simply an indigenous and autonomous entity which is born suddenly out of a response to the pains of imprisonment, but reflects to a much larger extent those broader cultural conditions which exist outside. As Irwin and Cressy (1962) have noted, the indigenous theory of Clemmer, Sykes, et al, has more to do with the preservation and maitenance of prison culture than its origin. Prison culture is not the result of a group of men who are nothing but tabula rasas upon entering prison. They have brought their past realities with them as well, and these realities all form a part of the meaningful reality of the prison culture.

If we take Stuart Hall et al's (1976) definition of

culture as that "level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give expressive form to their social and material experiences", then we could do better justice to the culture of the prisoner. The prisoner's culture must be examined not only from its historical specificity, but from the specificity of the prisoner's own experience. Certainly, one should take into account the specific responses which relations between prisoner and prison entail at specific times. But what is equally important is that these responses are not seen as simply prescribed reactions, but actions; creative and individualistic expressions of movement which could be as harmonious as they are dissentive. Later in this thesis I shall be examining the prisoner's tattoo as a particular example of the prison culture's expressive and creative movement. But for the moment I will attempt to describe the specificity of the prisoner's experiences, as much as is possible, in the words of the prisoners.

The convicted held incommunicado

It is not only the deprivations of physical freedom and liberty which the prisoner must contend with during his time in prison. The forces of discipline and the pains of imprisonment that he faces are of such a profound and subtle nature that they centre their point of attack upon his mind,

his sensory experiances and above all upon his feelings of self-worth, rather than upon his body. He is subjected to a mortification of self as his privacy and his independence is lost; he is no longer a person but a thing, a number, and his old conception of self is under continual attack from the disfiguring discourses and mechanisms of the prison. What the disciplinary powers of the prison assault more than anything else is the prisoner's stable sense of meaning, and the ability to create a meaningful and plausible "symbolic universe". Conversely, the prison culture counter-attacks the prison's techniques of control upon this same field of battle, offering up counter-discourses which possess their own theory about themselves, the penal system and the justice which imprisons them. The prison culture helps to supply the prisoner with a "picture which is not just orderly, but which is plausible and explains or justifies his existence" (Cohen and Taylor, 1981: 68); an existence which at most times is extremely tenuous under the psychological stress of the prison enviroment.

Inside the prison there is the obvious constant stress of being watched within an enclosed and confined space. As a prison visitor, I have been subjected to the stress of surveillance and confinement on numerous occasions. It is of a type that invisibly permeates both the mind and the body; a sense of powerlessness and listlessness overcomes the physical body and leaves one feeling detached and desultory.

It becomes immediatly clear that the prison has no other express purpose other than the confinement of docile bodies. And a docile body is what one is intended to become upon entering prison.

To gain entrance into a federal prison a prospective visitor must first apply for visitor's status from Correctional Services Canada, whereupon his or her past history is extensively reviewed and examined. As an individual visitor, a person may visit only one prisoner at one prison. There will be no admittance to visit any other individual nor any other institution; this for the express purpose of preventing communication between inmates in separate prisons. Any person may be excluding from visiting for reasons which do not have to be stated, and which are usually not offered. Visits are definitely not allowed to those with criminal records (which excludes the friends and relatives of many of the men inside).

Visits in prison are a priviledge, not a right. The outside world is kept at a distance, excluded; and this distance is emphasized the minute one enters the prison doors. To get from the outside in, one must first go through a series of ritualized surveillances and inspections. Pockets are emptied, and their contents spilled into manila envelopes. Purses are locked away. Identity cards are scrutinized and checked against the visiting list. Bodies are made to walk through metal detectors. There then follows

a maze of anterooms upon anterooms, within which guards behind thick glass panels further scrutinize each individual and, if satisfied , signal their compatriots on the other side of the double-locking doors to allow the visitor through.

> Take a few steps and bars close behind you. A few more steps and another set opens in front of you and closes behind. Always stuck between two doors. From the cell to the infirmary, less than five hundred feet, seven barred doors to go through. And the same number of checks. Time enough to die seven times. They call it movement control (Paul Rose, Archambault Theatre Group, 1982: preface).

There are no windows, nothing to show that the outside world exists at all. There are no shadows; "No yellowing or incandescents, nothing but Shadow-Bans" (ibid), necessitated by the closed circuit cameras which monitor the movement of captured bodies.

Entering the prison is only the first in a series of assaults upon the self that an individual encounters. For the visitor, this ceremonial degradation ends with the visit. For the prisoner it is a constant presence. His enviroment is one of limited space; his life a pattern of stultifying routines. While he is part of a mammoth human industry, he is not assured the anonymity of an individual within a crowd. His classification or living unit officer knows in some detail the moments of his life. His mail is read, his visitor's conversations overheard. His life history is the subject of general discussion by classification and parole

officers. He is minutely examined for behavioral or physical changes.

> This is one of our favorite jokes: how should I behave if I want to be in their good books? If I hang out with a bunch of friends they'll say I'm part of a gang, if I stay on my own they'll label me `anti-social', and if I limit myself to one buddy they'll conclude I'm queer (Archambault Theatre Group, 1982: 32).

It is not only the controlled subterranean enviroment which takes its toll upon the life of the prisoner. What strikes with equal force upon the mind and body of the condemned are those disciplinary powers which are not as easily described: powers which are not so much structural (or perceived from the outside), as they are phenomenological (or perceived from the prisoner's subjective experience). These are powers which deeply affect the emotional world of the prisoner; powers which above-all constrain and alter his social relations with other human beings both inside and outside of prison. Like the structural walls of the prison, their primary purpose is to hold the prisoner incommunicado; to control by inhibiting communication. "Thus, for many the reality of confinement is a reality of limitations" (Smith, in Johnson and Toch, eds., 1982: 53); above all, limitations upon communication.

Friendship, important enough outside, is of great importance to the well-being of those men inside in order to counterbalance the complex physical and psychological powers of the prison. Yet, precisely because of these complex powers, developing personal relationships inside prison can

be extremely problematic. Of greatest consequence are problems of commonality and continuity. Despite the large numbers of fellow-prisoners, it may be difficult for an individual to find a colleague who shares his history, concerns and perspectives. This difficulty is often exasberated by a social enviroment in which toughness, inviolability, the denial of personal problems and manipulation of others are common ingredients. The prison is a setting in which, as Jean Genet has observed, "more than elsewhere one cannot afford to be casual" (Genet, intro., in Jackson, 1970: 3). Held within disciplinary controls that deliberately seek his dependence, a prisoner must seek his autonomy. But autonomy in theory means to sacrifice supports; to be left to one's own resources. Under such contradictory circumstances, the prisoner must delicately balance in his search for friendship.

