

## POWER, ADAPTATION AND RESISTANCE IN A LATE-MODERN MEN'S PRISON

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*Based on an ethnographic study of a medium-security UK men's training prison, this article has two main aims: to document the nature and experience of power in the late-modern prison, and to detail the ways in which prisoners adapt to these mechanisms of penal power. It is argued that although overt resistance is uncommon and prisoners generally appear highly compliant, this public transcript of consent comprises a range of prisoner orientations, from normative commitment to strategic, backstage resistance. In this respect, the article highlights the heterogeneous effects of penal power, and illustrates how the different components of prison social order are expressed through a range of adaptations to the ends and techniques of contemporary imprisonment.*

According to Alison Lieblich (2004: 484), the mission to 'eliminate residual resistance and secure a new mode of compliance' has been 'the largely undocumented penal project of the last decade or so'. While Lieblich has charted the last 20 years of UK prison policy and organization, and others have theorized the reconfigurations of penal power entailed by managerialism and associated changes in techniques of governance (e.g. Garland 1997), we have little empirical evidence of how power is manifested and reconstituted on the prison landings. Based on a semi-ethnographic study of a medium-security UK men's training prison, this article has two main objectives: to document the nature and experience of power in the late-modern prison, and to detail the various ways that prisoners adapt to these mechanisms of control and compliance. Prisoner testimonies are used to illustrate the form, balance and location of penal power, highlighting perceptions that the contemporary prison may be 'softer', more civilized and less authoritarian than in the past, but that power operates within it in ways that are insidious, intangible, opaque and highly effective. In this context, open defiance is generally considered imprudent and ineffective, leading to an outward appearance of calm and compliance. Following Scott (1990), the article shows how this 'public transcript' of acquiescence masks a more complex reality in which consent comprises a range of prisoner orientations, from normative commitment to strategic, backstage resistance.

### *Penal Power, Compliance and Resistance*

As Giddens has succinctly suggested, power—the capacity to achieve outcomes—does not operate in a single direction. Social subordinates can 'turn their weakness back against the powerful. [ . . . ] Only a person who is kept totally confined and controlled does not participate in the dialectic of control' (1982: 39). It is hardly surprising that

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this dialectic has occupied prison sociologists since the discipline's foundation. A key premise of Sykes' (1958) classic monograph was that the prison's apparently totalitarian nexus of power was more compromised than it seemed, and that, through their code of anti-institutional solidarity and their role in the informal achievement of order, prisoners had considerably more collective power than might be expected. However, as Mathiesen (1965) revealed, prisoner power needed to be neither collective nor oppositional in order to be effective. By holding officials to task for not conforming to their own norms or wider moral values, individual prisoners were able to exert significant influence over their custodians. Mathiesen characterized prisoners as fighting from a position of weakness, not least because their 'censoriousness' operated within, rather than against, official discourse, thus ostensibly accepting the terms of the prison superordinates. Nonetheless, he noted, making representations from within prevailing ideology could be a highly effective way of challenging one's treatment.

Scott (1990) challenges the view that censoriousness is a sign of ideological submission. Unless subordinate groups believe they can overturn their domination, he argues, it makes sense for them to negotiate using the terms of hegemonic discourse, but this does not mean that they have internalized hegemonic norms. Indeed, it is almost impossible to gauge from the 'public transcript' whether an appeal to the dominant value system represents a prudent and strategic performance of ideological concord or genuine ethical incorporation. As Scott also asserts, there is an 'immense political terrain [ . . . ] between quiescence and revolt' (1990: 199). To seek out only public defiance and rebellion as indications of resistance is to grossly simplify the concept, and expects rather a lot from subordinates in situations in which power differentials are extreme. Overt and organized resistance does occur in prison, in the form of riots and protests (Useem and Kimball 1989; Scraton *et al.* 1991; Carrabine 2004), and through hunger strikes, escape attempts, legal actions and other forms of conscious political action designed to subvert state power (McEvoy 2000; Buntman 2003). However, even if one excludes acts which might better be seen as coping or psychological survival, resistance is clearly not limited to such explosive and organized manifestations.<sup>1</sup> As studies of women's imprisonment have demonstrated, it may take the form of ostensibly trivial acts, such as challenges to dietary provisions and codes of dress, that represent assertions of subjective identity (e.g. Bosworth 1999; Bosworth and Carrabine 2000). Even if such minor conflicts are absent, to interpret a 'calm surface' of public consent as evidence of contentment or normative assent is to be 'looking in the wrong place for political conflict' (Scott 1990: 17). Under conditions of domination, dissent and resistance are likely to be heavily concealed within public discourse or limited to backstage areas.

The extensive space between open rebellion and absolute consent represents the normal reality of prison life, in which order prevails, but often tenuously and uneasily, based on a combination of forces. These can be summarized as, first, coercion, fear and violence; secondly, the manipulation and orchestration of economic needs and desires; thirdly, normative consent or 'legitimacy', in which power arrangements can be justified in terms of the values of those subjected to them (see Sparks *et al.* 1996); and,

<sup>1</sup> McEvoy (2000) suggests that resistance and coping exist on the same spectrum of activities, but should not be confused. It is important not to define resistance as *any* expression of agency or identity, particularly in an era in which the aim (which is not to say the outcome) of imprisonment is not to obliterate personal integrity. Buntman's (2003: 237) characterization of resistance as 'actions and practices designed to dilute, circumvent, or eliminate the imposition of unwelcome power' remains somewhat ambiguous, but is a useful baseline definition.

fourthly, signification or ‘dull compulsion’, in which the rules and rituals of prison life generate a pragmatic or fatalistic acceptance of its inalterability (see Carrabine 2005). The way these components are balanced and combined within an institution delimits the distinctive forms of compliance and resistance that result. As Foucault asserts ‘Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’ (1978: 95).

The reverse is also true: forms of power are ‘devised, elaborated, and justified’ with resistance (and thus compliance) in mind (Scott 1990: 111). Recent developments in UK prison systems testify to this, while illustrating how policies designed to achieve order meld different elements of persuasion and compulsion. Following the widespread prison disturbances of 1990, situational control measures such as smaller wings, fewer communal areas and the increased use of CCTV have functioned in both coercive and symbolic ways—reducing opportunities for collective unrest, while reinforcing to prisoners the futility of protest. Meanwhile, attempts have been made to re-legitimize the prison through more accountable and purposeful regimes, more sanitary conditions, and efforts to eradicate staff racism and brutality. Yet, many of these measures, implemented as a direct consequence of the *Woolf Report*, also functioned at multiple levels. From the mid-1990s, a politicized agenda of security and control transformed what had been envisaged as a system of high basic standards and rights, with extra entitlements on top, into a ‘more punitive and restrictive’ system of ‘sticks and carrots’ (Liebling 2004: 30): a means of ensuring compliance that was coercive and instrumental as well as potentially legitimizing. When the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme was launched in 1995, giving prisoners the opportunity to earn benefits (such as in-cell television, more visits and greater private spending) on the basis of good behaviour, such terms were all the more apparent. Mandatory drug testing, the extension of early release provisions and the expansion of offending behaviour courses were implemented with similar rationales. While looking to contribute to rehabilitative goals, by linking rewards and sentence progression to behaviour, their aim was to incentivize prisoners to invest in institutionally desirable behaviour, and to take responsibility for the terms of their own incarceration.

