

Adaptation, Compliance, and Resistance

The wealth of typologies in prison sociology provides plentiful evidence that there is no single pattern by which individuals adjust to prison life. The basis of classification varies greatly between studies. So too do explanations for differences in experience and behaviour, and conceptions of the relative influence of the institution, the individual and the external environment in determining adaptive patterns. Many early studies of prison life highlighted the significance of ‘indigenous’ or institutional factors—such as the prison’s organizational goals, the severity of its deprivations, and the way it administered power and privileges—in shaping the social roles available to prisoners (Grusky 1959, Berk 1966, Street *et al.* 1966).¹ Differences between prisoners were related (not always exclusively) to intrinsic characteristics of imprisonment, such as length of time exposed to the prisoner subculture (Clemmer 1940) or stage of sentence (Wheeler 1961). Prisoners were labelled according to prison-specific factors such as deviation from the ‘inmate code’ (Sykes 1958).² Roles were seen primarily as different ways of handling the pressures of imprisonment or managing the tension between the worlds of the institution and the free community (Goffman 1961).

The terminology of ‘roles’ reflected the belief that prisons generated certain social positions virtually regardless of the traits

¹ Reference in this book to ‘adaptation’ is not intended to suggest ‘prisonisation’ (Clemmer 1940), or a merely passive, accepting or ‘tension-reducing’ (Cohen and Taylor 1972: 132) response to imprisonment. Rather, it refers to the process of *adjusting* to the prison environment: the set of behaviours that a prisoner chooses or adopts within this domain.

² The word ‘inmate’ is employed when discussing the American prison literature, particularly the early prison ethnographies, because this was the term used in such studies. Elsewhere in this book, ‘prisoner’ is preferred because it is a more neutral, objective term. Although some Wellingborough prisoners referred to themselves as ‘inmates’, others felt that this connoted mental illness.

of those who entered them (Sykes 1995). According to these perspectives, the prison walls marked a decisive break with the outside community and surrounded an alien world with distinctive social positions, into which prisoners were 'socialized' or 'assimilated'. Imprisonment stripped prisoners of their identities, limiting their contact with external influences, restricting their physical and psychological autonomy, and providing a new set of rules, relationships, meanings, and rewards around which identity and behaviour were reconstituted. Although Sykes acknowledged that the differential adoption of roles was likely to be influenced by personality structures, his comments on this were rather cursory (Sykes and Messinger 1960). No attempt was made to elucidate how individual traits or cultural dispositions might influence prison conduct or might shape how particular positions within the inmate community could be consciously adopted.

Other theorists have emphasized the significance of 'imported' factors, such as criminal orientation and outlook (Irwin and Cressey 1962; Irwin 1970), attitude towards authority (Cohen and Taylor 1972), and race or ethnicity (Carroll 1974; Jacobs 1977) in determining differential responses towards incarceration: differences in relationships with staff, attitudes to drugs, violent misconduct and so on. Such studies do not deny that incarceration presents prisoners with specific kinds of social and psychological problems. However, they argue that the incoming prisoner is not wholly overwhelmed or over-written by the new world he or she enters. Rather, the problems of imprisonment are addressed and resolved through attitudes, cultures, networks and ideologies formed outside the institution, prior to imprisonment. These 'latent' orientations are not imported into the prison without amendment. Nonetheless, they provide the crucial ideological bridge between internal and external behaviour, and supply the social connections that enable involvement with particular social groups within the prison. Adaptations are thus seen as being in some way *consistent* with identities and values that pre-exist the prison experience. To some degree, the significance of these external factors in shaping adaptations is an outcome of prisons having become more porous and less repressive institutions.³ As

³ Although Clemmer's (1940) study of the prisoner community placed emphasis on external dispositions many years before the reforms that opened up prisons to outside forces.

they have become less depriving and have allowed prisoners more opportunities for outside contact, the generic identity of 'the convict' has diminished in importance and been superseded by a multitude of identities that had previously been suppressed (see Carroll 1974).

Importation exponents have tended to place more emphasis on the capacity of individuals to reflect upon the prison experience and choose, rather than merely accept, their place in the inmate world (see in particular Cohen and Taylor 1972). Even when they have not, their focus on 'types of person' rather than 'social roles' implies an interest in personality as well as institution. It is accepted now that the relationship between the two is complex or 'transactional' (Toch 1992; Toch and Adams 1989), that reactions to imprisonment are to some degree idiosyncratic (Bukstel and Kilmann 1980), and that the relationship between pre-prison factors and in-prison behaviour is variable, combining imported and indigenous components (Akers *et al.* 1974; Zamble and Porporino 1988). As Toch (1992: 2) notes: 'A given physical or social milieu is a different psychological environment for everyone who operates in it.'

Clearly, though—as Kruttschnitt and Gartner (2005) demonstrate—the institutional environment makes some adaptations more likely or 'available' than others. The history of the Scottish Special Units and the successes of prison therapeutic units and faith communities illustrate that, in particular penal contexts, individuals are given opportunities to escape their institutional histories: to be a different kind of prisoner. In other words, context matters, and any typology that presents prisoners in static terms fails to account for the fluidities in behaviour that can occur according to the institutional context (and the personal life-stage), albeit within the constraints of biography and personal resources.⁴ Individuals are never *always* a particular kind of prisoner; nor are prisoner types universal. Indeed, any attempt to generalize about adaptations will struggle to cover the variety of penal settings where they occur and will fail to account for the range of imported factors through which adaptive possibilities are given form, shape, and substance.

Despite this, the prison literature suggests that a number of basic adaptive styles can be identified (the implication being

⁴ With thanks to Richard Sparks for pushing me to clarify these issues.

that the conditions of imprisonment do make certain positions more likely). By combining the frameworks presented by Merton (1938) and Goffman (1961) (and see Schrag 1944), these can be bracketed as follows. First, some prisoners 'withdraw', 'retreat' or 'regress', focusing on immediate events and issues of 'self', and often isolating themselves from their peers. This includes obvious 'maladaptations', such as repeated self-mutilation or psychosis, but can also incorporate obsessive body-building and the deep absorption into art, education, or mere 'reverie' that can allow mental escape from institutional life (Clemmer 1940; Cohen and Taylor 1972; Boyle 1984).

Second, some prisoners actively rebel, engaging in organized and conscious resistance (Boyle 1977; McEvoy 2001), escape attempts (McVicar 1974), or concerted campaigns against prison conditions and practices (Cohen and Taylor 1972). In the UK, such activities tend to be concentrated within higher-security establishments, where the pains of imprisonment are more profound and prisoners are more likely to be desperately frustrated, personally resourceful and ideologically opposed to authority.

A third kind of adaptation is 'conformity' (Merton 1938) 'colonisation' or 'conversion' (Goffman 1961). Prisoners of this kind appear relatively content and comply with the demands of the system with apparent sincerity and enthusiasm. This category includes the 'centre-men', 'straights' and 'square johns' described in the early prison ethnographies, men who identified with conventional values prior to imprisonment. It also includes the category of 'gleaners' who Irwin (1970) identified as men seeking change and self-improvement through official programmes and structures. Several commentators argue that extreme forms of conversion—where prisoners internalize official definitions of their status and selfhood—are uncommon or merely superficial because they require that prisoners discard their values, abandon their claims to autonomous selfhood, and accept ideas of their inferior moral worth (Morris and Morris 1963; Carrabine 2005).

A fourth set of prisoners represents the 'innovators' that Merton described as men who accepted official objectives but rejected the institutional means of their attainment. To use Mathiesen's (1965) vocabulary, these are prisoners whose general stance is one of 'ensoriousness' rather than normative opposition (c.f. Sykes 1958). 'ensoriousness' entails the criticism of those in power for not conforming to official standards or wider moral norms, or

for pursuing institutional goals through the wrong means. These prisoners may include 'barrack room lawyers', or 'straight' prisoners who align themselves with pro-social values but see the prison as a deficient institution for the achievement of its stated aims.⁵

The majority of prisoners want to 'do their time and get out' (Carrabine 2004), and find ways of coping with imprisonment that involve neither extreme resistance nor complete acquiescence. Whether described as 'playing it cool' (Goffman 1961), 'doing time', or a particular form of 'ritualism' (Merton 1938; Morris and Morris 1963), this adaptation entails nominal but unenthusiastic conformity, aimed at making the prison experience as comfortable and conflict-free as possible. Prisoners in a sixth category are more active in seeking to manipulate the system (Morris and Morris 1963; King and Elliott 1977). They use their prison experience to exploit rules, work 'angles' and perform desired behaviour to prison officials while flouting it elsewhere. These prisoners do not necessarily cause 'trouble', and often use legitimate as well as illicit means to achieve their ends, but they do so outside the spirit of the system.