Friendships inside also suffer from the lack of continuity within the prison. Men are often arbitrarily moved from wing to wing or prison to prison without a moment's notice. This insensitive relocation may be read as a powerful political strategy on the part of prison administrators. If a leader of a prisoners' movement or committee gains strong support from his peers in his political demands of the system, he will be transferred to another prison, thus debilitating the strength of the movement. A prisoner writes of this strategy which is, again,

the technique of `divide and conquer'.

> For years, the various prisoners' committees have been fighting for their independence -- in vain. They have been obstinately refused the slightest power, categorically forbidden to undertake any initiative whatsoever . . . And if any of them [the leaders] manifest the slightest misplaced aggression, they're sent on the double to another prison, usually of a higher security level. The right to express yourself, among other rights, is denied (Archambault Theatre Group, 1982: 34).

Such tactics of divide and conquer are applied to such groups as the Native prisoners rights committees which exist in nearly every Canadian prison. In a similiar vein, one of those convicted of the Litton bombings (undertaken by the Vancouver anarchist group later known as the `The Vancouver Five'), was sent to a prison in Quebec to serve his sentence, even though it was clear that he did not speak French. The intent here is clearly to disable these men in their communication in order to keep them under disciplinary control. Despite the years that seperate `modern corrections' from the Pennsylvania `seperate system', the belief still holds that if prisoners are not permitted to communicate with one another, they cannot develop or revert to anti-social practices. The anti-social is thus repressed by a mechanism of seclusion; a most contradictory justification which works solely for the extention of disciplinary power.

Maintaining communication outside the prison also poses a major difficulty for the prisoner. The difficulty of

preserving these social ties further adds to the stress of affirming self-expression and identity in an enviroment primarily designed not to provide for these needs.

Cohen and Taylor write that, "The whole subject of letter writing can easily become one which involves the prisoner in endless frustration. A form of censorship operates which in effect prevents the prisoner from writing about the one subject which matters most to him: his own situation" (1981: 78). While Cohen and Taylor are writing specifically here of a maximum security prison in Britain, this censorship also exists within Canadian prisons. Prisoners are generally not allowed to speak of the conditions which effect them inside. While now, in Canadian prisons, a prisoner may write whenever and to whomever he pleases, the "letter he sends or receives is read by one of the many clerks in the Visits and Correspondence Department, and censored if necessary, that is, if the tenor of the letter goes against house rules or 'does not contribute to the rehabilitation' of the prisoner in question" (Archambault Theatre Group, 1982: 31). Often, a letter will be suppressed in its entirety, and not released to the outside post. Similarily, letters originating from the outside may be suppressed as well. Frequently, this happens without the prisoner's knowledge, which leaves him unsure of whether or not he has simply been forgotten.

> "The friend on the outside cannot inform him otherwise. If he tells another corresspondent to pass on news of

> his attempts to write, then this letter in its turn will be suppressed. In these ways contact with the outside can break down completely after a man with a life sentence has served only a couple of months of his time (Cohen and Taylor, 1981: 80).

Visits also become a source of anxiety and concern. While visits are of great importance to those inside, they also can add to the stress of confinement. Interruptions in social contact can easily lead to depression, worry and confusion. The prisoner feels an ever-present risk of loss or abandonement by a loved one, and knows that he is powerless to rectify matters should this loss occur. He is extremely vulnerable, both on the level that his visits (if at all) are rationed and relatively sparse, and that these visits signify a world that he is no longer part of and over which he has no control.

> The only thing, when I be inside this cell eighteen hours doing nothing and you be thinking about home, you think about what's happening, or somebody come up to visit you and say, "Oh, your mother is sick" or something happened to her or something like that, your mind gets confused, it goes blank, you do anything (Johnson, 1976: 86).

It has been suggested that some prisoners purposely sever external relationships to avoid the stress or 'hard time' produced by these infrequent visits. Maurice Farber (1944) observed that the relationship between suffering and visits with those on the outside followed a curvilinear model.

> Those who had few contacts with the outside through letters and visits were low in suffering, those who had medium contact suffered a great deal, while those who had high contact were again found to be low in

> suffering. [Farber] found clear evidence of prisoners who cut off all contact in order to reduce suffering. As one said: `I don't do hard time. It's much easier if you get the outside off your mind and just forget about your family, your folks and your wife' (Cohen and Taylor, 1981: 82).

Escape attempts: Strategies and counter-strategies of control

Erving Goffman has defined the total institution as one which provides "a barrier to social intercourse with the outside" (1961: 4). Certainly the prison is furnished with such barriers. In isolating the prisoner from the realities of life outside, or from those indices of reality which take form in the words and gestures of others, the prison strives to inflict its own prescribed reality upon the prisoner and thereby define experience for him. This is the primary mechanism of control within the prison.

The prison is essentially a controlled structural and social enviroment that seeks to deprive the inmate from unconditional interaction with other human beings. This technique of power was once justified as a methodology for converting or rehabilitating bad persons into good. Now it is only recognized for what it is: as a technique of power; a mechanism of control. The question of whether imprisonment does the prisoner any `good' is no longer relevant; the only `good' that is spoken of is that which is done for society, in society's protection from those imprisoned. The prison is

simply a place of control. Its experience is intended to be "punitive and depriving, the confinement is meant to be total" (Cohen and Taylor, 1981: 205).

Hence the use of inhibiting social relationships as a means of control. If a prisoner is not allowed to share his experiences with others, particularly with others outside of the institution, then these experiences become increasingly difficult to validate; they become increasingly less 'meaningful'. That intricate and delicate relationship between self and others, between behavior and experience is continually inhibited and denied by the micro-powers of the prison. And when this relationship is repeatably withheld, so too is any development of the concept of the self as a subject of the outside world. The prisoner instead becomes an institutionalized object; an object dominated and defined by the hegemonic experience of the prison.

> I just try to get through the day. I try to keep busy in the yard playing handball. Usually I'll be able to get myself out of it or around it a little bit, even though I don't feel like it, kid around a little bit, and then I start to come out of it. But lately I just can't seem to get myself out of this rut. And its a hell of a thing. I just don't have the patience for it anymore. Like working these problems out, you know. I know I control nothing. (Johnson, 1976: 122).

Slowly, the prisoner may be engulfed from within by the hegemonic experience of the prison. For the prison attempts to take him farther and farther away from his past experience of the outside world in order to inflict its own monopolized experience upon him. It must displace all other

worlds in order to assure the primacy of definition and control upon which it depends. This requires the segregation of the prisoner from those who would attempt to continue mediating the old `outside' world to him. The reality of the prison must be protected from any other reality-disrupting influence. And gradually, those who would mediate the outside world to the prisoner, "become unwilling actors in a drama whose meaning is necessarily opaque to them; and not suprisingly, they typically reject such an assignment" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 160-61).