Such strategies are typical of those that Garland (1997), drawing on Foucault (1977; 1982; 1991), has characterized as forms of governmental power emerging throughout the field of crime control. These governmental ‘technologies’ assume rational actors who can be manipulated by incentives and disincentives to align their preferences with those of the governing authorities and self-regulate in a way that feels freely chosen, even when highly structured. This ‘subjectification’ process does not constrain or suppress so much as incite and stimulate. Through a combination of threat and opportunity, the prisoner is ‘taught’ to engage with institutional goals, take responsibility for their actions and address their offending behaviour: to become ‘an entrepreneur of his own personal development, rather than an objectified or infantilized client upon whom therapeutic solutions are imposed’ (Garland 1997: 191). Accountability and governance are shifted from the institution to the individual.

When successful, governmental power is neither straightforwardly coercive nor consensual, nor is it simply economic or ideological. Choices are steered, so that the subject comes to recognize institutional and personal goals as analogous, while punitive measures—the denial of visits, transfers to higher-security establishments—are used only if self-monitoring fails (Hannah-Moffat 2001). Power is not concentrated in and

imposed by a sovereign power (Foucault 1977), but dispersed through specialist knowledge and expert authorities, operating in a way that is 'light' (Foucault 1977: 202), 'non-corporal' (Foucault 1977: 203), 'automatic and anonymous' (Foucault 1977: 176), without any need for personal motive on the part of those who exercise it. The supervisors, as well as the supervised, are surveilled, disciplined and enmeshed by the system of power. Indeed, recent developments have radically reorganized the nature and location of power throughout the prison system. Managerialism and performance-culture represent attempts to reform an organization perceived as indecent, inefficient and ineffective, and to redistribute power in ways that allow these reforms to be implemented and monitored (Liebling 2004). Power has been centralized and shifted upwards, towards governors and senior managers, and away from uniformed staff. Although the IEP scheme has given officers significant discretionary power in contributing to decisions about prisoners' privilege levels, their collective and coercive power has been greatly diminished.

Strategies of self-government and responsabilization do not represent new forms of power so much as an intensification of established techniques. Nor do they exist in pure form, or in isolation from other sources of order. More importantly, governmental projects are never fully realized in practice: ' . . . the question of how prisoners *engage* with these practices, and the ways in which these practices do or do not actually shape prisoners' subjectivity and behaviour is a separate issue of great importance' (Garland 1997: 207). In addressing such questions, this article provides an exposition both of the organization and experience of penal power, and the responses that these power formations engender. In doing so, it differentiates between a range of prisoner adaptations, illustrating that prisons not only vary in the means by which they secure order, but that different prisoners are motivated and compelled into (relative) compliance through different elements of these means.

### *The Study*

To repeat Scott's (1990) central assertion, 'any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners of their subordination' (Scott 1990: 4). Yet, accessing hidden transcripts is difficult precisely because they are deliberately concealed from the public eye, while those double meanings and veiled messages that are surreptitiously inserted into the public text are often incomprehensible to outsiders. In such circumstances, ethnographic research methods provide the best means of discerning and deciphering the concealed discourses of prison life. Informal interaction over a sustained period allows the researcher to observe what occurs behind the backs of the officials, or in backstage areas, before tracks are covered over and performances reproduced. Meanwhile, off-stage interviews provide an opportunity for prisoners to discard their public masks. In the modern prison, where there are few zones of autonomy, this provision of a neutral site is essential.

In this study, conducted over a 10-month fieldwork period in HMP Wellingborough—a medium-security training prison for men—interviews took place in a private office on one of the establishment's residential wings. Seventy-two prisoners and 20 staff provided around 300 hours of interview material, while extensive fieldwork notes were collected primarily during a three-month phase set aside for observation and informal

conversation. The establishment was visited three or four days per week, including weekends, evenings and public holidays. The author was given keys to allow full and unaccompanied access to all areas of the institution. At the time of study, the prison held around 520 men on seven wings, including a 180-bed voluntary drug-testing unit and one wing holding life-sentence and long-term prisoners deemed suitable for medium-security conditions.

Half of the prisoner interviewees were men with whom relationships had been developed during the study's observational stage. The others were selected through random sampling, to prevent the study from over-representing more extroverted prisoners. Interviewees were directly questioned on issues of power, adaptation and resistance—e.g. what factors influenced their behaviour; how they achieved desired goals; whether their compliance signified contentment—while discussions of everyday conditions and attitudes towards staff elicited further data on these matters. Where power is exercised without direct coercion, its operation may not be evident to many of those subjected to it. Nonetheless, many prisoner testimonies richly articulated the form, balance and location of power in ways that illustrated both its objective terms and its subjective experience.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Perception and Experience of Power*

You don't exist right up against the authoritarian wall, you exist somewhere away from it, and there is a buffer zone in-between. If you start pushing for things, all of a sudden you hit up against that. [ . . . ] There are certain things that you're never gonna get, there are other things where you can undermine or erode that authoritarian block. But [mainly] you live in a buffer zone between it, so you might not [hit it]. Then all of a sudden, *bang*, you will hit up against the wall [ . . . ]. Back in the day, the system was pure authority, there was no give in it. [You] were banging up against it, so you did get things like riots. [ . . . ] That shield has been removed slightly from your everyday contact with the prison. (Interviewee 31)

A number of themes can be gleaned from the quote above. The notion of the 'buffer zone' is particularly significant, in signalling both the nature of power and its location. First, it was noted repeatedly that prison officer culture had shed much of its authoritarian character: that most officers were reasonable and approachable, and that life on the landings was more civilized and humane than in the past. Improvements in the material conditions of imprisonment contributed to a diminution of everyday tension—and to a higher baseline of basic legitimacy. Secondly, power did not appear to reside primarily on the prison landings or with the uniformed staff who worked on them. Experienced prisoners frequently contrasted the current era with one in which officers had 'been gods: they had the power of life or death' (Interviewee 21); 'They had control of the whole prison. [ . . . ] They did whatever they wanted, and the governor backed them' (Interviewee 9). Prisoners recognized that such collective power had been eroded and supplanted. Decisions to shut wings or cancel evening exercise were

<sup>2</sup> Prisoners with long-term experience of the prison system were the most capable of describing the contemporary operation of power. This was partly because they were able to make comparisons with the ways that power functioned in earlier periods. There are, of course, problems with taking such testimonies at face value. Alongside the normal issues of selective recollection, lifers are often comparing prisons of different security levels, in which power and order take on different forms. Nonetheless, their descriptions were generally in accordance with academic accounts, and articulated in more lucid terms what other prisoners sought to convey.

taken at a management level.<sup>3</sup> And although judgments about license releases and parole were based partly on feedback from wing staff, ultimately they too were made at higher levels of the organization, or by specialists such as psychologists and probation officers.