Typologies tend to underplay the degree to which adaptive positions can be strategic or provisional rather than fixed. Prisoners of all kinds may employ censoriousness at particular moments,⁶ or may 'rebel', 'withdraw', or fully 'conform' at certain times in the sentence for tactical gain, because of changing life circumstances or when certain thresholds have been passed. The dilemma, therefore, is whether to characterize adaptive styles in the form of nouns or verbs: 'rebels' or 'rebellion', 'innovators' or 'innovation', and so on. The typology of adaptation provided in this chapter does the former. Not all prisoners fitted neatly or consistently into a single adaptive category, and the aim is not to suggest that styles of adaptation were static over the course of a sentence, let alone a carceral career. However, the great majority had a stable and classifiable orientation to the sentence at the time of the study and in the particular context of HMP Wellingborough. The focus of

⁵ Bowker (1978) argues that 'merchants', 'politicians', and 'right guys' can be seen as innovators, because they pursue conventional goals of wealth, status, and power through illicit means. However, this seems to conflate *social* goals and more specific *institutional* goals.

⁶ Regardless of the sincerity with which it is used, censoriousness is a highly effective means of contesting the terms of one's incarceration and blurring the moral divide between the prisoner and the state representative (Mathieson 1965).

the typology that follows is the interplay between the terms and imperatives of this institutional setting, and the values and dispositions that prisoners brought into this environment. The idea is not to presume the primacy of either biography or social structure, but to show their interaction. Likewise, the aim is to show the dynamics of agency and constraint—the manner in which prisoners chose to take up, reject, or refigure the opportunities, incentives and social positions that the prison made available.

The typology carries the normal drawbacks of typological analysis, but there are significant advantages in this descriptive style.⁷ Although the social world cannot be carved up as cleanly as is always implied in typological work, an effective typology can draw attention to its contours and can provide a conceptual pathway through its terrain. Clear analysis requires some degree of simplification. Without some reduction into classes, the danger is that a complex social setting is presented as an undifferentiated mass of individual accounts with some hazy, central tendencies. One of the clear findings of this study is that there is no such thing as the typical prisoner or a single ‘prison culture’. The typology seeks to provide a parsimonious description of variance within the prisoner world. It also allows comparisons to be made with other studies, whether of similar prisons, prisons in other jurisdictions, or other kinds of penal establishment.

One hazard of typological work is ‘reification’: the construction of abstract types with no empirical basis. Weberian (1949) ‘ideal types’ are often criticized on these grounds. As Bailey (1994: 19) argues though, this may be a misrepresentation of Weber’s position, and ideal types can be seen as the ‘clearest and purest example of the type, with no dull or damaged features’. Empirical cases are always likely to fall short of these clean specimens. In comparison, ‘constructed types’ (Becker 1940; McKinney 1954) place less emphasis on *accentuating* characteristics of the type and more on producing empirical ‘approximations’ from which real cases might deviate by being both more or less ‘extreme’. The ideal type sits at the end of a continuum of values whereas the constructed type sits closer to the middle. In this chapter, the use

⁷ Strictly speaking, a form of classification that begins empirically is known as a ‘taxonomy’ while one with a conceptual basis is a ‘typology’. This study combines both, but the latter term is preferred because of its historical currency within prison sociology.

of case studies to illustrate each type demonstrates their empirical grounding and their lived authenticity. Nonetheless, these examples were chosen because they most closely captured the conceptually salient characteristics of each 'cell' of the typology. They were the exemplars relative to which most other prisoners within each category were less clearly illuminated.

As is common in ethnographic work, the construction of the typology was guided by conceptual priorities, but followed an inductive logic. As an adapted form of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Layder 1998), empirical clusters were identified prior to the development of conceptual labels,⁸ but the identification of these groupings relied on direction from the literature described above. John Irwin's focus on criminal orientation and Cohen and Taylor's emphasis on attitudes towards authority merit acknowledgement here. Merton's typology of individual adaptations, as outlined in his (1938) article 'Social Structure and Anomie', was also influential in providing the initial conceptual framework through which the stock of disorganized data was strained.

The basic elements of Merton's framework are 'institutional norms' and 'culture goals' (1938: 673), or the appropriate *means* and the desired *ends* of a social environment. As such, it can be applied to almost any context. Merton provides a grid of adaptive possibilities (including conformity and deviance in terms of both means and ends) that can indicate how individuals act in any environment or institution. In suggesting a limited range of positions that individuals might take up, the framework has a clear structuralist bent. But Merton himself noted that adaptive styles related to cultural backgrounds and personalities (1938: 678). How structural positions take shape in practice clearly relates to imported factors—here, the late-modern context in which prisoners were socialized and the life experiences that shaped the transactions between individual and environment.

Merton's framework is apposite for the prison precisely because its core focus is individual compliance with institutional techniques and the achievement of institutional goals.⁹ In the

⁸ For clarity, I should state that the labels did not derive directly from the terminology used by prisoners themselves, nor from the language of staff.

⁹ Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) *Delinquency and Opportunity* drew significantly on Merton's work, which Cloward had first employed in his doctoral analysis of adaptive styles in an army prison (see Bowker 1978).

managerial prison, increasing emphasis has been placed upon *institutional* conformity with particular methods of government and *individual* compliance with a specific set of institutional demands. The means of imprisonment are ever more regulated, and are tied to relevant ends for prisoners. In an earlier era, more concerned with containment than self-government, the relationship between everyday adaptations and institutional objectives was much looser and more tenuous. In the period when Sykes and Irwin were first writing, for example, as long as prisoners were not seeking to escape or causing disruption, there were few demands on them to adapt *in particular ways*.¹⁰ Now that government—the direction of human conduct (Foucault 1982)—is a principal concern of the system, now that prisoners are addressed far more directly by techniques of institutional power, and now that their commitment to institutional objectives is more closely scrutinized, adaptive styles are intertwined with the mechanisms of institutional control. A ‘relationship’ of some kind with the institution is obligatory.

The typology that follows has five main parts. Prisoners are labelled¹¹ (1) *enthusiasts* (2) *pragmatists* (3) *stoics* (4) *retreatists* and (5) *players*. A further sub-category, the *disengaged*, is also discussed in this chapter, as is the small number of prisoners who appeared to be ‘in transition’ from one adaptive style to another.¹² The primary basis of classification is compliance with institutional means and goals. Each category of adaptation represents a different form of engagement with the system’s demands for self-government and active engagement. Commitments to institutional imperatives ranged significantly, from normative enthusiasm to resigned pragmatism to hollow performance enacted as a form of resistance. The typology is ordered from most to least conformist, although the adaptive styles at its extremes are more easily positioned on this spectrum than those in its mid-section.

¹⁰ The same is true in the modern ‘warehouse prison’, where prisoners are merely stored and emitted.

¹¹ I am aware of, and somewhat uncomfortable about, the regrettable irony that these categories impose another set of labels on a set of people already burdened by institutional definitions.

¹² Some indication is given of the approximate proportion of prisoners who occupied each adaptive category, but specific numbers are not included because the typology was constructed on the basis not only of formal interviews, but also very many informal discussions with prisoners, which were less easy to count.

Orientations were related to biographical experiences and future expectations, and took expression in a range of behaviours including attitudes to and relationships with staff, involvement in prison activities, and modes of resistance. Coming chapters will show how they also shaped and were manifested in aspects of the prisoner social world such as patterns of friendship and loyalty, commitments to prisoner values and involvement in the informal economy.

'Enthusiasts'

Carrabine (2005: 904–5) has commented that 'few prisoners embrace an ideology [...] that maintains that they are inferior and deserve their fate' (and see Morris and Morris 1963). It was certainly true that Wellingborough prisoners very rarely condemned themselves in terms that were absolute. However, a significant number (around one in five) denounced their past identities as morally shameful, provided testimonies that were suffused with guilt and self-reproach, and presented their current status as morally lowly captives as entirely warranted. Almost always, these were former drug addicts or alcoholics who attributed their crimes to selves that they had now shed, and who saw incarceration as an opportunity for self-improvement and moral reparation.

Luke and Ian were typical of this prisoner type. Luke—a roguish looking, thick-set, talkative prisoner—described his childhood as 'quite settled' until he was a teenager, when his parents separated and he moved with his mother and siblings to a rough area of a new town. His father was a strict disciplinarian, who would beat him with a whip until his legs bled. He left school aged 15, and received his first custodial sentence a year later, when he was sent to a 'brutal' detention centre. Now in his late thirties, he had been 'in and out of prison for fifteen years', mainly for relatively minor offences such as fraud, deception, and burglary.