Thus, the prison attempts to ensure that the prisoner is left alone in his subjective defense against the experience of the prison and the stigmatic identity assigned to him. The prisoner may eventually react to this fate with resignation and become one of the passive institutionalized. Or, he may react to this fate with resistance and rage, but this resistance, especially if violent, may only serve to further justify his socially defined identity. He is imprisoned within the objective reality of society and the prison ensures that this imprisonment is secure. It has armed itself with all the necessary ingredients: segregation from the outside world; the required socializing and normative personnel; the correct scientific and `humanistic' body of knowledge; and the necessary armatures of discourse which dispense the prison's legitimations. It is not only the prison's walls which are intended to be escape-proof.

Yet there are escape attempts; attempts to dismantle and disfigure the predefined and isolated objective reality of the prison and to confront it with a counter-definition of the prisoner's own creation. These escape attempts entail both social and conceptual conditions; they are both social and individual acts, with the social acting as the supporting matrix for the conceptual. They are both physical and cognitive; located within the mind and expressed upon the body. And most importantly, they are not only a response to the pains of imprisonment, but a creative action against it. They are expressions of both impotence and power.

For to confront the power which is instituted within the prison is not to simply strain against the bonds of material tyranny and the overt forms of repression, but, above all, to create new forms of expression, new modes of communication, new practices -- in short, new conceptions of meaning. This is intrinsic to the prisoner's strategy for 'psychological survival'[7]. In order to counter the tautological definitions under which he is imprisoned, he must bring to light their artificial nature, he must distort their cherished meanings, and sometimes, create his own. He must attempt to communicate his experiences within an enviroment that disallows such subjective expression, and thus he must be heedful of the censorous limits of the prison. Hence, his stylistic expressions take form upon a most ingeneous medium. They take place upon that site which paradoxically occupies a

lacuna in the discourse of the prison and yet becomes the centre of its attention. The prisoner's alternative expressions are written directly upon his body.

Endnotes for Chapter Four

1

`The Pains of Imprisonment' is the title of the forth chapter in Gresham Sykes classic, The Society of Captives, (1966). In a book of the same name, edited by Robert Johnson and Hans Toch, (1982), it is written that " As Sykes (1966: 78) saw it, five basic deprivations -- of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations and personal security -- together dealt a `profound hurt' that went to `the very foundations of a prisoner's being'" (p.17). I would add to these pains that of a severe limitation upon the social communication of the prisoner.

2

Allan Megill writes in Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, (1985), that "there is a temptation to derive from Foucault's history of the prison true propositions regarding the actual institution within society that we know as the prison . . . " ". . . Foucault is best treated as an animator -- not as an authority . . . it is all too easy to take his writings literally, to read him in the mode of `is rather than in the mode of `as if' " (p. 246 - 247).

3

of this type of research literature Cohen and Taylor (1981: 214 - 215) write: a principle function of official research into crime and punishment is to reassure the public that the problem is scientifically be tackled. The research itself may or may not say anything significant, relevant, or overly interesting . . . This is relatively unimportant. The main thing is the research's window dressing potential (W.D.P.). To have a high W.D.P. the research must fufill the following criteria: it must be well financed; it must be comprehensive to most politicians and administrators; its aim must be presented in a simple direct way, preferably in the form of a hypothesis to be tested. Any complex theoretical or methodological problems must be kept to one side and the results, when they appear, should be ambiguous enough to reassure, while at the same time generating numerous statements of the `more research is needed' variety",

4

John Howard, often cited as the `father of prison reform', was the sheriff of Bedford England in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1777, he published The State of the Prisons, an exhaustive account of his investigations of jails in England and across the continent. Appalled by the cruelty and chaos of prison life, Howard proposed the system of the model modern penitentiary, based upon the concept of solitary confinement. he is also attributed to being one of the first men to apply scientific methods to social research.

5

see for example: Brown, Bertram; Louis Wienckowski and Stephanie Stoltz "Behavior modification: Perspectives on a current issue" in Leger and Stratton's (eds.), The Sociology of Corrections, John Wiley and Sons, New York: 1977

6

Clemmer, Donald, The Prison Community, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York: 1958.

7

`Psychological Survival' is the title of Cohen and Taylor's insightful and sensitive study of men serving long sentences within a British maximum security prison. See Cohan, Stanley, and Laurie Taylor, Psychological Survival: The Experience of Long-Term Imprisonment, 2nd ed. Penguin Books, Middlesex, England: 1981.

Chapter Five

The Prisoner's Tattoo

> If the law of thought is that it should seek out profundity, whether it extends upwards or downwards, then it seems excessively illogical to me that men should not discover depths of a kind on the 'surface', that vital borderline that endorses our seperateness and our form, dividing our exterior from our interior. Why should they not be attracted by the profundity of the surface itself?
>
> Yukio Mishima
> Sun and Steel

A man can be a sign. He can be read from afar, like a flashing neon sign reading no vacancy, filled up with society's meanings: there's no room at the inn for his own. The prisoner may be such a sign. Particularized by the absolute singularity of the prison, he is to be recognized universally as deviant; his image registering on the surfaces of normative eyes; his stigmatic representation projected from the blue-grey screen of the TV set, in the screaming mouths of politicians and in the whispered warnings of the mother to her child. He is a sign which circulates through the eyes and mouths of others; a sign reflected off the smooth images of objects in order to serve society's command for discipline and normalization. He is a sign which serves as a form of currency in the economy of power.

How does the prisoner stop the circulation of himself as sign; how does he bankrupt his value as currency in the economy of power? He does this by "repositioning and recontextualizing commodities, by subverting their conventional uses and inventing new ones, . . . giv[ing] the lie to . . . the 'false obviousness of everyday practice' (Althusser and Balibar, 1968), and open[ing] up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional readings" (Hebdige, 1979: 102). The object, the commodity in question here, is the prisoner himself, or more specifically his body: that body which has been paraded about and displayed as commodity in the production of discipline and normalization; that body which as an object connotating the evil, the deviant, becomes no-thing-but-that-thing; becomes a sign to be assembled within the discourse of disciplinary power. And that sign which conversely is left deliberately absent from the discourses of the prison.

The prisoner uses this same body as a vehicle to subvert his circulation as sign; he deforms its meanings and reassembles it into something of his own construction, of his own creation. He deforms these meanings to the extent that he deforms his own body. He punctures it with sharp needles that leave their traces of ink in permanence upon the body's surface, violating the normative standard of the 'natural' stainless body. He tattoos his body.

The prisoner's tattooed body becomes a snare for the

normative eye. He captures it and drowns it among the contradictions within which he is imprisoned. The eye that reads his body must wince, sensing the pain that has worked its way across the skin and the `unnatural' pleasure which this pain has imparted. The judging eye, the public eye, will be made to see the living parchment upon which the prisoner inscribes his signs.