Thus, despite their discretion to determine privilege levels, officers were generally regarded as relatively powerless: unable to make the decisions about which prisoners cared most—those that meant getting released as quickly as possible—without reference to their superiors. Officers were not seen as *embodying* the system of power so much as *implementing* it: 'like robots: they're programmed just to give certain answers' (Interviewee 11). Frequently, then, they were excluded from descriptions of 'The System' and were perceived as marginal rather than core figures in its organization. Power flowed *through* officers, but they were not considered its ultimate possessors. Prisoners often therefore took out their irritation on officers, but did not hold them accountable for what were perceived as the iniquities or failings of a system determined well above their heads.

In contrast, specialist staff were seen as part of an extensive, repressive and increasingly powerful network of disciplinary knowledge whose influence reflected a key transformation in the nature as well as the location of penal power:

In the old days, they could fuck you up with their fists. Now they can fuck you up with their pen. [ . . . ] The power of the pen is really mighty in prison nowadays. Psychologists have taken over prisons. (Interviewee 7)

Many prisoners viewed psychological expertise with particular suspicion, identifying it as judgmental, objectifying and deeply insidious—no longer concerned with prisoner welfare so much as public protection. One interviewee observed that it was relatively easy to adjust to the everyday terms of prison life, but that the authority exercised by specialists was more pernicious: ' . . . it's to do with the effects on your life, of you getting out, it's a deeper type of power [from] the everyday situation: I think it's felt more profoundly' (Interviewee 31).

The perceived diminution of 'pure authority' did not mean that power was somehow absent from the space between prisoners and 'the wall'. Rather, the 'buffer zone' represented a 'softer' form of power, in which staff–prisoner relationships functioned to enhance both decency and control: eliminating many of the tensions of prison life, while providing officers with better opportunities to identify and inhibit the roots of discontent. Likewise, many experienced prisoners recognized that power was exercised upon them through precisely those aspects of prison life which were ostensibly benevolent. Thus, while acknowledging that the civilization of the prison had alleviated many basic frustrations, they identified improvements and opportunities as dimensions of penal control:

<sup>3</sup> One incident in the prison, in which the perimeter fence security system failed, illustrated the hierarchy of decision making among staff. Wing officers were given only basic information about the situation, and were not consulted on how to deal with it. Decisions were made by a team consisting of the prison's governors, and three operational principal officers. In general, Wellingborough's uniformed staff were collectively rather atomized and passive. During a troubled period in the prison of staff shortages and a change in shift patterns, there was little indication of solidarity or group spirit. Staff protest was largely ineffective, consisting primarily of individualistic responses such as 'going sick', and a culture of demoralization in which staff retreated to wing offices. Protests from the establishment's Prison Officers Association were bitter and vocal, but many officers regarded the organization as toothless and insular.

People are scared. They're all chasing things now. They don't want to upset the apple cart. They don't want to have the TV taken off them [The prison's] saying to you, 'we'll give you that but you've got to do this for us'. [ . . . ] They give you so much now, but they only give you things which they can take back off you. [ . . . ] All this enhanced, standard, basic, it's a good thing in the long run because prison did need this change, where they gave you a bit more. But the prison system will only give you stuff which they can take away from you. (Interviewee 34)

Such comments recognized a tension between the enhancement of legitimacy represented by penal reforms and the manipulation and coercion inherent in schemes that granted access to such reforms in conditional and differentiated ways. As one lifer complained, 'It's alright havin carrots, but there's no point having carrots if somebody's behind it with a big stick' (Interviewee 11). Meanwhile, improvements in treatment and opportunities extended the *amount* and *intensity* of power available to the prison authorities: ' . . . they can hit you with a stick a lot fuckin harder [ . . . ]. They've got more stick to wield' (Interviewee 11). Indeed, since the prison's primary inducements related to the prisoner's progression towards release, and its sanctions involved checking such progress, the might of the stick and the appeal of the carrots were almost inseparable. The difference between being an 'enhanced' or 'basic' prisoner was significant to prisoners not only in terms of their current conditions, but because these were official status labels that influenced the speed of a prisoner's journey towards freedom. The potency of the prison's seductions was precisely what made them so sharply double-edged, and so encompassing. One interviewee described the situation as 'more diplomatic; [but] always in their favour. [ . . . ] The system has the monopoly. They own all the cards' (Interviewee 34).

The dispersal of power throughout the institution, and through a range of technologies, meant that although very few prisoners doubted that the prison was 'run by staff', many struggled to see whether power had a solid or identifiable base: ' . . . nobody runs it, I suppose,' one reflected (Interviewee 9). Another noted that 'there is no such thing as a god to go to [now]. It's within the guidelines. [But] those guidelines are manoeuvrable' (Interviewee 21). Many prisoners knew that their behaviour was restricted, but had little idea of how power was operating upon them. For the more experienced, power was not invisible, but intangible: it operated at a distance—through specialist knowledge and risk assessments—that made it almost impossible to affect. The system was perceived to function anonymously, unreachably and inflexibly (Foucault 1977):

There's definitely a brick wall there, and you hit the brick wall then that's it, no further. The system, or the people who administer the system, will never ever change anything for an individual prisoner's benefit. If the system says 'no' then it is 'no' no matter what it is. [For example] I've been waitin for a town visit since January. [ . . . ] It doesn't matter how often you go down that office and, 'what's happening?' Nothing will be hurried up: it will go at the pace that it's supposed to go at [ . . . ]. There is no point in complaining, it will happen when it will happen. (Interviewee 24)