During his previous sentence, as his relationship with the mother of his son faltered, Luke had attempted suicide: 'when I look back now, I can't believe I done it. But I was clinically depressed. And I found prison a very, very, lonely, horrible place.' Shortly after release, the relationship had ended, and although his ex-girlfriend had written to him at the start of his current term, he had told her to 'get on with her life; she's in the prime of her life. It would be wrong for me to try and hold her back, and quite naïve. You can't

sustain a relationship in prison.’ Luke did not want his son to visit him in prison—believing it was ‘not right’ to bring a child into the penal environment—and had not seen him for two years.

In the years before his current sentence, he had become a user of class A drugs, and had entered prison ‘a nine-stone wreck, absolutely no good to society; [...] a crack and heroin addict. I was an habitual thief, living a terrible way of life.’ Given a sentence of almost six years for a serious but non-violent offence, his primary aim during his sentence was to wean himself off drugs and re-establish his family ties:

When I was bad on drugs I don’t suppose I was very nice as a person and it did affect my relationship with my family. And that is very important to me. My mum is getting on a bit now, I didn’t want to let my mum see me like that. So when I got this prison sentence, I made a decision to keep away from drugs and pull myself back together.

Ian had grown up in a ‘working class home’, owned by his parents, both of whom were employed. His father was a violent alcoholic who used to beat him and his mother. When Ian was 14, his parents split up temporarily, and he moved in with his grandparents until he left school, at which point he worked as a salesman. At 14, he had begun to use cannabis—‘it makes you sort of forget things that have happened’—and by 16 was addicted to amphetamines. He had first been imprisoned when aged 19, but his prison career accelerated when he started using crack and heroin three years later after separating from his girlfriend who had been unfaithful to him during a previous sentence. Now 29, Ian had been imprisoned on a number of occasions for domestic and commercial burglaries, carried out to feed his addiction. A mild and relatively introverted prisoner, he was currently serving a three and a half year sentence. As a consequence of his ex-girlfriend’s drug addiction, their daughter now lived with his sister, a development that had ‘turned my head around, made me realize I’ve got to look after her’.

Prisoners like Ian and Luke regarded imprisonment as a righteous intervention, not just a predictable outcome of offending. As well as accepting the legitimacy of their incarceration—as most prisoners ultimately do (Sparks *et al.* 1996)—they placed themselves on the same moral plane as that of the institution, whose motives they considered virtuous. This required a particular vision of self-identity: the ‘good person’ who had made

'bad decisions' or whose past acts did not represent 'the real me', or the 'lost soul' in search of spiritual redemption (see Maruna 2001). Through strenuous castigations of past acts and extensive deliberations on matters of conscience, they sought to distance themselves from the flawed, fallen selves of their past and prove their ethical substance. Zack, a former crack user and another typical enthusiast, rebuked himself for having been a 'ruthless, vicious, manipulative, obnoxious little bastard' at the height of his addiction, stealing from his family rather than looking after them following the death of his father. In berating himself for having taken 'the easy way out', it was significant that his language denoted a parallel identity and indicated his capacity for an alternative course of action. Describing the crime for which he had been sentenced, he underlined his feelings of guilt and the entrenched morality that represented his 'true self':

I really did feel shit for doing it. Because I knew there was an old lady who owned the house. And I thought 'no man, all the codes that you've always lived by, you just broke'. I really did genuinely, genuinely, genuinely feel shit about it.

Zack attributed his transformation to the recognition that 'everything in my life was not real. It was all false.' The way he was in prison—by his account, a compliant prisoner who protected the vulnerable, and was deeply committed to the Youth and Community Project—was his authentic persona: 'the real me. I've longed to be like this, for years.' Ian and Luke had similar self-narratives. Ian emphasized an upbringing that had taught him manners and morality, but had been corrupted by drug use. His original identity, he said, provided the compass by which he oriented his current existence in prison. Imprisonment was therefore welcomed for having restored his essential self:

When I was on the street and when I was on the heroin, I knew then that I was ready, I wanted to go to prison. I know it sounds mad but for me prison is the only place that you can get off the drugs. I'd just had enough. I didn't want to live the way I was living because *it wasn't me*. So when I got locked up it was sort of a godsend. [Emphasis added]

Luke explained:

[I] knew what I was doing was wrong. I knew right from wrong. Because I came from a good home. [...] I knew I was living a wrong, bad existence. And I felt I could do better than that, that I had better qualities in me than

that which had been suppressed by the life I was leading. And I thought I should sort myself out and let my better qualities shine through. Because I'm a better person than that.

One reason, therefore, why the prison was considered a somewhat benign institution by these prisoners was that it helped them to rescue themselves from their 'bad' identities, and provided an opportunity for them to restore, cultivate, and exhibit what they considered their genuine selves. Within the prison, they fixated on projects that would demonstrate to their loved ones, to themselves, and to the law-abiding world with which they sought to identify that they were fundamentally 'good people' with pro-social aspirations. Typically, they aimed both to better themselves (through education, by learning skills, and by going on drug/alcohol awareness or anger management courses) and to contribute to a wider notion of social good (for example, through the Youth and Community Project, or by getting involved in restorative justice or charity work). Most sought out victim awareness courses that would enable public apology and absolution, and work that would demonstrate trust and dedication.

Future plans involved making further amends, and promoting the wellbeing of the next generation—what Maruna (2001) refers to as 'generativity'. Ian wanted to work alongside the police in schools, warning children about the perils of drugs and crime: 'doing something good for the community and people outside, you know'. Zack wanted to mentor young offenders. Other *enthusiasts* hoped for jobs as drug counsellors and community workers, at the very least in 'honest business' (Luke). Most talked of moving away from hometowns and making a 'fresh start' somewhere they could get away from 'bad memories' (Kyle) and 'people who will get me into trouble' (Ian).¹³ Zack's decision to commit to settle down with his girlfriend and his efforts to rebuild himself physically had clear symbolic functions in displaying his intention to rebrand himself.

Aspirations were expressed passionately and with absolute certainty. *Enthusiasts* had little doubt that they would succeed in going straight. Indeed, most exhibited an almost grandiose confidence

¹³ Other prisoners' life stories indicated the ironic dangers of this stance, for, by refusing to stay in hostels occupied by drug users and petty offenders, they had found themselves homeless or in breach of licence conditions, and thus on the path back towards prison.

about their ability to forge their destinies—the kinds of narratives of unfettered agency that Maruna (2001) found were significant in aiding desistance. This discourse of self-efficacy and personal responsibility was recurrent among these prisoners. Some spoke almost evangelically about the need for prisoners to take control of their lives, exhorting their peers to desist from drug use and criminal activity and to reassess their personal values. Being clean and staying straight were committed to almost as new addictions. *Enthusiasts* often accosted prison visitors and non-custodial staff to inform them of the latest developments in their plans. Through these public pep talks, they reinforced their identities: like Foucauldian subjects, by telling their stories, they worked upon and reinscribed their selves. Much of their language echoed the terminology of offending behaviour courses and other cognitive programmes: setting 'goals' and 'objectives', 'being able to identify the problem', taking 'the right path' (see Fox 1999). 'It's up to you where you go again. Whether you go for a good life or a bad life', Zack argued. Furthermore, the descriptive labels of the prison's psychological discourse were often appropriated without cynicism. *Enthusiasts* frequently described themselves as 'high-risk' or 'prolific offenders', discussed their 'criminogenic needs', and complained that there were not enough available courses to match their enthusiasm.

Such language indicated the normative alignment between the aims and values of *enthusiasts* and those of the prison system. They supported the differentiation of prisoners according to privilege level or voluntary submission to drug testing, because it helped them to get away, spatially and symbolically, from what Luke called the 'idiots' and 'arseholes'. They had no complaints about mandatory drug testing (MDT), because they were keen to demonstrate their abstinence, or about the IEP scheme, which affirmed their efforts. Often, they complained that the prison's rules and IEP policies should be more stringent, to help demarcate the distinction between themselves and other prisoners. And they appreciated the prison's rehabilitative efforts, arguing that opportunities existed for anyone who wanted to change. 'The system does work if you let it', Zack argued. Luke compared his previous prison experiences to the current era, arguing that all his past sentences had been 'worthless':

All they've done is tried to punish me by locking me in a shit cell under shit conditions. [Now] I'm doing something worthwhile. For the first time in my life I'm *learning* something in prison that might benefit me in the outside world. [...] It was all one kind of life before. You was all in one big

cauldron. Now there's a division where *if* you do toe the line, if you're the sort of prisoner who respects himself, who wants to get up and do something for themselves, you can. [...] There is a better kind of life in prison. [...] If you choose to take a good path in prison, doors will open for you.