Subversive style: The prison's tatooed bodies

> Although, as Lefebvre has written, we live in a society where `. . . objects in practice become signs and signs objects and a second nature takes the place of the first -- the initial layer of perceptible reality' (Lefebvre, 1971), there are, as he goes on to affirm, `always objections and contradictions which hinder the closing of the circuit' between sign and object, production and reproduction (Hebdige, 1979: 17).

The prisoner is intended to be as an object within the `natural' world of the prison. And as object, he stands as a sign; a signification of deviance which sustains the normalized and `naturalized' meanings upon which disciplinary society rests. And as sign, he is made as an object; captured and subordinated within the disciplinary and punitive environment of the prison.

Yet the prisoner does have the means to step beyond this constructed and circulatory identity of sign/object. He does have a method of escape from these meanings and practices which simultaneously contain and exile him. His challenge may take form in violent and physical acts of

revolt, but these acts would only serve to strengthen the normalized meanings within which he is imprisoned. The presence of such acts is too easily read; they still speak in the meaningful language of the oppressor. Instead, the prisoner will voice his objections in a language of his own creation; a language within which the presence of meaning is concealed from the eyes of his keepers. It is a language whose meanings have broken free from the anchorage of signification to flounder within a directionless maze.

But perhaps even the word `language' here signifies something too coherent, too unified and directed. Language can always be mastered. The prisoner expresses his objections "obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed . . . at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs" (Hebdige, 1979: 17). His revolt takes place within a signifying practice[1] which attempts to subvert and contradict the authoritative and and imprisoning meanings of the carceral system. The prisoner signifies, but what he signifies is not always clear.

Despite his stigmatic identity, and because of it, the prisoner revolts in style. His stylistic revolt is the tattoo; a style indicative of the cultures of biker, soldier, sailor or prisoner; cultures which are marked by their institutionalized spaces, hierarchized order, highly ritualized rules and secretized meanings. These are cultures

which are extremely rigid in their composition; they draw circles around themselves and attempt to define themselves against an intruding world. Within this circle, they may construct and project a stable and coherent identity. These cultures are permeated with intact and obvious meanings.

We are faced with a paradox here. We have a culture known for its conservatism, its strict codification of rules and regulations (the inmate code), which utilizes a form of revolt based upon movement. It is a culture which sets in motion a signifying practice which above all works to "deconstruct existing codes and formulate new ones" (Hebdige, 1979: 129). In contrast to the close and grey architecture of the prison, and in contrast to the rigid symbolic architecture of the prison culture, the tattoo floats freely and colorfully, crossing borderlines, knotting chains of signification, floating within the ambivalent, "a floating which would not destroy anything but would be content to simply disorientate the Law" (Barthes, 1977, in Hebdige, 1979: 126).

Hebdige feels that it is precisely this "dialectic between unity and process" (Hebdige, 1979: 164), or this "dialectic between action and reaction, which renders these objects meaningful" (ibid: 2). For, signs are "open to a double inflection: to `illegitimate' as well as `legitimate' uses" (ibid: 18). And the prisoner's sign, engraved directly upon his body, an `illegitimate' use of a `legitimate'

vehicle, contains such a duplex modulation. At one sense, the prisoner's tattoo is a stigmatic mark of a valued and forbidden identity. It identifies the prisoner as a member of the prison culture. It incorporates him into this social group and gives expression to its common values and communal systems. The tattoo names the prisoner as prisoner and relates him back to the experience of the prison. At the same time, this marking is used as the practice to escape meaningful identity. It disguises as well as expresses.

The tattoo draws attention to itself and the body upon which it is displayed. It stands as the stigmatic mark of the prison culture, relating it back to the symbolic order of the prison. But it also acts to disfigure this symbolic order. It acts to twist and alter meaningfulness into meaningless shapes. The prisoner's tattoo is a figure which contains both impotence and power. It is both a reactive symbolic expression of the experiences of the prison culture, and an active revolt and mutilation of this reality, of this experience. It is both 'stigmata and revolt'.

Julia Kristeva (1976) explains how the seemingly 'single, unified subject' of the prisoner is in fact a 'subject in process', a subject in motion who disrupts this notion of unification. She writes:

> The setting in place, or constituting of a system of signs requires the identity of a speaking subject in a social institution which the subject recognizes as the support of its identity. The traversing of the system takes place when the speaking subject is put in process

> and cuts across, at an angle as it were, the social institution in which it had previously recognized itself. It thus coincides with the moment of social rupture, renovation and revolution (Kristeva, in Hebdige, 1979: 165).

The signifying practice of the prisoner is precisely this 'setting in place and then cutting through or traversing of a system of signs'. The prisoner is in place and in motion. At one sense he is positioned by the penal institution and in another sense he disrupts this positioning via his strategy of movement embodied within the tattoo.

The tattoo is spectacular style written upon a hidden body. For the prisoner, and more specifically the prisoner's body, is positioned as a lacuna, an absence, within the language and discourses of the carceral system. This is in fact part of society's general strategy to colonize the non-instrumental, to remove disturbances from view, as well as a more particular carceral strategy which attempts to down-play the punitive powers of the prison by directing attention away from the body. The prisoner is also positioned both figuratively and literally on the outside of society, hidden from view, in order to place him beyond the immediate comprehension of the 'normal' person on the street. This particular strategy of positioning enables disciplinary society to represent and speak of the prisoner without contradiction from any other 'reality', to fix the prisoner in a unified and stable identity of 'deviant' and to account for this 'deviant's' social experience unhindered. It is via

this positioning of absence and distance that disciplinary society objectifies and masters the prisoner.

Out of this positioning of absence and distance the prison culture must create its own identity. It must somehow find a cohesive fit between the values and histories of its members, their subjective experiences and their objective enviroment, and chose the proper symbolic forms which will adequately reflect this culture as a unified structure. It must attempt to discover that degree of closure or coherence which would allow it to define itself against this positioning of absence and distance. It must constitute a strategy of presence and visibility against the carceral system's strategy of absence and invisibility. The chosen medium for this strategy of presence is that of the body. It is written upon the body, (and not only in tattooing, but weightlifting and self-mutilation), for the body is that which is expressly and intently hidden by the carceral system. By drawing attention to the body, more precisely, by tattooing it, the prison culture expresses a visible presence -- the presence of bodies, of subjectivities, of histories, of names and of loved ones -- all written upon the body. Furthermore, this tattooing distinguishes the prisoner's body from the tattooed bodies of other cultures. There are tattooed bodies inside prison which have never been seen before on the street. They are tattoos which are primarily indicative of the prison experience. It is in this way that

the prisoner's cultural style of tattooed visible bodies acts to contrast and deny the carceral system's competing discourses of invisible bodies, and distinquishes it as an autonomous, unified and coherent culture.