It was in this respect—as an abstract, remote bureaucracy—that authority was encountered as a 'wall'. Conversely, in describing everyday contact with officers, prisoners contrasted a past culture of clarity, austerity and brutality with one that was softer, yet more opaque and uncertain. Many compared a time of 'lines that you did not cross' and rules written 'in stone' (Interviewee 21) with contemporary conditions where boundaries were blurred and expectations unclear:

[In the past] The rules was tight but at the same time it was relaxed because you knew exactly how far you could go. It's like getting a piece of elastic band, pulling it, and you know if you pull it a bit further it's going to snap. [Now] you have the same elastic band and pull it and pull it and pull it and not know when it's going to snap. (Interviewee 34)

Whereas the prison of the past was presented as honest and direct, albeit confrontational, the late-modern prison was portrayed as dishonest and manipulative: psychologists tried to 'get inside your head'; and the system repeatedly raised hopes without always providing clear criteria for how these could be met. In the past, one lifer explained, 'you could ask for something, and you knew the answer. The answer was always "no". There was no delusions, no dangling carrots, [ . . . ] no moving goalposts' (Interviewee 10). In this context, when prisoners extolled a time when you 'knew where you stood', the phrase meant being told to your face, rather than in a written report or after delay.<sup>4</sup> Some prisoners felt 'disrespected' that everyday decisions were not conveyed through face-to-face contact and that power seemed to operate 'behind your back' (Interviewee 9). Others claimed, somewhat hyperbolically, that staff violence was preferable to being 'killed off on file' (i.e. having negative comments placed on record), because its impact was predictable and short-lived rather than distant, long-lasting and at some unpredictable point in the future. Likewise, some prisoners were nostalgic for a time of 'straightforward' verbal confrontation: 'You have to be so careful of the words you say. Because otherwise [it] could get called up on one of your interviews—your "areas of concern". [Back then] You could tell a screw to fuck off. [ . . . ] and he'd tell you to fuck off. You knew where you stood. [Now] You can't get your point of view across' (Interviewee 21). Such complaints were not representative, but they expressed a widespread sentiment that the tone of late-modern penalty was soft, sly and unmanly.

In identifying prison life as lacking clear terms and boundaries, prisoners also highlighted the manner in which they were not only held responsible for, but were also agents in the terms and conditions of their incarceration:

The screws [used to] let you know: 'you step over that line, and I'll have you.' These days they'll let you step over the line. They'll give you enough rope to hang yourself. [ . . . ] You can just tie yourself up and then kill yourself with it. (Interviewee 34)

Here, then, the 'buffer zone' represented the sphere in which the prisoner was expected to self-govern without direct intervention: to be 'the principle of his own subjection' (Foucault 1977: 203). It was not sufficient to advance through the system invisibly, as an object of it. Progression required active engagement with the system, and constant self-monitoring, not simply being passive, compliant or avoiding trouble:

Before you just did your time and you got out. There was nothing required of you, except to go to work. Whereas now, it's down to the slightest little thing. [ . . . ] Like there's a notice out there, 'don't fill a bucket from the hot water tap or you get a strike'. You get three strikes, you're knocked down a level, you might lose your TV, [or] a couple of visits. [ . . . ] Right down to the tiniest forms of behaviour, it's all monitored, it's all tied in to your future. (Interviewee 24)

<sup>4</sup> The term was also used in relation to many local prisons, in which staff cultures were more traditional and the institution had less to offer in terms of early release schemes.

Prison life was experienced not only as ‘deep’ (Downes 1988) and ‘heavy’ (King and McDermott 1995), but also ‘tight’: ‘like a straitjacket’ (Interviewee 37). In the terms of one prisoner, the ‘boundary of the bubble’ was a lot less imposing in a category C prison than in higher security establishments, but ‘to keep the bubble from bursting, it seems to be tighter. [They’ve] got control over you, not with the bars [but], by saying “look, you can get these things as long as you comply”’ (Interviewee 48). ‘Improvements’ in terms of comforts and opportunities were a trade-off for the freedom to be left alone. Officers themselves were not necessarily ‘in your face’—indeed, during association periods, their visibility was often minimal—but drug tests, cell searches and ongoing surveillance for reports meant that direct oversight was not required for prisoners to be gripped by mechanisms of control and to regulate their behaviour accordingly. Not all self-regulated in ways that the prison desired (see below), and a rich prisoner subculture did exist, but there was little autonomous space beyond the grasp of power. At best, prisoners said, you could ‘ride’ the system, but you could not ignore it.

The bureaucratic and governmental organization of power had a further consequence. Prisoners not only had to do the things expected of them, but also demonstrate that they were doing them. Compliance needed to be visible, formally recorded and in line with systemic discourses that some prisoners saw as in conflict with genuine concerns to rehabilitate, and meaningful assessments of truth and risk:

If you’re not complying with one thing, then they see you as a risk of not complying with other things. [ . . . ] Like I wouldn’t do R & R [Reasoning and Rehabilitation]. Because I see it as a farce. They’re trying to get you to act in a way that you would never act. That no human being would ever do. [But] You can’t be seen as being given your own view, you have to [take] *their* view. And I can’t comply like that. [So they said] that I wasn’t complying with the rules of the system. But it’s not in the rules to do R & R. As soon as you go there, they tell you it is voluntary. (Interviewee 2)

I’ve done all the course work. I’ve done anger control. [ . . . ] But the system wants to see you on paper. Whether you’ve taken a blind bit of notice of it or not, you’ve sat on it and you’ve gone through the motions. It’s quite easy to sit there and tell them what they want to hear. [But] I cannot do that. Because I don’t like being caught out on lies, because that then demeans me. [ . . . ] I should be judged ‘am I threat to society?’. I’m only a threat to the prison system. (Interviewee 21)

One prisoner argued that the IEP scheme ‘individualized you from each other’ but was ‘profoundly indifferent to you as an individual’ (Interviewee 31), forcing you to conform to institutional discourse with little regard for your subjective experiences and motivations. Tidiness and personal dress functioned as proxy measures of risk and compliance. Meanwhile, prisoners were expected to be ‘genuine’ with probation and psychology staff, but the power wielded by these specialists and the hegemony of their language made honesty both risky and potentially unintelligible: ‘Everybody’s telling you to be open and honest and to tell the truth, and when you do, they can’t believe you. They’d rather believe a lie than the truth. Their truth, they can handle. Not the prisoner’s truth’ (Interviewee 9).

Such complaints were not typical. Rather, they conveyed the reach of penal power, its objectifying qualities, and its demand for performances of commitment that were often felt to be at odds with personal integrity. Given the extent of the prison’s capacity to punish—to withhold rewards and privileges—it was no surprise that prisoners

appeared to conform, and that resistance was rarely visible. In Scott's (1990) terms, the prison's public transcript suggested an acquiescent prisoner community. Yet, the frustrations communicated through the quotes above indicate a less tranquil backstage territory.