The prison's increased legitimacy was signalled clearly here. Yet, as the language of choice suggested, it was important to these prisoners to be able to claim responsibility for their moral regeneration and self-development. 'It doesn't matter how many people sit round and say "oh, you should do this, you should do that"', argued Luke. 'It's up to me. You can't *make* someone want to change. You've got to want to change yourself. And that change has come from within me.' Zack likewise claimed that 'no-one's helped me change. I've had to recognize it all myself.' In this respect, they saw themselves as agents rather than subjects of power. Although the outcomes of their agency were consistent with institutional objectives, their compliance was presented as a means of personal reconstruction or making amends, rather than acquiescence to systemic demands. The prison was not considered a source or agent of compulsion, but a catalyst of change and a midwife of personal rebirth.

Enthusiasts resented any suggestion that their commitment was feigned, or that they would want to behave as anything other than decent, law-abiding people. Their ambivalence about imprisonment was apparent here, as they declared their determination not to submit to institutional culture: 'I refuse to act like an animal', declared Brian: 'I was raised to have manners, to have respect for people'. Ian expressed similar sentiments: 'Just because I'm in prison it doesn't mean to say that I've got to be an arsehole; it's not in my nature.' In the same manner, they insisted that they were not consciously regulating their natural behaviour in order to obtain early release and that their compliance did not require external regulation. Luke's comments typified this attitude of moral voluntarism: 'even if they opened the front gate now and said "go down the road, get a loaf of bread and come back" I would do it—I would go down the road, get a loaf of bread and come back'.

The degree to which *enthusiasts* normatively assented to the terms of the institution was confirmed by a number of statements of this kind. In many ways, they were the ideal, self-governing captives. 'I'm doing this for me, not for them' was a typical refrain. Arguably, this distinction between personal

desire and institutional obligation was more symbolic than substantive. Nonetheless, there is a difference between normative commitment founded on personal morality ('ethics') and normative commitment based on the recognition of an authority's right to dictate behaviour (i.e. its legitimacy) (see Tyler 1990). Both were significant in ensuring the compliance of *enthusiasts*, who believed that they deserved to be in prison, embraced the prison's corrective ideology, accepted its moral rectitude, and generally saw the system as materially decent and fair. At times though, they prioritized personal integrity above absolute compliance with institutional authority, as Luke's testimony illustrated:

I won't go on a course unless I think it's going to benefit me.... I would like to show that I have looked at that area within myself, without being told to do it.... I can't not be me. When I go for my parole, I'm going to tell them straight. And if they don't give me it they don't give me it. It isn't going to make the slightest difference to me, because the development I've made personally within myself is so great, from what I came into prison to what I am now.... My idea [for parole] was not to do all their courses, but the ones that I felt was beneficial to me. Not what they told me to do, because of their statistics. When I tried to do ETS [Enhanced Thinking Skills], [my dissatisfaction] was a lot to do with the other people on the course. They were there for the sake of doing the course, not because they wanted to gain anything from it. They were just making up the numbers.

Enthusiasts were so determined to change, to do so autonomously (through 'free will' rather than compulsion), and to honour their 'real selves', that they could find themselves at odds with systemic prescriptions. Acts carried out as obligations could not illustrate their authentic commitment to change. Likewise, things that they perceived as insincere—the prison's statistical targets, and the motives of many of their peers—were stains on their own sincerity. 'Playing the game' was not an option if it meant being someone you were not. Such sentiments also illustrated the almost obsessive fixation with self-identity and self-exploration that is common among the 'born-again'.

Despite such moments of disillusion, *enthusiasts* rarely resisted institutional demands. They were generally driven by powerful loyalties to their families, partners or children outside, with whom they wanted to be reunited as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the enthusiasm they invested in their sentences was reinforced by the prison's reward structure. Normative motives to comply

were thus bolstered through inducements and rewards (as Luke's comments that 'doors will open for you' suggested). Zack noted that 'there's two ways of doing prison sentences: an easy way and a hard way', and described his changed engagement with the system as follows:

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 I'm not scratching their back at all. *I'm scratching my own back*.... I've never been more compliant in all my life. And I'm getting more than I ever got out of the system [when I was] being manipulative, obnoxious, and kicking off. I'm getting what I want. I'm getting educational needs. I'm benefiting now, from everything that I'm doing. [Emphasis added]

Zack partly highlighted the shift in the primary means of accomplishing penal order from informal reciprocity (Sykes 1958) to the addressing of individual desire. By being rewarded for being a 'good prisoner', the identity and benefits of being a 'good person' were both reinforced. As also illustrated, 'responsibilised autonomy' (Garland 1997: 180) was effective in channelling behaviour in ways that were freely chosen and highly directed at the same time. In this respect, *enthusiasts* appeared both agents and subjects of power.

Throwing themselves into their pursuits, *enthusiasts* spent little time on their wings and had negligible involvement in the prison's informal economy.¹⁴ They socialized in limited circles (see Chapter 7), fashioning lives that allowed them to 'let time go by', 'rebuild my life' and 'hide away from the realities of the worst side of prison life' (Luke). Indeed, they were often highly judgmental about other prisoners, deploying the normative language that infused their testimonies to censure their peers. 'I don't really look up to someone who's a murderer or an armed robber and think he's a tough guy', Ian explained: 'I think he's a big idiot. I won't do crimes like that.' Luke was equally at pains to differentiate his crime morally from more serious offences: 'I'm not saying that I'm an angel. I've [done a] terrible thing.

¹⁴ Zack compared his everyday choices to those he would have made in the past: 'I'd go down the gym a lot, build myself up, get my fitness level peaking again, and know that once I get released, [the police] would have their hands full. [And] If I was doing drugs now, I'd be working in the workshops earning thirty quid a week to pay for my smack.'

But [some] people, they know what they're doing, they know it's wrong. My offence, I didn't mean to hurt anybody.' He also complained repeatedly about the values of those prisoners who did not share his commitment to change: 'people who just want to sit around taking drugs and have got no will, or just blatantly don't want to adhere to any kind of ruling, or buck the system, who just want to sit around and have a laugh with their mates, drink coffee, take drugs, and do as little as possible in prison and not try to improve themselves personally'. *Enthusiasts* thus presented themselves as both a 'better quality of prisoner' and a better kind of person, above the ignorance and immaturity of their peers.

The values implicit in this judgment corresponded with those of the institution. Burdened by guilt, much of the resentment that *enthusiasts* felt about their predicament was self-directed, rather than aimed at the prison authorities. Ian explained that he was 'here because of my own fault, nobody else's fault, they're just doing their job'. He was angry: 'at myself, for not being there for my family and messing up my life for the past ten years', and declared his loyalties not to other prisoners, but to his daughter and mother: 'so that's why I don't get in trouble'. Zack's priorities were: 'my family. My wife. And respecting the staff, and them respecting me.' *Enthusiasts* often expressed annoyance that other prisoners claimed that staff were lazy or malevolent. They identified as closely with staff as with other prisoners, and were more trustful of, and candid with, officers than they were with the majority of their peers: 'I'll stand here and talk to the officers rather than talk to some of the inmates', Ian noted. Kyle stated similar attitudes:

These lot look at them as their worst enemy. The way I see it, they're doing their job. I've got a lot of time and respect for officers and police officers, believe it or not. You always get the odd dickhead officer, but I've got a lot of respect for them. I could not do their job, not a fucking prayer. I could not come to work, put up with the shit that the inmates give the officers in here.

Relationships with male officers were often sincere and relaxed, based around shared interests and genuine 'connection'. Female officers provided opportunities to display charm and gain reassurance of masculine appeal. Zack sought to 'make sure that bit of charm's still there'; Ian's aim was to 'see if you can make

them smile and stuff'. Other *enthusiasts* showed vulnerability and weakness with female officers that they hid from males. Female officers also served as surrogate versions of female family members, and were granted affection and 'protection' accordingly. Such orientations were forms of identity work, either validating 'normal' masculine status or providing symbolic reparation for past behaviour. Through these interactions with female staff, then, *enthusiasts* sought to reconstruct and maintain their self-images as good fathers, sons and husbands (Crewe 2006a).