Yet, the same symbolic form which denounces invisibility and absence is also a semiotic which celebrates it. The tattoo which announces membership, stability, visibility and unity is also that which denies or subverts any sense of stable meaning or unified construction. The tattoo which attempts to locate the prisoner within the contradictory experience of the prison is also that which attempts to break with this location in experience. It attempts not only to reconcile the prisoner with this experience, but also to represent the contradictions which this experience entails. It does not only celebrate `sameness', that which binds together, but `otherness', that which remains unintelligible and unknown.

The design which is inscribed upon the prisoner's face is that which draws attention to the face. It makes the face visible. It is the design which confers upon the face its social existence, its human dignity and its membership. But it is also that design which is the face. It creates the face. The design subsumes the individual features of the face; it takes on a life of its own. It hides the face's eyes, it conceals the mouth, and as the face moves, the design moves over the face, disguising its identity and its

emotions. The tattoo not only reveals, but conceals.

Thus, "while it is true that the symbolic objects . . . were `made to form a "unity" with the group's relations, situations, experience' (Hall et al., 1976), this unity was at once `ruptural' and `expressive', or more precisely it expressed itself through rupture" (Hebdige, 1979: 121-22). To return to Kristeva's terms, the tattoo is that which sets the speaking subject in place, but it is also that which puts the speaking subject in process. Another way of understanding this dialectic between placement and process, again in Kristeva's terms, is to consider the relationship between the `symbolic' and the `semiotic'. A. White explains:

> The symbolic is . . . that major part of language which names and relates things, it is that unity of sematic and syntactic competence which allows communication and rationality to appear. Kristeva has thus divided language into two vast realms, the semiotic -- sound, rhythm and movement anterior to sense and linked closely to the impulses (Triebe) -- and the symbolic -- the semantico-syntactic function of language necessary to all rational communication about the world. The latter, the symbolic, usually `takes charge' of the semiotic and binds it into syntax and phenomes, but it can only do so on the basis of sounds and movements presented to it by the semiotic. The dialectic of the two parts of language form the mise en scene of Kristeva's description of poetics, subjectivity and revolution (A. White, 1977, in Hebdige, 1979: 164).

Thus, it is equally the way in which the symbolic posits its control over the semiotic, making it mouth coherent words and signal understandable gestures, as it is the "way in which the semiotic relates to and disfigures the symbolic" . . . "which gives us the basis of subjectivity as a process"

(ibid), and as a practice of resistance.

It is this dialectical process which prevents us from reading the prisoner's tattoo as a "full and final closure" (Hebdige, 1979: 125), or at any level of obvious meaning. For just as the tattoo is signification -- a communication, expression, or representation of a unified and coherent meaning -- it is also significance -- a process, a work, in which the prisoner escapes meaning, twists it, explores it, teases out its contradictions, and ultimately deconstructs meaning.

The prisoner's tattoo poses problems for its reader. How can the meaning-in-form of the tatto be defined when the forms under consideration have no common structure other than a body in motion and the range of possible meanings is endless? The tattoo is polysemous: it is both the known and the unknown, the perceived and unperceived. It can organize its language to fit a logical and rational consistency or it can call into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, and suggest the notion that there may be other ways. It is at once infinitely accessible and infinitely obscure. It is multiple, and for this reason it must be examined only from a multiplicity of possible interpretations. There is much to say about the prisoner's tatto as a signifying practice. Given the constraints of time and space, I can only supply the reader with a few limited examples of this practice, but it is hoped that these

examples shall not be limiting in their interpretation.

Histories and locations

> 'The traveller had various questions in mind, but at the sight of the man, he asked only, 'Does he know his sentence?' 'No,' said the officer. He was about to go on with his explanations, but the traveller cut him short: 'He dosn't know his own sentence?' 'No,' the officer said again . . . 'There would be no sense in telling him. He experiences it on his own body'
>
> Franz Kafka
> In the Penal Colony

Those who have studied the body marks of 'primitive' peoples tell us that the primary purpose of these inscriptions was one of differentiation. These marks asserted the difference between the human animal and other animals, between one culture and another culture, and within each culture between one individual and another. These marks were individualistic expressions -- of community, of age, of sex, of status -- but they were also "the differential mark of the law and the symbolic order set upon the body" (Thevoz, 1984: 61). The symbolic order, its meanings and its structure, was inscribed upon the epidermis, linking it permanently , physically and visibly with the invisible. The symbolic order was made both internal to the individual and yet co-extensive to the social group. It was a collective medium of human thought and human flesh. Each person's body individually became infused with the symbolic; its meaning

was the body's meaning and the body's creation. Each marked body was a messenger of the symbolic and the individual.

Canadian communications theorist Harold Innis has postulated in Empire and Communications (1950) that the kind of symbolic order a society creates is largely dependent upon the type of communications media employed. More specifically, Innis argued that media which emphasize and sustain time (stone, clay or written bodies) favor centralization and hierarchical institutions that accentuate community, whereas media which emphasize space (satellite, paper and radio) favor decentralization and centralized institutions which achieve power through the standardization of individuals; assuring regularity and predictability in their movements.

Hence, the body marks of `primitive' societies codified the symbolic order directly upon the individual and this was its primary place of expression. Each member of the society embodied this order within him or herself to the extent that it was made a part of the body. It was a "socius of inscription were the essential thing is to mark and be marked" (Delueze and Guattari, 1977: 142).

Conversely, `civilized' society mediates its symbolic order externally from the individual and codifies this order independently and anonymously. The law of `civilized' society ceases to be figured upon individual bodies; instead, it is written upon media which can be everywhere and every

one's. There is no original writing transcribed upon an original body: there are only copies of copies, each one an imitation of the logos. These are transcribed upon the ephermeral parchments of video tape, radio waves and scrap paper, and their codification and creation is done as if in secret, anonymously and invisibly, by those who have access to the `space-bound' media. This type of writing, this incognito inscription, "begins with empires; it is invented to inscribe the decrees, the `ipsissima verba' of the despot" (Lingus, 1983: 24).

Franz Kafka's story In the Penal Colony is an expressive portrait of a civilized codification of the law which is conversely written upon the body. The device which the officer of the penal colony proudly shows the traveller is a particularly horrific `drawing machine', within whose mouth full of shiny needles a convict is lain. The purpose of this machine is to inscribe upon the convict's body the law which he has broken, driving it deeper and deeper into the skin for a tortuous six hours. The convict knows not what is being written upon his body. He knows not what his sentence is. The needles strike into his body in such a complicated way that they are impossible to decipher. "`Read it,' said the officer. `I can't,' said the traveller". It is only at the last moment of life, at the last minute of the sixth hour when the pain has left his body, that the convict can read the law in his own dying flesh.

> Nothing else happens; the man is simply beginning to decipher the text, pursing his lips as though listening, it's not easy, as you saw, to decipher the text when looking at it; our man, remember, is doing it with his wounds (Kafka, 1981: 224).