### *Compliance, Resistance and Adaptation*

Scott suggests that hidden transcripts are least inhibited when there exists an isolated social space beyond the surveillance of superordinates, and when 'this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination' (Scott 1990: 120). The conditions of the Category C prison are some way from this description: turnover is rapid; the outside world is fairly accessible and freedom close by; and the inmate community has been fragmented through privilege and early release schemes, and the individualizing impact of drug culture (see Crewe 2005). Improvements in hygiene, food quality and interpersonal treatment have removed many sources of collective grievance, while the severity of penalties for 'prison mutiny' and a range of situational control measures mean that, even when aggravations are shared, prisoners are reluctant to orchestrate their collective expression. Most are not politicized. There are few issues, or leaders, around which to unite.

In this context, the kind of solidary subculture that might engender overt, collective resistance is unlikely to be realized. More significantly for current purposes, since the prison seeks order through a combination of means, the experience of power, and thus the nature of dissent, is unlikely to be homogeneous. If we accept that resistance, and its counterpart, compliance, is structured by the terms and technologies of power, it follows that individual prisoners will resist and comply in relation to the particular modes of power that address their values, aims and expectations. What follows is a typology of adaptation (cf. Merton 1938; Goffman 1961; Cohen and Taylor 1972; King and Elliot 1977) that seeks to highlight distinctions within the prisoner community in terms of levels of consent and forms of compliance, and which reveals the hidden transcripts of resistance that characterize the late-modern institution.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Type one: committed compliance*

You've got to want to change yourself. And that change has come from within me. I've progressed. I came into prison nine stone, a crack and heroin addict. I was an habitual thief, living a terrible way of life. [ . . . ] I knew I was bad. I knew I was living a wrong, bad existence. I don't care whether he's in a uniform or not: if someone's alright to me, I'm alright to him. If I wanted to buy drugs then no doubt I could go and find drugs if I wanted to. But that is a personal change, to distance myself with drugs but knowing I can go and get them if I want. Not to go and get them, that's part of my personal rehabilitation. (Interviewee 32)

Carrabine (2005: 904–5) has remarked that 'few prisoners embrace an ideology of fatalism that maintains that they are inferior and deserve their fate'. In fact, as typified above, a number of prisoner narratives were infused with sentiments of shame and

<sup>5</sup> This typology, built up inductively from interview material and observation, is not exhaustive. Some prisoners displayed and described behaviour spanning more than one category, and many held views that were somewhat inconsistent and unstable. Nonetheless, the great majority of prisoners could be classified within one of the categories described here.

moral self-reproach. Almost always ex-drug addicts or alcoholics whose convictions were addiction-related, such prisoners (around one in five) blamed themselves for their incarceration, while renouncing the former selves for which they held their drug habits responsible.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, they not only accepted the legitimacy of their incarceration, but embraced the prison's moral rectitude. Imprisonment was considered a righteous intervention, not just a predictable outcome of offending. These prisoners placed themselves on the same moral plane as the institution, and used normative language to summarize their predicament: *I was a bad person, I did bad things, and I deserve to be in jail*. Most fixated on projects of self-improvement, seeking to demonstrate to themselves, their loved ones and to the law-abiding world that prison represented that they were 'good people'. Imprisonment was an opportunity for self-betterment and moral reparation.

Among such prisoners, the language of agency and personal responsibility was recurrent. Some evangelized about the need to change, preaching to their peers to desist from drug use and crime, and to fundamentally rethink their values. Psychological language, taken from offending behaviour courses and other cognitive programmes, was deployed without cynicism. Some prisoners described themselves as 'prolific offenders' or discussed their own 'criminogenic factors'. Others complained that they 'didn't have enough deficits' to be accepted onto courses (fieldwork notes, 2002). Such prisoners were thus highly compliant, based on personal, normative commitment to the aims and values of the establishment and to institutional practices such as drug testing and the IEP scheme that enabled them to differentiate themselves from prisoners who had no commitment to change: 'idiots' and 'arseholes', who 'drink coffee, take drugs, and do as little as possible in prison and not try to improve themselves' (Interviewee 32).

Compliance was presented as a means of personal reconstruction or making amends, rather than as acquiescence to the regime: 'I'm doing this for me, not for them' was a typical refrain. Implications that compliance was feigned, or that they would behave as anything other than decent, law-abiding people, were resented. Such statements confirmed the degree to which these prisoners were incorporated, rather than cowed, into the official discourses of the prison. They saw themselves as agents rather than subjects of power, but directed their agency in ways that were consistent with institutional objectives. The enthusiasm with which they invested in their sentences was reinforced by the prison's rewards: normative motives were thus bolstered through instrumental means. One prisoner's description of how his engagement with the prison had shifted captured this sensibility of 'responsibilized autonomy' and assent (Garland 1997: 180):

There was an officer—I used to scratch his back, he used to scratch my back. And I used to get what I wanted. I used to get free range of the landing, and all that. But that was me, Mr Naïve. [Now, by doing courses and gaining qualifications] I'm not scratching their back at all. I'm scratching my own back. [ . . . ] I've never been more compliant, and I'm getting more than I ever got. (Interviewee 29)

For the prison, then, these were the ideal, self-governing captives. Burdened by guilt, much of their resentment was self-directed rather than targeted at the institution, whose intentions were perceived as benign and whose conditions were considered

<sup>6</sup> The other prisoners who fell within this group were those who saw themselves as 'straight' citizens who had committed a one-off offence, and who identified with the prison as a righteous institution. However, not all one-off offenders were so compliant, some turning their righteousness against the prison in a powerful form of censoriousness.

decent. It was in relation to systemic inefficiency, or the prison's failure to make available the rehabilitative provisions that they wanted, that these prisoners were most critical, pursuing their grievances politely through official channels or sympathetic staff. Censoriousness was aimed at officers considered lazy or disrespectful, but not at their role as powerholders per se. Neither were these 'bad apples' seen as representative of a legitimacy deficit in the broader system of power. Most officers were regarded as 'doing their job' and as on the right side of the moral rubicon. Bitter complaints and explosions into anger were rare. When they did occur, they were quickly followed by explanations or apologies. More often, frustrations (e.g. about the late arrival of post, or slow responses to job applications) were aired with caution and courtesy, or were simply repressed.