As Kyle's quotation (above) showed, *enthusiasts* were not uniformly positive about uniformed staff. Although they accepted that their incarceration was legitimate, and that they should ungrudgingly endure its basic deprivations, they did not see why their treatment should be needlessly disrespectful. They were highly critical of officers who were rude, lazy, or careless with their power. Indeed, because they considered themselves moral arbiters and sponsors of the prison's moral agenda, they were all the more censorious of officers who failed to live up to high ethnical standards. Nonetheless, such officers were seen as 'bad apples' rather than emblems of a broader legitimacy deficit. As a stratum, officers were seen as fulfilling a vital function in difficult conditions, and as standing on the right side of the moral Rubicon. Committed to a discourse of 'mutual respect', in general, *enthusiasts* complied with reasonable expectations and made few attempts to deceive or manipulate staff.

It was in relation to systemic inefficiency that *enthusiasts* were most vocally critical. This included issues such as the late arrival of post, shortfalls in material provisions, slow responses to requests and applications, substandard work and education facilities, and the prison's failure to make available the rehabilitative programmes and resources (especially victim awareness courses) that *enthusiasts* demanded for their ventures in self-renewal. These were censorious forms of criticism (Mathiesen 1965), framed not through oppositional values, but in terms that were consistent with the means and ends of the institution. And although these grievances could be considerable, in general, they were repressed or were pursued in ways that sought to illustrate patience, self-control and respect for the prison establishment: cautiously and courteously, via sympathetic staff or through official channels. Bitter complaints

and explosions into anger were uncommon. When they did occur, they were quickly followed by apologetic explanations and visible contrition.

'Pragmatists'

Around half of Wellingborough's prisoners complied for reasons that were mainly instrumental and fatalistic rather than normative. Although a rather disparate group, with a less consistent narrative than that of *enthusiasts*, prisoners of this kind shared a perception that the prison held a virtual monopoly on power and that to resist it was either impossible or imprudent. They could be divided into two relatively distinct groupings, within which there was further variation. The first group, *pragmatists*, tended to be young, low-level recidivists, serving short to medium-length sentences for violence and drug-related crimes such as burglary and robbery. The second group, *stoics*, were prisoners on much longer sentences, with rather different interests and identities, to which the chapter will return below.

Cameron was typical of a certain kind of *pragmatist*: the young 'tearaway' whose confidence hid a more complex interior life. An ebullient, white man, Cameron described being raised in a poor family in a large Northern town. He was abused by a family friend for several years from the age of 8, something for which he 'always blamed himself'. His father, a strict and abusive disciplinarian, left the family home when Cameron was 9, after which his mother began gambling heavily and went 'off the rails'. In school, Cameron bullied other children, and was expelled for beating up a teacher: 'he made me look a complete fool and he started being cheeky, so I punched him. Everyone was laughing in the class because he sent me out. I just felt like a prick and I didn't like it.' By fourteen, he had stopped attending school altogether, spending his time shoplifting, smoking cannabis, and joyriding. He soon began to commit violent robberies and received his first custodial sentence at the age of seventeen. In Young Offenders Institutions, he obtained respect through vicious bullying, about which he felt little compunction: 'That's life if you want to survive. That's the way things are. I didn't give a fuck, to be honest with you. I didn't really care.'

On release, his intentions were good, and he got himself a house and a job: 'I used to always have money, always have nice clothes.' Soon though, after a brief period on heroin and crack,

he began drinking, and started to commit acts of random violence, 'for no reason, ... to have fun'. Although, when sober, he felt bad about such acts, he repressed these feelings: 'because if I start feeling worse and thinking about the bad things I'll get depressed and end up flipping'. In prison, he struggled to control his temper, venting his frustrations through use of the gym. He maintained contact with his father, sister and young girlfriend, describing visits as 'the only thing that keeps me going'. However, such contact also exacerbated his stress. His emotional dependence made him feel 'like a cunt'. 'Now I'm the vulnerable one', he acknowledged, having lost control of his emotions during a phone call. His paranoia about his girlfriend's fidelity was such that he banned her from going out more than once a week and constantly questioned her movements. Meanwhile, he felt responsible for his father's emotional instability:

Me coming to jail put a lot of stress on him, and my brother is a smack-head.¹⁵ Every father's dream is, you know, they want their kids to make it and that, but me and my brother, we don't seem to be doing anything about it. We just commit crime and shit like that. I'd love to make him proud.

Burdened by such anxieties, Cameron told his father nothing of his frustrations in prison. Privately, he agonized about his volatility and his general mental state: 'I'm not normal, I don't think. I've asked them if I can see psychiatrists or counsellors. Just to see what's going on upstairs.' Despite these psychological problems, Cameron gave a public impression of coping well with imprisonment, and was seen as 'one of the lads'.

Other *pragmatists* were low-status prisoners whose vulnerabilities were far more apparent, and who coped poorly both inside prison and in the community.¹⁶ One such prisoner was Colin, a large, Afro-Caribbean man in his late thirties, serving a relatively short sentence. Colin described his family background as 'typical for a lot of people'. He had grown up in a small town near to London, and had gone into care when his parents separated. After

¹⁵ 'smackhead': heroin addict; 'smack': heroin; alternatively 'powder', 'brown' or 'gear'.

¹⁶ A number of prisoners within this category had been recalled to prison having been out on licence, and struggled to understand why they had been re-incarcerated for what felt like mistakes rather than offences: missing probation appointments or stepping outside the terms of their licences.

a spell in an approved school,¹⁷ he took up a number of manual jobs but 'felt closed in, y'know', and 'got into crime', mainly commercial burglaries, car thefts, and credit card fraud. Crime was 'a way of surviving.... I'm a hand to mouth man, spur of the moment thing'. Colin saw himself as 'no different from a tramp or a vagrant basically, I'm on the edge. And when I go out there I'm gonna do crime again.'

Colin had no family, explaining that he could 'not afford to'. He expressed fears that his social instability would have a 'knock-on effect' on any child. He was also psychologically vulnerable, stopping the interview at one point because of paranoia, and describing himself as having 'internal problems, so much that it is hard for me to explain it. I have a lot more stress than is necessary to cope with.' Within Wellingborough, on his tenth custodial sentence, he struggled to survive on his means. Without any private income from friends or family, he had to borrow money to fund his tobacco consumption and pleaded with other prisoners for cigarette papers. In the past, he had sold his food to raise money for such purposes. In Wellingborough, he earned very small amounts by 'mediating' between borrowers and lenders—in effect, finding out who needed 'items' and who had them to lend.¹⁸

Whether tearaways or poor copers, the compliance of *pragmatists* was founded on a blend of routine, resignation, and a pragmatic acceptance that self-government formed part of a reciprocal contract with the institution. First then, a number of testimonies signalled the role of sheer habit and conditioning in determining behaviour. Asked what motivated him to do what the prison wanted, Gavin replied that:

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 eight o'clock, bang up five o'clock, bang up flipping twelve o'clock. You become so used to it, you do the same thing day in, day out.

Gavin's parental metaphor was significant in illustrating how *pragmatists* took for granted the supremacy of staff. He also highlighted the manner whereby the symbolization of authority—here,

¹⁷ An 'approved school': a residential institution for young offenders; in the US, a 'reform school'.

¹⁸ 'items': goods used for trade, for example tobacco, phonecards, toiletries.

its reification through daily timetables and procedures—contributed to a sense of fatalism among *pragmatists* about their relative powerlessness. Connor conveyed a similar sense of helpless resignation in the face of the routine exhibition of institutional domination:

I just get on with it. That's all you can do.... They're always going to win.... [Officers] think they're higher than you, which I suppose they are. They're the bosses, we're the inmates. But they show that in silly little ways. Basically saying 'look, we can do this to you, you can't beat us. If we tell you to do something, you'll do it'.

And is that true? If they say something goes, does it go?

I'd say so, yeah.

As Cameron also summarized: 'The screws have got the power. The screws have got the keys and we're behind the doors at night; what they say goes.' Many *pragmatists* over-estimated the scope of officer domination, assuming that their surveillance techniques were more omniscient and sophisticated than they actually were. *Pragmatists* were also deeply aware of the measures that restricted their movements and the threat of being transferred to other establishments, where they might be further from home and would have to build from scratch the social and economic networks that aided their subsistence. 'Once you've finished kicking-off, you're going two hundred miles away to a different prison', said one prisoner. Coercive situational control measures thus encouraged these prisoners to stifle their frustrations.