Like Kafka's drawing machine, the disciplinary mechanisms of society work with an illegible grace, its needles extending and permeating invisibly across the social body. What better example than this of the practices of disciplinary society, which, with the economy of power, work their way naturally and illegibly into the skins of its subjects. The law is felt and obeyed, but never seen, until disobeyed. And it is only at this point that the graceful syncronicity of society's disciplinary mechanisms make themselves and the offending bodies visible, marking them into police blotters, data banks and video clips. Michel Thevoz writes:

> So tattooing does not disappear with the advent of writing, it is simply placed in reserve. If the law postpones the moment of marking and chooses to wait, it does so in order to emphasize its de-individualization and its universalization. If it spares the body, it does not do so out of respect for its integrity, but on the contrary to signify that in its view bodies have become non-essential and interchangable (Thevoz, 1984: 62).

Tattooing, then, has never quite been relinquished, but with the evolution of 'civilized' and centralized society its meaning has gradually been reversed. What was once the sign of inclusion within a community is now the sign of exclusion, or regression to the margins of society. This is perhaps why the prisoner tattoos his body. He is intently expressing his

differentiation from the norm; positioning himself as 'deviant' via a signifying practice which is recognized by this society as the stigmatic marking of those who inhabit society's margins. The prisoner thus buries himself symbolically into this margin; masking the features of his face with the lines of the tattoo, until the two, face and tattoo, form and content, join. Indistinquishable from one another, they are lost to the margins of ambivalence. In this sense, it is his very tattooed mask which unmasks his stigmatic identity. He makes himself as frightening as his imprisonment is frightening. He is both possessor and possessed by the tattoo, writing upon himself, upon the sacred stainless body of Western humanism, the episematic marks of the deviant.

Profaned Bodies

The prisoner's tattoo profanes the humanistic values and meanings of a society which strives to keep the human body within the norm, to keep all human bodies looking like one another. It is part of the glorification of the 'natural' body that it should be de-individualized and made universal. In contrast to the public individual bodies of the primitive, our modern society has privatized the body, disinvested it and removed it from the social field. God made man in his own image, said the Book of Genesis. And if the body is to

be an image, "it had to be effaced as such, it had to be reduced to the most disembodies signifier possible of an invisible transcendence" (Thevoz, 1984: 67). The body must be neutralized, so that it does not draw any attention to its individuality, or to that flesh which led men to evil acts.

In a similiar vein, Judaic culture placed great emphasis upon the wholeness and completeness of the body, forbidding bodily `perversion', which `means a mixing or confusing' (Douglas, 1966: 53). "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you" (Leviticus, xix: 28), for this would be the mixing or confusing of one distinct form or category with another. "Be holy for I am holy" (Leviticus, xxiii: 23), and holiness, as Douglas interprets it (1966: 53), is exemplified by completeness; it is an order that involves correct definition, discrimination, unity and symmetry.

Thus the prisoner subverts this bodily order. He confounds the sacredness and wholeness of the body by tattooing it, by visibly defiling its boundaries, mixing ink with skin and the image with the ground. The task of his tattoo is to declassify, to collapse the difference between the flesh of the body and the form of a bird or a fish or a skull. It fuses things together which are meant to be apart, obliterating their difference, and thus obliterating the meanings or values which posit this difference.

The intrinsic character of the tattoo lies not so much

in its subject matter, but in its medium -- the body. There is an eerie incongruity between the set imagery of the tattoo and the flexible canvas of the body. Here lies its potency, for the tatto exceeds and transcends the rectangular frame which normally announces the seperateness and alienation of the image from the world at large. The canvas of the body continually moves, swells, shrinks and quivers; destabilizing any sense of frame or compartmentalization, and curtailing the visual distance and objectification brought on by such an enframing. The canvas of the living body fuses the subject with the object; grounding the represented image into the spatial and temporal specificity of its site. The prisoner's tattoo recalls the image to its original medium --the body itself -- and is indeed a "savage manifestation of resistance to the mathematization of sense experience which essentially characterizes our culture" (Thevoz, 1984: 82).

The prisoner's tattoo eludes the perceptive focusing brought on by the frame, and immerses the spectator into an unobjective and unreferential space which testifies to the presence of the flesh. So, in this sense also, the prisoner's tattoo confounds the logic which maintains the axiom of disinvested and invisible bodies. By marking himself, the prisoner makes it clear that his is a body which has already been invisibly marked; a body which has already been 'vampirized by its normative image' (ibid), preceeded by its iconic double. Thus, he regains himself

from this representation by being himself the representation. He rejects the 'natural' make-up which society has given him and replaces it with a flamboyant make-up of his own. And this is paradoxically a make-up which reveals rather than conceals. The prisoner does not tattoo his body in order to cover over an initial identity, but conversely, he tattoos his body in order to reveal what has been hidden beneath the 'natural' socio-cultural cosmetics of the carceral order.

Tattooed faces

To don a mask is to throw oneself into question. It is to question the natural identity of the face beneath the mask. We have seen how the practices of disciplinary society are masked, concealed, as a particular strategy of the power of normalization. We have seen how the bodies inhabiting this society are made invisible, as to ensure their standardization and coalescence to the norm. And we have seen how these natural and illegible practices only become visible and legible when they are challenged, and that the challenging bodies only become visible at this moment of defiance.

By inscribing a mask of ink upon his face, the prisoner parades a parody. What he is doing is taking back in an extreme and spectacular style his own mass-mediated and stigmatic image; embodying within himself that which has

already been infused into society. The hearts engraved on the cheek, the tendrils of roses that descend from his crown, sheilding his eyes, his mouth, his readable features by which one could normally read expression, act to heighten and emphasize the invisible signifiers within which he is imprisoned. By disguising his face, he is alerting us to the notion that he is meant to be disguised. By allowing these inscribed images to completely overwhelm his face, he makes it clear that his stigmatic image proceeds him. In essence, the prisoner and his tattooed mask makes visible the invisible. He challenges the invisible order by parodying and making visible the represented images upon which it relies. By covering his face under a garden of hearts and roses, he uncovers the strategic process of dedifferentiation peculiar to disciplinary society. He brings to light the notion that we really don't know the identity of that face hidden beneath these intertwining inscriptions. He flaunts this face as a provocative challenge to the principle of generalized equivalences, of disinvested bodies, and of the imposition of a univocal image. He exteriorizes, with the linework of roses, the fate and the fallacy of a man exempted from his own body.

The man with the garden head is altered. What should be the sign of his emotions, his identity, his mind, is hidden beneath the sinuous lines of a flower garden; brought down, so to speak, to the earth. That axis of verticality which

commands the separation of body and earth, mind and body, image and ground, is dystroyed. The garden is not only at the man's feet, but on his face. It covers him and extends without end, fusing the body with its literal surroundings. It unites the man with both the literal and the symbolic, pointing in both directions, and displays the essence of his contradictory condition. The man with the garden head thus invites the spectator to view and confront the distinct categories upon which their society and culture was built, and to recognize them for the fictive and constructed creations which they are.