*Type two: fatalistic or instrumental compliance*

A much larger group of prisoners (around half) were equally compliant, but for predominantly instrumental and fatalistic rather than normative reasons. They perceived the prison to have a monopoly on power, and saw little point in trying to resist or manipulate it when it held so many incentives to behave. Less experienced prisoners within this group invested with little protest in privilege schemes, regarding the contract of rewards for good behaviour as legitimate or satisfactory. As the following quote illustrates, their compliance was largely founded on routine, resignation and a pragmatic acceptance that self-government formed part of a reciprocal contract with the institution:

Interviewer: What motivates you to do what the prison wants you to do?

It's not about motivating. You've just got to do what you're told, don't you? It's like being at home again, it's like being with your parents. You do what they say. Bang up 8 o'clock, bang up 5 o'clock, bang up flipping 12 o'clock. [ . . . ] You become so used to it, you do the same thing day in, day out.

Interviewer: Some people say that what motivates them to behave is that they don't want to lose their enhanced [status].

Yes. [ . . . ] You don't want to lose it. [ . . . ] You sort of get treated better, you get more favours and whatnot when it comes down to jobs. And when you go for your parole, home leave, D-Cat, transfer. It helps you, yes, of course. (Interviewee 62)

These prisoners had little awareness of how power operated upon them. The prison was recognized as immutable, but its power was not experienced as a coercive imposition. Rather, it operated through the banal imperatives of daily subsistence: the everyday 'exigencies of survival' (Abercrombie *et al.* 1980: 56). Equally, the terms of imprisonment were regarded as unalterable more than they were accepted as legitimate (Carrabine 2004). This is not to suggest an absence of legitimacy. These prisoners were not committed enthusiasts of the regime, nor were they normatively aligned with the system, but the smooth nature of their interactions with staff indicated their sense that the prison was procedurally decent—at the very least, 'alright'.

This perception was also confirmed in claims that 'the only way to manipulate [is to] show courtesy, show kindness, show reform' (Interviewee 53), and that 'your power to them is politeness' (Interviewee 46). Such statements implied faith in a shared

discourse of fairness and decency. They also evidenced the limited terms of these prisoners' defiance. Where dissatisfaction was expressed, it was primarily about issues—such as getting trainers sent in or obtaining taggings—that confirmed their assimilation into policies designed to placate prisoners through the manipulation of economic interests and the potential for early release. Enhancing one's living standards (via clothing rights, more gym visits, etc.) and getting out of the prison as soon as possible were key objectives. Many prisoners were focused on returning to partners and children. Their compliance was based not only on economic expediency, but on emotional attachments that supplanted other concerns, dampened inclinations to challenge the system and encouraged an attitude of resigned submission.

When overt dissent did occur among such prisoners, it was shaped by the same sense of powerlessness that normally ensured their compliance. Typically, then, it was either unplanned and strategically naive—an outburst at an officer about the late arrival of post ('it's a fucking liberty!')—or a desperate attempt to obtain entitlements that legitimate channels had repeatedly failed to deliver. Thus, one prisoner, exasperated after accumulated visits with his wife had been delayed several times due to staff shortages, 'kicked off' in the hope of gaining access to a governor and a resolution to his frustration. The incident was striking for the consensus it achieved about the legitimacy of its ends and the illegitimacy of its means. Staff acknowledged the prisoner's assertion that the prison had 'a duty to maintain prisoners' relationships' (fieldwork notes, 2003), while the prisoner accepted that his violent outburst could not go unpunished: ' . . . you know it's the wrong thing to do. [But] you go through all the right channels and still don't get what you need. [ . . . ] Sometimes it's the only way to make your point' (fieldwork notes, 2003).

More experienced prisoners within this category were no less concerned about 'getting to the gate' and were no less compliant. Having spent years getting to medium-security conditions, most were resigned to their own acquiescence. Yet, these prisoners were acutely aware of how penal power was exercised upon them. Whereas younger prisoners were relatively uncritical of the prison's incentives system, providing it functioned smoothly and fairly, long-termers resented what they recognized as part of a broader apparatus of power, but considered it sensible to comply, or to limit their complaints, in order to make life easier and hasten their sentence progression:

For a number of years now, I don't ask for anything from the system. I never put applications in, I never ask to see the board of visitors, I never complain about anything. Because it's too much of a bloody hassle to be honest. It's form-filling, and explaining, and at the end you're probably gonna get a 'no' anyway. [ . . . ] If you are after something, or you want to get something resolved, the best way to do it is to try to get staff onside, not to alienate them; it's to use the system as it's presented to you, even though it's a big paper chase [ . . . ] If you demand things, you won't get anything, obstacles will be put in your way. [ . . . ] It can be frustrating, but you just have to control it. [ . . . ] You just see it as part of your position in this place. There's nothing you can do about it and to resist it will just cause you problems. (Interviewee 24)

The majority of these prisoners articulated a bitter transcript of frustration about the system within which they were constrained, but reserved this for backstage areas, or pursued their objectives only through means that were officially recognized, and with caution. Those who used complaint procedures and legal channels (solicitors, the Prisons Ombudsman) to claim rights to town visits or speed up their movement to

lower-security conditions, were careful to do so in ways that were not confrontational. Such prisoners accepted that there were limits to what could be achieved in this manner, but feared being labelled 'trouble-makers'. For example, one lifer submitted a courteous request to a governor to increase the number of visiting days around Christmas, but acquiesced completely when told the situation was not subject to change. Likewise, when polite petitions about the quality of food were ineffective, further action was considered pointless.

There was some consensus between prisoners and staff in relation to such issues. Officers often acknowledged substandard meals and encouraged prisoners to make formal complaints. Meanwhile, most officers were perceived to 'listen to reason' (Interviewee 54)—something that lifers contrasted with the indifference they encountered in the past. That many issues could be peacefully negotiated on the landings again illustrated some degree of legitimacy in the daily dynamics of power. Complaints about decisions (e.g. to cancel evening exercise or raise canteen prices) and conditions (draughty cells, property entitlements) were normally expressed and resolved openly and politely. For many prisoners, though, it was not clear how to pursue more important grievances. Lifers recognized that the power to make the decisions that most seriously influenced their lives lay beyond the staff with whom they had regular and direct contact. 'The system' was disparaged as unreachable, and inflexible to the needs of the individual. 'Years ago I could fight it, I could challenge it. [Now] I get sympathetic ears off the governors or the officers, but there's no legal process I can take to fight it,' complained one lifer (Interviewee 10), about the delay of his release due to probation decisions that he could not fathom. Another prisoner explained:

You start wondering who you're going to be angry with. The only people you can be directly angry with is the officers on the wing. And sometimes you don't know whether to believe them or not. [They] say 'yeah, I've done your paperwork; your paperwork's gone'. And you've got to believe them. (Interviewee 2)

When power operates at a distance, there are 'no buildings where the control desk of the system are lodged and which could be stormed and captured' (Bauman 2000: 5). Power is everywhere, yet there is no central power to resist. Responsibility always lies 'somewhere else'. Since feelings of dissent had no clear target, and venting them publicly risked being 'killed off on file', they were suppressed or privatized—kept among trusted associates, or behind cell doors.