This fatalistic orientation to doing time represented a practical rather than normative acceptance of subordination. Unlike *enthusiasts*, *pragmatists* did not dwell on their moral status or the legitimacy of their predicament. Nor did they pursue projects of personal transformation. They submitted with little thought to their situation and settled into passive routines, as their mundane descriptions of doing time illustrated: 'I don't make no fuss or nothing', declared Ellis, 'I've just plodded along with the sentence'; 'I just travel from day to day', said Harvey; 'you just settle down and get used to prison. I've done it for sixteen years', said Derek. In an environment where power was stacked so unevenly, where there were so many incentives to behave, and where resistance (as they perceived it) could only

be counter-productive, such strategies appeared to represent the only sensible option:

If you fight against it, you don't get nothing. You lose no matter what. The only way you'll beat it is if you just go with the flow. You've just got to keep your head down basically. Just do your time and just get out, and don't let it get you down.... The best thing you can do is just do what they say. And no matter how much they annoy you, just grit your teeth and move on.... No matter what you do, you're still going to lose aren't you. You can't beat the system. The only time you beat it is when you get out. And you just play by their book. (Chris)

I think the best way is to just abide by their rules. I think that's the only way you're going to get anything off them, whether you're frustrated or want to kick off, sometimes it is best to just not show it and just try and abide by their rules and do things through the right channels. (Harvey)

This fatalism extended to *pragmatists'* perceptions of the prison's mechanisms of compliance. *Pragmatists* did not question drug testing; they took for granted that reports were being written about their behaviour; and they attended offending behaviour courses with little cynicism—for self-improvement and personal insight as much as obligation and sentence progression. Thus, Joey sat his course because 'it would help me to understand and it would help me try to go for parole', while Gavin sat his to help get parole and because: 'If I can learn to think before I actually say things [and] do things, then I think I'll be a much better person. I'll be able to get on a lot better and achieve a lot more in jail.' They spoke positively about programmes and courses, reporting that they had given them 'better insight, regarding the victims' (Ellis), improved their family relationships, and helped them understand their own thinking and behaviour. They sought out work that would teach them new skills, or would boost their earnings. To some degree, then, *pragmatists* were habituated into engagement. They did not embrace the prison's aspirations so much as allow its demands to flow through them and carry them on its tide.

Likewise, many *pragmatists* invested uncritically in the IEP scheme, seeking to enhance their living standards and make their sentences as comfortable or survivable as possible. Televisions and PlayStations served as vital 'bird-killers'.¹⁹ Colin described television as making a 'phenomenal difference.... It eases the time, it

¹⁹ 'Bird' was a common term for 'sentence' or 'prison-time' as well as woman or girlfriend.

brings you nearer the community, it eases the tension out of the brain'. Gym sessions helped in releasing frustrations as well as building physique; visits were vital sources of contact with girlfriends and young children; private cash allowed the purchase of supplementary foodstuffs and items such as grooming products and CD players which, in the eyes of many younger prisoners, denoted social status. For *pragmatists*, these were significant incentives to comply. Indeed, their importance was such that, although the potential for material dispossession was experienced as a significant threat, the prison's consumerist contract was perceived as legitimate: privileges were a fair deal for good behaviour. Those *pragmatists* who did resent the IEP system relied on it, and thus complied with it nonetheless.

In part, this unquestioning acceptance of the prison's compliance regime related to youth. Most *pragmatists* had considerable experience of custody, but none that included the era prior to IEP. The majority could not envision a system without conditional and differentiated living standards. Thus, while Cameron considered himself 'staunch', he could not think far beyond his material standards when pondering collective action:

You think: if we stick together, [they're] gonna take my enhanced off me and I'm going to lose my job. Is it worth the fucking risk for a fucking hot meal? I don't think so. I'll do me cold fucking meal. I'd rather keep my enhanced and make life a little bit easier.

Although this rationale was common among other prisoners, *pragmatists* were unusually motivated by considerations of their everyday conditions. Some recognized that the benefits of enhanced status went beyond official privileges. As Gavin noted: '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.' Most were not especially strategic in the ways they sought out IEP status, so much as driven by need to maximize what they could obtain. Those, like Colin, who had experienced imprisonment in an era when much less was on offer recalled these conditions with dread. For these men, imprisonment was difficult enough whatever the circumstances:

Do you feel that you have control over your life in here?

No. I don't have no control over my life in here. My life is controlled very much by the system. Everything is controlled for me: the time I get in my cell, the time I wake up, dinner, time for shower, changing kit, everything

is in control.... I haven't got dignity or power. I haven't got any power over anyone, apart from being the person I am.

Lacking economic and psychological resources ('inadequate', in the terms of many officers), these more vulnerable pragmatists relied on the prison's provisions to lessen the pains of imprisonment. 'I'm not content, I'm never gonna be content', Colin clarified, 'but the last thing I wanna do is to make any trouble for myself. Cos that means getting canteen wiped off, which then would make it harder on me, and then I start doing silly things.'²⁰ So basically, yeah, I'm quite compliant.'

As also suggested here, for many *pragmatists*, compliance was not a simple matter of choice or effort. For those with mental health problems, the regime was difficult to follow. Many struggled to cope with regime inconsistencies. Colin explained that he was 'one of those persons who's always late'. He was often the last prisoner to get to his cell at the end of association periods—scurrying around trying to obtain tobacco or cigarette papers—or to come out of the shower or collect his dinner. He explained as follows:

It's not that I'm *bad*. I'm a bit, like, slow, to conform. When [I] come down for dinner, there's a big queue, and you have to wait five or ten minutes, and I think 'I can't be bothered doing this', so I think 'might as well wait ten minutes up here'. By the time I come down, my calculation is wrong.

Such behaviour was easily labelled as non-compliance. *Pragmatists* of this kind often gained strikes for infractions that resulted from their poor coping skills and vulnerabilities rather than any conscious attempt to be difficult. Some reacted in volatile ways to discretionary inconsistencies, perceiving them as deliberate slights: 'it's council estate mentality, you see everything as a threat' (prisoner, fieldwork notes). Others were penalized for the outcomes of their boisterousness and immaturity. Meanwhile, they were easily lured or manipulated into illicit activity, either through fear, naïvety or—more often—economic need. Colin was very aware that if he were placed on basic he would be 'escalating down a road where you're gonna feel bad and do [more] bad things'. Yet he was also required to get involved in petty illicit activity in order to make his prison experience more manageable.

²⁰ Here, Colin meant stealing from cells out of desperation.

Despite their general compliance, younger, more intelligent *pragmatists* were also active in the informal economy. 'Keeping your head down is actually a lot harder than it sounds', said Callum, 'everybody wants their little luxuries'. These men did not seek status or power through their dealings, which involved low-level trade in tobacco and drugs, and opportunistic thefts from the institution. Nor did they assign anti-institutional meaning to their trade activities. Instead, as was consistent with their general orientation, their actions were risks aimed at enhancing personal life quality. As Callum explained, contrasting *sub rosa* activity with explicit dissent, 'you weigh up the pros and cons. You'll get away with it more times than you'll get caught. [Whereas] if I'm protesting against something, that is going to cause a lot of trouble.'

In the same manner, *pragmatists* limited their involvement in the prisoner social world and curbed inclinations to express their frustrations. In relation to the former, to avoid being dragged into 'trouble', they restricted their social affiliations and put limits on the terms of their loyalty (see Chapter 7). In relation to the latter, although they were often discontent, they saw little point in challenging the system. 'Making a fuss gets you a nicking and then gets you nowhere', Declan commented. Other prisoners described their reasoning as follows:

I go home in three weeks. There is no way on earth you're going to get me in a protest about anything. If a screw turns around and tells me to do 600 press-ups in the bogs otherwise he's nicking me I'm off to do 600 press-ups. I'll hate him for making me do it, but I'll do it. (Callum)

All I want to do is go home on my [release] day.... I've done the fighting, I've done the answering back and that ain't got me anything apart from doing longer than what I should have to. This time I thought: 'just do it, if they ask you to do something just do it'. What have I got to lose? At least I know [that] when my date's up for release I'm going on that date. [If I comply] they can't stop me going home on my date. (Aaron)

The desire to be released on the due date was not an unusual aspiration. But this was a particularly significant motivation among *pragmatists*, either because they experienced imprisonment in such painful ways or because their longing to be reunited with family trumped the status issues that could motivate self-assertion and dissent among some other prisoners. Lifestyle circumstances and future expectations varied a great deal among *pragmatists*, but

for those with young families, emotional attachments were highly significant in dampening inclinations to challenge the system and intensifying an attitude of submissive acceptance.