Love and hate on either hand

> Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. (I am large, I contain multitudes)
> Walt Whitman
> Song of Myself

To attract other persons from foreign lands into your own is not only to seduce, but to abduct. The prisoner with the garden head seduces the visitor with his inscribed images of roses and hearts which swirl and dance visibly on the skin. The visitor is seduced by the tattoo's pure joy of unimpeded process. But the visitor is also abducted into a world wherein distinctions are confused and the contradictory nature of society is displayed. He or she is pushed into a

labyrinth that is filled with the dread and the rapture of being lost. In a sense, it may be the seduction of the tattoo which acts as its compensation for its assault upon society's meanings.

Just as the garden inscribed upon the prisoner's face moves smoothly between the constructed oppositions of society, so too does another tattoo which utilizes language, rather than image. This tattoo, like the garden inscribed on the face, invites interpretation. But it also resists it, or resists a reading from any rational point of view, just as the garden subsumed the prisoner's features and hid them from view. While this tattoo utilizes language, it is a blatant deconstruction of the meanings assigned to this language, just as the prisoner's rose and heart covered face deconstructed the image from its frame. And like the garden planted upon the face, this tattoo brings to the fore the essence of the prisoner's contradictory condition.

This tattoo also seduces and abducts. It intices the visitor into its boldily movement, into its puzzle, and then leaves one in limbo; to flounder within the meaningless of the words' meanings. It is in a sense a communication of non-communication, whose central rationale is the irrationale. It is a deliberate testing of the salience of society's limits; an implicit questioning of the boundaries set by the logocentric order. It gains power through the fracturing of the symmetrical relations of power-discourse

and power-knowledge, whilst making intensely visible the contradictions with such relations entail. It makes chaos out of order, (and herein lies its subversive style). Alienation becomes the prisoner's method rather than his fate.

These are the words love and hate which the prisoner has tattoed on either hand. One hand has love inscribed upon it, the other hate. Which one commands the other? Does the prisoner love or does he hate? Is he to be trusted? The ambiguity of the matter is obvious. By what frame can we give meaning to this paradoxical statement? As visitors into the unknown world of the prison we are caught within an Epimenides circle: `Epimenides says that Cretans are liars. But he is a Cretan. Therefore he lies. Therefore Cretans are not liars. Therefore he speaks the truth. Therefore Cretans are liars. . . ' To step into this contraption is to go round and round, unable to stop. Truth leads to the lie, and vice-versa.

This contraption, which Sartre has called the `whirly-gig' (1963) and Hebdige the `wind-up' (n.d.), contains the same contradictory ambush for the spectator as it does for the prisoner. For the prisoner uses the tattoo to be what the prison has made him in the world as it is. But simultaneously, since he wills his relationship to this world, he also wills his exile, since the world will reject him on the basis of this mark. The visitor is brought into

this `whirly-gig' and the plight of the prisoner is for the moment made his own.

And yet, something else is happening here. The `whirly-gig' which is turning faster and faster is in danger of taking off from the `real', from the lines which we have been taught to walk lest we fall into the brink (of unreality). "Genet applies himself to disordering reason as does Rimbaud to disordering the senses. He takes pleasure, out of resentment, of jeopardizing the thought of the Just" (Sartre, 1963: 333). This tattoo also is disorderly. The prisoner's tattoo of love and hate strives to subvert the dominant definitions of the normal which have condemned him to his imprisonment; he seeks to escape the classification which has deemed him deviant. The rational language of the normal is abandoned for a realm where there are no frames, where `reality' is incessantly being put into doubt. Dick Hebdige describes the verbal equivalent of this tattoo -- the wind-up:

> . . . the wind-up shows how verbal communication can be used to preserve silence -- to prevent anything "real" from being disclosed to the outside world . . . Thus, when Billy, who is definately a jazz musician, probably a thief, and perhaps a pornagrapher is introduced to a new face, he will immediately proceed to wind the stranger up by relating a series of personal exploits that become progressively less credible as the conversation goes on. At some point in this spiral, the "victim" will realize he is being duped, and either beat an embarrassed retreat or engage in the game itself, but whichever option he chooses, he can no longer ignore the fact that alien frames of reference are being used which invalidates the normal rules of discourse. At one sweep, the wind-up dispenses with fundemental conventions of verbal interaction and breaks the tacit

> agreement which, under normal circumstances, unites two speakers by opening declaring its committment to untruths. In this way, the wind-up performs an inherently subversive function, and, even if he accepts the terms of the game, he cannot translate his "findings" back into the more familiar language because a totally different epistomology is governing the exchange. (Hebdige, n.d.: 61).

The verbal communication of the wind-up, Genet's `whirly-gig' thoughts, and the love-hate tattoo are all anarchic solutions to the external controls imposed upon the criminal or the prisoner by a disciplinary and normalized society. They are all, in a sense, tactics for 'waging war on the word'. Like the whirly-gig or the wind-up, the love-hate tattoo stands as a testimony to the paradoxes of abstraction, deliberating negating the `as-if', and allowing the prisoner to move secretly behind his skin. The onus of definition is appropriated by him, and he becomes a subject in control rather than an object to be controlled. He draws the orderly into the chaotic and suffocates it there.

Dismembered meanings

> He took particular delight in vermilion designs, which are known to be the most painful of tattoos. When his patients had received five or six hundred pricks of the needle, and then taken a scalding hot bath the more vividly to bring out the colors, they would often collapse half dead at Seikichi's feet. As they lay there unable to move, he would ask with a satisfied smile: `So, it really hurts?'
>
> Junichiro Tanizaki
> Tattoo

Whenever people discuss the design of a tattoo, they emphasize the pain with which it was acquired. These marks must count for something, for they hurt. Even before they signify anything, or signify nothing, they give pain to the living body upon which they are engraved. And even after the moment of inscription itself, these marks still harken back to the pain with which they were acquired.

Surveys have shown that while ten percent of prisoners may be tattooed upon entering prison, the majority are marked upon leaving (Brain, 1979: 160). Why is this? Is the tattoo a sort of litmus test which sets the prisoner apart from those who would not readily submit to the pain which the needle imparts and the permanent stigmatization which that pain implies? Is it merely a partisan badge of self-mutilation which celebrates sentiments of belonging to an underground world?

Well, why not do violence to the body, when most of the prison's violence concentrates itself upon absent bodies and imprisoned minds. But this interpretation is much too simple. It relies too strongly upon the direct correllation of cause and effect, and direct correllations are what the prisoner's tattoo escapes rather than expresses. The prisoner's tattoo cannot be gathered into a single equation, for it is part skin, part image, part figurative and part literal. Here there is no whole which is equal to the sum of its parts.