On the whole, it was not interpersonal treatment and everyday conditions that were the focus of these prisoners' frustrations, but the broader organization of penal power. Experienced prisoners commonly complained that in a system in which you had to actively do things right, you were disadvantaged if you were not sure exactly what was required of you. Some found this uncertainty highly onerous:

[When] you were [just] thrown behind the door, you knew that's where you were and that's where you stayed. And you could get on with it. [ . . . ] But now I go through the motions of doing everything right, for years without incident. I'll have one little incident and I'm back to square one. I'd rather just be behind my door. [ . . . ] That way I'm not doing anything wrong. (Interviewee 10)

Others explained that there was something 'deeply oppressive' about having to participate in your own carceral management:

There's always a sense that you *could* rebel, but you're responsible for staying there. For that to be made very overt—not being ordered to do stuff, but ordering yourself—is a burden. The burden of doing the sentence is not on the court or the prison, but on you. It's hard to bear, because it's hard to rebel or rail against. It means that your enemy becomes yourself, because there is no obvious enemy against whom you can protest. (Interviewee 31)

For these prisoners, then, frustrated by their own submission and self-restraint, resentment was expressed against the self as well as the institution.

*Type three: detached compliance*

A third, small group (around one in 15 prisoners) was highly compliant without being directly motivated or incorporated by institutional strategies of power. These prisoners were generally former drug addicts, but instead of reconstructing themselves through the prison's official channels and discourses, they disengaged from the regime and its incentives—or engaged highly selectively—and sought to rebuild their lives autonomously:

I knocked my parole back recently. [ . . . ] I'm in no hurry to get out. [ . . . ] It's fast and dangerous out, there are drugs out there, and I'm an extremist. [ . . . ] I just want a bit more time. [ . . . ] People start talking about tagging, parole, home leaves in front of me, I either retract myself from the conversation or I'm not interested at all. [ . . . ] I'm content in my own existence. [ . . . ] I've got a personal sentence plan, I just get my head down and do it. (Interviewee 42)

I'm not very bothered about D-Cat and all that business. [ . . . ] I couldn't trust myself in a D-Cat. [ . . . ] I'll just keep myself in here for the time being: [ . . . ] I've got my little bit of burn, I've got my little job, and I've got my little room.. [ . . . ] I'm not going to bang my head on the wall for stuff that I'm not interested in. [ . . . ] If I'm not expecting anything then my happiness is in myself and what I've built round [me]. (Interviewee 54)

As indicated here, these prisoners had little faith in their ability to control their impulses, and experienced life inside prison as a respite from the temptations of the free community. The routines of incarceration provided psychological security because they contrasted with the ontological chaos of drug addiction (see Crewe 2005).

While accepting the legitimacy of their punishment, like Merton's (1938) 'retreatists', such prisoners rejected both the goals and means of the institution. They were liked by officers for their obedience and passivity, but declined the systemic imperative of the late-modern prison to engage proactively with its offerings, prioritizing inner demons over external concerns. The formal mechanisms of compliance were effectively sidestepped: 'how can a prison have power over you when you're in no rush to go beyond the gates?' asked one prisoner rhetorically (Interviewee 42). It was not the world outside the prison to which these prisoners were oriented, but their own self-renewal. In terms of partners and family members, there was often little to return to outside. Within the prison, they avoided trouble, or dabbled in the internal economy in order to make life easier rather than to challenge the system. Indeed, neither deeply frustrated (once basic needs were met) nor committed, these prisoners made little attempt to exert any power against the institution. In this

respect, this adaptive mode of personal fatalism could be defined as a form of passive dissent.<sup>7</sup>

*Type four: strategic compliance and manipulation*

Scott notes that 'rituals of subordination [ . . . ] may be deployed both for purposes of manipulation and concealment,' notes James Scott (1990: 35), and a significant proportion of prisoners (around one in four) revealed that their performances were precisely this: displays of compliance that disguised oppositional objectives and hidden resistance. Prisoners within this category were not content, nor did they see the establishment's material offerings as fair trade for compliance. Their normative commitment to the prison's aims was negligible, and they were hostile to the prison at all levels: its staff and principles in general. However, judging that the system could be neither ignored nor surmounted, they acted out an institutional script of active obedience in order to subvert its aims and advance personal rather than systemic objectives.

In general terms, such prisoners were highly aware of the performances required of them, and constructed personae accordingly:

Like cards, you've got to have bluff. [ . . . ] You've got to get them to believe you're not high risk, [ . . . ] that you realise your mistake, you're fully rehabilitated, you're never coming back to jail, and they think: 'he's a good lad'—you're going home in two weeks. [ . . . ] I ain't content in the slightest but what choice have I got? [ . . . ] It's their place, at the end of the day. (Interviewee 39)

The way that's useful for me is manipulation. [ . . . ] Being summat you're not. Letting them think that you're this good person. [ . . . ] When I went to sentence planning, I knew what he wanted to hear. [ . . . ] I says, 'I do feel sorry for my victims, and I'd like to have a chance to apologise to them'. But deep down, I didn't give a fuck. [ . . . ] You've got to make sure that you're seen how you want to be seen. [ . . . ] It's an act. [ . . . ] It'll all go [well] for me in the end, when it comes to [them] writing reports. (Interviewee 27)

As suggested here, reform and contrition were acted out strategically within institutional discourse in order to advance progression through the system. Such prisoners attended psychology courses with feigned commitment, parroting the requisite language without inner conviction or seeking to use what they learned for oppositional purposes: '[It's] given me a bit more knowledge, I know a bit more about the system, you've just tooled me up for more bullshit when I get out' (Interviewee 39). Some manufactured histories of drug addiction in order to be seen as 'victims' that the prison could claim to have restored, or turned the prison's attempts to achieve greater legitimacy against it by exploiting sensitivity to claims of racial discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Others became Listeners for cynical motives, or simply developed disingenuous relationships

<sup>7</sup> In similar fashion, prisoners occasionally claimed that they were disinclined to achieve 'enhanced' status precisely because 'once you've got it, they've basically got you—they can easily take it off you' (Interviewee 35). Meanwhile, a small number declared themselves 'immune' to the prison's power to punish. That is, they said they had no fear of being put in segregation or being shipped out to another establishment, and maintained that they were completely unreluctant upon material goods. There was little evidence in Wellingborough that these statements of defiance were acted upon. At higher levels in the system, for example, in the Close Supervision Centres, prisoners are more openly defiant, and may embark on 'persistent campaign[s] of confrontation and challenge, involving dirty protests, violence and/or threats of violence against staff, as well as litigation against the system' (Clare *et al.* 2001: 103).