Aaron's view was also typical of *pragmatists* in its binary vision of compliance and resistance: 'kicking off' or 'keeping quiet'. Whereas some prisoners recognized alternative means of achieving their ends, *pragmatists* could conceive of few options beyond the most visible, explicit, and strategically naïve forms of resistance: 'smashing up' or barricading their cells, making threats of violence, 'giving attitude' or 'losing it' with members of staff. Most *pragmatists* struggled to see the precise ways that power operated on them and thus how resistance might take more sophisticated forms.²¹ Significantly then, modes of dissent were shaped by the same sense of powerlessness that generally ensured compliance; they were the corollary of feelings that one had no other options. Largely, they were unplanned outbursts—about the late arrival of post, for example ('it's a *fucking* liberty!')—or were desperate attempts to obtain entitlements after legitimate channels failed to deliver. One prisoner, exasperated after accumulated visits with his wife had been delayed several times due to staff shortages, 'kicked off' in the hope of resolving his frustration by gaining access to a governor. The incident was striking for the consensus it achieved about the legitimacy of its aims despite the illegitimacy of its means. Staff acknowledged the prisoner's assertion that the prison had 'a duty to maintain prisoners' relationships' that it was not fulfilling. Meanwhile, 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.'

The compliance of *pragmatists* was characterized primarily by economic pragmatism and fatalism. First then, to the extent that dissatisfaction was expressed at all, it was primarily about issues—such as getting trainers sent in and obtaining HDC—that confirmed the degree to which *pragmatists* accepted, and were actively assimilated into, the policies of self-interest designed to placate them. Power operated through the banal imperatives of daily subsistence, the desire to enhance living standards, and the

²¹ Asked whether he ever played 'mind games' with people, Olly replied: 'I'm not really too smart, so I'm not really good at that psychology shit'.

longing to be reunited with partners and children as quickly as possible. Second, for *pragmatists*, the everyday terms of imprisonment were regarded as unalterable—or simply ‘how it is’—more than they were accepted as legitimate (Carrabine 2004). But this is not to suggest an absence of legitimacy. *Pragmatists* were not committed enthusiasts of the regime, nor were they normatively aligned with the terms of the system, but they recognized the procedural, interpersonal, and material decency that it normally achieved.

This was evidenced in a number of ways, not least the relatively smooth nature of everyday interactions between *pragmatists* and staff. In arguing that ‘the only way to manipulate [is to] show courtesy, show kindness, show reform’ (Colin), *pragmatists* showed their faith in a discourse of mutual respect. ‘Your power to them is politeness’, said Chris: ‘when we’re being polite to them, they’ll go out of their way to help us’. Some *pragmatists*, like Colin, found officers ‘no bother whatsoever...quite relaxed’, and assumed a stance of passive acceptance. Others were more demanding, but in terms that were measured and civil, and were active in developing instrumental relationships with uniformed staff. As Cameron explained: ‘There’s some, obviously, that I won’t like. But I’ll try and get on with every officer. Mainly to make my life easier so he don’t get on my back.’ These self-interested motives were not necessarily concealed: ‘I’ll give the landing a sweep. Or if they need something from a different wing, I’ll say “I’ll get that for you. Just remember it when the [parole] papers come in”’ (Cameron).

This cultivation of good relationships with staff was partly an outcome of the discretionary power that allowed officers to allocate small privileges and make the IEP decisions on which *pragmatists* depended. It also showed the preference among *pragmatists* for using interpersonal rather than bureaucratic channels to pursue their ends. Some were too apathetic to use applications and request and complaint procedures. Others lacked confidence in their ability to use the system effectively. Many had little faith in its efficacy.

In front of other prisoners, younger *pragmatists* often expressed hostility towards officers. However, this was done principally out of bravado, and comments were quickly retracted when challenged. Very few held uniformly hostile attitudes towards officers or judged them through collective terms or definitions.

Rather, they tended to see officers as 'normal people' who were simply 'doing a job' without representing a wider ideological system. This also meant that, unlike *enthusiasts*, they did not automatically respect the symbolic authority of the officer position. Officers were guaranteed neither deference nor disdain. Many *pragmatists* expected respect to be offered before they would return it. Even when good relationships were formed, their maintenance required effort. Officers were judged as individuals, based on their interpersonal interactions. *Pragmatists* therefore expressed particularly sour views about officers whom they disliked, while also developing some relationships that were genuinely close and respectful. For vulnerable *pragmatists*, the warmth and support of officers was an essential element of psychological survival.

The disengaged

Disengaged prisoners—a sub-type—were *pragmatists* gone awry. They were men for whom, *in principle*, self-interest was the primary source of compliance, but for whom, *in practice*, and through various circumstances, incentives and disincentives had become insufficient or irrelevant. For some *disengaged* prisoners, this was because of external factors: not being able to give the prison a permanent address at which they could reside during their home detention curfew, or needing more time to sort out accommodation or patch up relationships. Others, such as Tyler, had been refused the rewards that would have provided motivation:

I've been turned down for parole, Ben, I feel that my chances for home leave are very limited, and to [get a] move to a different prison is going to be a struggle because of my previous record. What do you think you can really offer me in HMP Wellingborough? What goals have I got? What am I really supposed to do? I feel I'm locked in a very negative society.

Some prisoners anticipated such rebuffs and disengaged accordingly. Explaining why he refused to take courses, despite the impact of refusing, Billy said: 'you can do all your courses, behave yourself, talk to the screws all nice and pally, and you might get your parole, but you still might not'. As suggested here, to opt out in this manner was to release oneself from the burdens of impression-management. Confident that he would be refused

a ‘tagging’, due to a prior absconcion and a poor disciplinary record, Marcus outlined the psychological compensation of disengagement:

I just don’t like depending on them. I don’t have to worry about keeping in his good books so he can give me a better life or he doesn’t pad spin me.²² I don’t have to depend on fucking upsetting some member of staff.

Other *disengaged* prisoners considered the advantages of being ‘enhanced’ to be negligible relative to the effort required to obtain and maintain it. They were therefore happy to forego its benefits for the sake of their dignity.

For Darren, a Northern prisoner in a Midlands prison, punishments rather than incentives no longer had force:

I said to them, ‘well, you can’t send me no further from home, so you might as well take me today if you want. I’m not fucking bothered. Take me straight to Camp Hill’ [on the Isle of Wight]. Because the damage has been done for me. They don’t give me parole. They’ve told me basically I’m not getting home leave. They can’t hurt me any more than what they’ve already done.

Some prisoners had lost faith in the prison’s ability to deliver its pledges. Jordan described how he ‘gave up trying to get stuff done a long time ago’, after applications for Cat-D were repeatedly lost or unanswered:

You put in an app and it doesn’t go anywhere for weeks on end. You’ve just got to go on repeating yourself and by the time you’ve got anywhere it’s probably been about three or four months, because the apps take so long going through. You’re waiting for an answer for so long, you’re going to be out before you get an answer

Prisoners who saw how long it took, and how difficult it was, to be recategorized to open prisons likewise reconciled themselves to half-hearted compliance. Those who felt untrusted or ignored were also liable to give up their efforts: ‘If I think people are suspicious, I think “fuck off” and then I don’t make the effort. I wait for them, and they don’t come....If I don’t start to get help, I’m just gonna play the system.’

These positions were forms of fatalism born of submission to the prison’s punitive potential (as with *stoics*) or to its rituals, routines, or rewards (as with *pragmatists*). Instead, they

²² A ‘pad spin’: a cell search.

represented failures of the prison's incentive and opportunity structure to function effectively or correspond with some prisoners' interests and predicaments. The outcome though was a form of dormant or passive dissent, one that could easily slide into more active resistance, as later sections will discuss.

'Stoics'

Pragmatists perceived the terms of imprisonment as immutable but rarely described them as coercive. They had little awareness of how power operated upon them, and were relatively uncritical of the prison's incentive structure providing that it functioned fairly and effectively. *Stoics* were no less concerned about 'getting to the gate' and were equally resigned to the prison's domination. However, they were acutely aware of the strategies by which their compliance was accomplished, and were far more cynical about the mechanisms of power in which they were enmeshed. Despite this critical awareness, having spent years reaching medium-security conditions, *stoics* suppressed their frustrations and considered it sensible to comply or limit their complaints in order to hasten their sentence progression.²³

Typically, *stoics* were life-sentence prisoners nearing release. George had been in prison for over twenty years for a crime he committed in his early twenties. He was raised in 'a very dysfunctional family', with a violent, alcoholic father, who committed suicide when George was young, and a 'highly volatile' mother, who had serious mental health issues and provided no emotional warmth. As a teenager, George became increasingly bitter and manipulative, and was expelled from school and taken into care. From the ages of 16 to 18, his lifestyle was relatively stable, and he held down a job in a factory, but he soon 'discovered booze', which both alleviated and aggravated his problems: 'all the crap from my childhood was still simmering away. I found myself very angry, very easily, and it was only the booze keeping the anger down.' He lost his job and home because of his heavy drinking, and began committing petty crime while living on the streets or in hostels. Given his first prison sentence

²³ Length of sentence is normally considered a 'deprivation' variable, yet for some prisoners, the time spent in prison was such that the experience of incarceration was built into personal identity.

at the age of 20, on release he resumed his cycle of drinking, living rough and offending. Within months he had committed a murder which showed 'how warped and amoral and unfeeling a person I'd become'.