The prisoner's tattoo is a signifying practice which arranges itself by bricolage. It is made of the flesh and the skin, of the dismembered eyes and limbs of beasts, beauties, and demons. It is a process of assemblage, bringing together all the debris, all the spare parts of society, fusing them with the sacred body, inserting the profaning needle under the stainless skin. Its very action is a mixing, a confusing, and a condemnation of those tautological meanings by which we live. It proceeds, not according to the codes of the prison, but by a process of significance; floating, disturbing, getting in the way of meaning. Perhaps it is only the volume of pain that brings this maneuvering significance back to the gravity of the prisoner's being.

In the coupling of the glaring skull upon the body there is excitation; points of high tension. There is an extravagant gesture of violence and movement, a kind of explosion so to speak, with the tattoo. This explosion is wrought by the clash of affinity with antagonism, and of attraction with revulsion. For the tattoo embodies the co-presence of the normative with the abnormal, and yet, it does not mediate or domesticate these oppositions. Rather, it pierces the conciousness with their contradictions. The prisoner takes a whole and absent body and cross-breeds it with an abnormal image, producing a form which comments on both the normal and the abnormal, the real and the unreal,

and questions the divisions between the two. The prisoner's tattoo has a visible energy which calls attention to itself, as if to express dissatisfaction with the limits imposed upon his body. The colorful tattoo which floats freely on the surface of the skin contradicts what is left inside (the immobile body). The body remains imprisoned, but part of it is in flight.

The tattoos previously illustrated were chosen expressly as examples of this process of significance. But all tattoos move, and all tattoos manage to maneuver around the frame; even those that signal in a rational language, even those that are mimetic or representational. The quality of the tattoo arises not so much from the specific content of image, as from the fact that it refuses to be taken as a unified whole. All tattoos embody a confusion of type. Even if the prisoner's tattoo utilizes an understandable language, it is still a repudiation of the unity of cohesiveness or wholeness upon which language relies. In mixing the familiar whole with an inventory of alien parts, the prisoner repudiates the prison's and society's conventional categories and rejects their restraint. Overall, the prisoner's tattoo repudiates not through content, but through form.

Behind these plays with form lies the conventional notion that it is the mind which forms the man and gives him his source of structure, order and unity. The tattoo expresses in a semiotic which has no organizing principle and

it speaks of a man which is not a unified whole, but a confusion of multiple parts. His parts are in a state of anarchy, producing an impression of vitality, movement and energy against the static and routinized world of the prison. Such vitality is the destruction of order.

"Confused things lead the mind to new inventions" (Harpham, 1982: 17). And the prisoner's tattoo, confusing categories, mixing ink with skin, does lead the spectator's mind towards new discoveries. Caught within the movement of significance, the spectator of the tattoo becomes sensitive to ambiguity and anomoly; to a process which seems to break the laws of common-sense. The tattoo speaks as a revelation. Because it breaks the laws, it can penetrate to new realms of experiance; it can communicate a life which the prison attempts to obscure. And because it resides within the margins of ambivalence, it brings the spectator into these margins as well. It brings the spectator into a space where contradictions are displayed and where the spectator may become aware of the experiance of the prisoner. And this awareness may somehow disengage the prisoner from the classification within which he is imprisoned.

Endnotes for Chapter Five

1

Hebdige (1979) discusses signifying practice as that modeled by the Tel Quel group in France. In opposition to the notion of reading a text (sign, speech, expression, etc.) as a message within which a fixed meaning is revealed, signifying practice sees the text as polysemous, generating a plethora of diverse meanings. Furthermore, it does not view the creation of this meaning as a direct correllation or equation between a fixed sign and a stable referent, but as a process which breaks with fixity or unity. "It is concerned with the process of meaning making rather than the final product" (Hebdige, 1979: 118). Signifying practice is that which, as an "active, transitive force", shapes and positions the speaking subject "while always itself remaining 'in process' capable of infinate adaptations" (ibid).

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Roland Barthes introduces The Pleasure of the Text by asking his reader to "imagine someone . . . who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism, but by simple disregard of that spector: logical contradiction; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity . . . " (1975: 3). Like Barthes reader, the prisoner and his tattoo also 'recreate the text', taking pleasure in confusing the common-sense, bringing contradistinction together -- not to unite it -- but for its creative action. The prisoner and his tattoo interprets the world by rearranging it, or recreating it; taking elements out of their context and placing them in a new juxtaposition to one another. This is in fact also how society's meanings are interpreted and enunciated -- by recreating a world according to the demands of design or pattern.

The prisoner's tattoo is an act of interpretation. And it is an enunciation of interpretation. His interpretation disfigures. Yet all interpretation disfigures. The common-

sense meanings by which we interpret disfigure and distort no less than any others. It is the action of the prisoner's tattoo which comments upon and enables us to see this distortion.

This is the spirit in which I have presented the prisoner's tattoo: not as something definately abnormal or deformed or disfigured, but as something which is only abnormal because society has interpreted it (distorted it, disfigured it, recreated it) in this manner. This, as well, is how society has interpreted the prisoner.

So the tattoo is the prisoner's vehicle for maneuvering around these disfiguring interpretations, and creating some interpretations of his own. And his act of interpretation is often so intensified, so 'distorted'and abnormal, that it pierces the awareness of the spectator, while escaping the spectator's awareness and imposition of 'normal' meanings at the same time. It is this action of intensified interpretation, of 'abnormal' construction, that brings one to realize the distorting and disfiguring action of all interpretation.

Thus, the tattoo resists interpretation as well as invites it and it is this double movement which operates its signifying practice. The prisoner's tattoo impresses upon the spectator that there are in fact many ways of interpreting, many modes of distortion, other than the ones used by our normative and meaningful society. His tattoo

disturbs the spectator with the prospect that our ways of interpreting are but a few among many. To see that the motion and the inconguity of the prisoner's tattoo is everywhere, (and everywhere imprisoned as an absence within institutional discourse), is to recognize the potentiality of other interpretations and other meanings.

This thesis too has been interpretative. It has attempted to examine the prisoner's tattoo as his interpretation of power in society, and as his interpretation of his positioning within this society. But in doing so, it has tried to avoid offering any definitive or total explanation which would account for the prisoner's experience. No one except the prisoner may offer such an explanation. Nor did it attempt to artificially bring the prisoner's tattoo into a unified, theoretical construct, for this would counter the polysemous movement which the prisoner's tattoo implies. Instead, theoretical constructions were used to provide a vocabulary in which the signifying practice of the prisoner's tattoo could be expressed. Finally, the essential purpose of this thesis was not necessarily to answer our deepest questions about the nature of power in society, but to make available answers that others might give -- answers that are usually not heard -- and thus include them into the consultable record of what human beings have said about their world.

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