<sup>8</sup> One prisoner managed to get soy sauce put on the prison's canteen list by arguing that it was 'an ethnic product', and that its absence was 'a race issue'.

with officers so as to appear pro-social: ‘I’ll say “safe journey home” [and], if it’s hot, “are you having a barbecue this weekend?”—generally humouring them [ . . . ]. Behind it, I couldn’t care less if they had a crash on the way home’ (Interviewee 59). When resistance was more overt, e.g. involving threats to take up issues through the law, its tone of almost mocking politeness provided a protective veneer of submission to official discourse and legal authority.

Such presentations masked backstage resistance of various forms, including illicit activity invested with anti-institutional meaning (e.g. drug dealing, stealing from kitchens and workshops) and active subversion (e.g. setting off fire alarms). Prisoners recognized that, in a system based on formal assessment, these hidden transcripts mattered less than the public simulation of compliance:

Basically it’s how everything looks on paper. It might not be a true reflection of who you are, but if you play the game then they’ve got no reason on you. (Interviewee 48)

The first thing they put down about me are ‘polite’ and ‘compliant’, two important words, and that’s what matters. I might walk away and say ‘wanker’, but as long as they don’t hear it, then there’s no harm done. [ . . . ] A weapon that staff use against you is that they’ll smile and call you by your first name, and then they’ll go into the office and write something bad about you. Once I learned that, I never gave them the opportunity to do that to me. Even though they might be sat behind their desk, knowing that I just disabled the windows or whatever. (Interviewee 7)

Prisoners of this kind perceived themselves as active and resistant, rather than resigned and compliant: playing ‘their game’ on paper, but without normative engagement, and in a way that provided a smokescreen for oppositional values and activities. Behaviour was constructed as defensively oppositional—*not* being broken, *not* being ‘one of their success stories, [ . . . ] not giving them an excuse to keep me in longer’ (Interviewee 7). The institution’s motives were assumed to be punitive or self-interested. Deceiving it, and being discharged as quickly as possible without normative acquiescence, represented a significant victory.

### *Discussion*

It was because speedy release was an almost universal ambition that there was no simple relation between mode of adaptation and location in the prisoner hierarchy. ‘Even the baddest man talks about his parole,’ remarked one interviewee (Interviewee 20). Accordingly, while overt opposition elicited a kind of bemused admiration, it was also considered deeply naive and unproductive. Those occasional acts of resistance that did occur—cell smash-ups, escape plans, wearing a t-shirt with a provocative political message—had consequences, such as re-categorization to higher security conditions, which were inconsistent with the aims of most category C prisoners. To the extent that a hierarchy did exist, high-status prisoners were more likely to manipulate the system than comply with it, and portrayed this as a form of strength and enlightened wisdom: ‘There’s ways and means you can do everything you’ve got to do and not get into a confrontation. If you get into a confrontation you’re an idiot in this day and age. [ . . . ] There’s ways of being passive but still assertive’ (Interviewee 57). Those prisoners who complied uncynically were rarely accorded status. However, self-improvement was an acceptable, even admirable objective. In this respect, prisoner values and those of the

administration were not in direct opposition (cf. Sykes 1958). Compliance did not generate stigma if it could be seen as self-serving rather than passive and acquiescent. By offering training courses and educational qualifications and in its promotion of a discourse of personal responsibility, the prison therefore appeared successful in contracting out control to the sphere of the individual. It was individual rather than collective self-regulation that was the primary source of order, and individual rather than collective resistance that was the primary manifestation of discontent.

### *Conclusion*

This article has outlined the characteristics of power in a late-modern medium-security men's prison: its relative anonymity, its pervasive reach, its non-corporal nature, its basis in formal assessment, and its bureaucratic and subjectifying qualities. Wrong (2002) argues that the topography of resistance within any social domain is shaped by the way that different forms of power are combined to establish order (see also Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005). In Wellingborough, the principal forms of resistance were manipulative, performative and censorious: modes of counter-discourse which are continuous with established techniques of dissent, but whose terms and primacy reflect the contemporary organization of penal power.

But the prison does not produce 'homogenous effects' (Foucault 1977: 202). Prisoners experience, manage and counteract power in various ways, in relation to factors such as family ties, histories of drug use, and past relationships with authority. In Wellingborough, the degree to which individuals feigned compliance and manipulated the system, and the targets of their censoriousness, also reflected different perceptions of staff and systemic legitimacy, beliefs in the prison's inalterability and assessments of the likely outcomes of resistance. The distinctions between seeing public dissent as unnecessary, pointless or counter-productive were significant in signalling different mechanisms of individual compliance.

In the late-modern prison, power has been designed to individualize prisoners, and there is much of it to wield. It is unsurprising that dissent is largely concealed and individualized, rather than writ large in public discourse. Yet the relative absence of overt, collective resistance should not be interpreted as an indication that the prison's power strategies are entirely successful, that there are no hidden transcripts of discontent, or that all prisoners passively accept the terms of penal power. These findings should also alert us to the tension between the prison's concerns with systemic efficiency and order, and its rehabilitative ambitions. The prison's moral mission may be easily neglected when the imperative for smooth governance and an official public transcript of calm efficiency is so powerful. There should be little comfort if prisoners are compliant only because they feel unable to express what might be legitimate grievances, or if they learn that the quickest way to advance through the system is through the hollow performance of commitment. To perform in such a way may be highly damaging to personal dignity, and the demand to do so undermines the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of those prisoners who are, in effect, punished for their honesty, while skilful actors progress.

Finally, as Scott (1990) suggests, the restriction of resistance to backstage areas should not be a cause for complacency. Resistance tests the limits of acceptable practice and has the potential to aggregate. Even symbolic forms of protest may help to

constitute material unrest. Since disturbances continue to occur within category C establishments, it is all the more important to acknowledge that penal order is always fragile, even when surface compliance predominates. Where prisoners feel profoundly powerless, fatalistic compliance may rapidly collapse into desperate rebellion (see Carrabine 2004). Clearly, too, even when compliant, prisoners experience a range of frustrations about how power is exercised upon them that are consequential not only as sources of discontent but as pains of imprisonment in themselves.

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