Once convicted, he felt 'a great sense of peace and freedom; I'd got no responsibilities, all the anger was gone'. Initially, he refused to recognize the moral implications of his crime. Because of this stance, he was labelled a psychopath and sociopath by prison psychologists. Angry that he was being categorized in this manner without receiving help to deal with his issues, he had a nervous breakdown, and spent some time in a hospital cell: 'from their point of view, I was just an unstable and dangerous person who needed to be controlled. From my point of view, I was a very scared and immature individual, who didn't really understand what was happening to him.' Inspired by a sympathetic, non-judgmental member of staff, he began to recognize that 'the dysfunctional aspects of my upbringing were reasons why I turned out like I did, [but] they weren't justifications. [And] I was responsible for trying to sort out the person that they'd made me.' He started to look into his crime, and began to change from someone 'so emotionally stunted that I couldn't relate to other people, I wasn't even able to relate to myself as a human being', to someone capable of remorse, objectivity, and emotional connection, however limited. After some time, he was returned to a normal prison location, where he was a low-status prisoner, tolerated by his peers 'because I showed respect and didn't cause any problems to anybody'.

George's temper threshold was very low, and he would regularly smash up his cell when frustrated. To calm himself, and to deal with the stress of 'heavy-duty' prison, he would take valium, which he afforded by trading small amounts of cannabis. Otherwise, he tried to stay out of the prisoner world and keep his head down, although this was interpreted by staff as 'insubordination' and reported in files as an attitude of anti-authoritarianism. He was transferred to a prison-based therapeutic community, a positive experience which improved his social confidence: 'I came out of myself, basically; it was an environment that encouraged that, y'know, and I began to find my voice.' Expelled because staff believed he was subverting the therapeutic ethos, he returned to the Cat-B estate, where he struggled to obtain Cat-C status, due, at first, to his own

volatility, and then, in his view, by systemic inefficiency and the outdated judgments of psychology staff:

[Since] 1995, I've just been standing still really. It's all been sort of on-going reviews, reports and knock-backs. I finally got Cat-C [and] was moved here four years ago. I've been here four years just marking time. In four years I've done three days' worth of courses, that's all I've been required to do. It's psychologists, basically. The old story: having to convince them that I'm not the person that I was, [and] get over all these labels that they put on me twenty years ago, y'know.... It's always been on the basis of a psychologist's report that the parole board have had to knock me back.

Tommy was also a lifer, and had been in prison since he was a teenager. He grew up in the North-West, where he was raised in children's homes from the age of 5, for reasons that had never been explained to him. The homes were a 'horrible experience', and Tommy struggled to settle at school, soon not bothering to turn up and living like a 'delinquent'. On entering prison after committing a murder, he was 'a young lad looking for something to prove' and hoped to use prison as an opportunity to develop a criminal career. He picked up a number of minor disciplinary charges for disobeying orders and using abusive language, and used drugs in prison, but, out of principle, never sold them. After a few years, he calmed down considerably, taking up education and changing his self-perception: 'I'm not a criminal. I'm not into crime. I've missed out so much on life that I want to go home and I want to enjoy it.' For many years, he had tried to spend his time in prison actively gaining positions of trust and trying to improve himself and develop as an adult: 'I do feel guilt, I do feel shame. It's something you never forget. But I've spent the last twenty years since trying to make my life better, trying to get away from that fact.'

Whereas *pragmatists* were primarily motivated by what they could *gain* from the system, and had a somewhat consumerist approach to the sentence, *stoics* were more concerned with what they might *lose* and with long-term goals rather than immediate conditions. Having spent years inside, they had been forced to make the prison into a home—a place of refuge and comfort. But the prison's material incentives were not their prime motives for compliance. Most *stoics* claimed to have coped well with more austere conditions, and did not fear an ascetic existence. Some claimed to be 'immune' from the prison's punitive potential. 'I

don't take things for granted', Tommy asserted. 'These tellies, these associations, the bit of canteen they do give you: experience has taught me not to let them use it as a tool to influence me.... They could put me in the block for six months, a year, it wouldn't affect me one bit.' Others simply did not benefit from the majority of the privileges on offer, as George explained:

It doesn't really work for me. As a lifer who's done twenty years, who doesn't get visits, who doesn't receive private cash, there is no incentive within the structure of the incentive scheme for me to behave, really. My incentive is from within myself, y'know, I want to get out, as soon as possible, and that motivation doesn't come from what's going on around me. When they brought in voluntary [drug] tests to maintain your enhanced status, I had a chat with the PO who runs it. I said, 'there's no incentive for me to submit to the humiliation of a strip-search and a piss-test every month to maintain my enhanced status, cos I don't get anything out of it. I don't get visits, I don't get private cash, I don't benefit from the high level of private cash you can use, it's not worth it'. And he said, 'I can understand where you're coming from, but why not just do it anyway, [otherwise] it might look bad on your record'.

As suggested here, many of the benefits that the prison could offer were immaterial to *stoics* because of the time they had spent behind bars. In their experience, the IEP scheme was more coercive than seductive, a cause of considerable resentment. These prisoners worked towards enhanced status not because of the everyday rewards that accrued from it, but because they believed that 'being enhanced' was an institutional synonym for general behaviour that was fed into decisions about release and would 'look good later on'. This long-term target of freedom was considerably more important than short-term lifestyle goals; and it was the threat of being held back that was the primary inducement to conform. For *stoics*, then, the operation of power was primarily perceived in negative, coercive terms: there was little to gain from compliance, but much to lose from defiance or dissent—not just added days or loss of privileges, but sometimes years of supplementary captivity.

A second reason why *stoics* resented such coercive mechanisms of compliance was that they considered them unnecessary. 'It's not what they expect of me, it's what I expect of myself', said Tommy. Motivated by personal morality as well as the prospect of freedom, the majority of *stoics* had little desire to buck the system or cause trouble. Instead, they sought a quiet

existence, looking to 'keep their heads down' in pursuits that were personally productive, such as education, art, and computer skills. At the same time, although they satisfied the prison's expectations of compliant behaviour, *stoics* did not strive to go beyond reasonable measures for the sake of appearances—to merely perform the prison's desired behaviour. For many such prisoners, it was difficult to sustain these performances or see prison as a matter of strategy. 'It's not a game', Tommy emphasized: 'This is my home. And that's where it differs. [To some prisoners] it's just a short stay, it is a game. But with me it's been my life, so I see it differently.' To perform or play games was to 'become part of the system'. Such views also reflected the considerable importance to most long-term prisoners of maintaining integrity, dignity, and control—of not being worn down by the system, and maintaining an authentic sense of self (Cohen and Taylor 1972). As Nathan argued, such aspirations had to be weighed up against the pragmatic imperative to submit: 'I wanna get out, but at the same time I'm not gonna compromise my integrity to get out. So it has been a careful balancing act between the two things.'

This balance was most evident in the detached but courteous relationships that *stoics* developed with uniformed staff. Some retained a categorical cynicism about officers, which they had absorbed while in higher-security prisons and in a more antagonistic era of staff-prisoner relationships. Generally, however, *stoics* appreciated the relative decency that Wellingborough officers showed in their daily interactions. 'I can honestly say that on my wing there's not one officer that I could have a bad word for', Tommy noted. They often expressed sympathy for officers, and were the prisoners most likely to condemn unjustified hostility towards uniformed and civilian staff. Nonetheless, they were wary of becoming too close to officers and did not seek to ingratiate themselves or cultivate friendly relationships. Rather, they preferred to maintain a form of polite, professional distance with both male and female officers, proffering respect with the expectation that it would be reciprocated. It was this distance, with its almost formalized civility, that enabled *stoics* to maintain their personal and public integrity without jeopardizing their progression towards release. They could not be accused by staff of disobedience or disrespect, nor by other prisoners of undue deference or over-enthusiasm.

Relations with officers also illustrated the form of legitimacy that underpinned *stoics*' compliance. Most Wellingborough officers—particularly those on the long-termers' wing—were perceived to 'listen to reason' (George), to handle their power with sensitivity, and to treat prisoners with respect. These traits were contrasted with the indifference and antagonism of the past. 'Generally speaking', George observed, 'they're much more approachable, much more willing to do their job [...] and you can talk about it if you've got any problems or difficulties'. Like *pragmatists*, *stoics* placed some trust in a shared language of decency and in official mechanisms of complaint, as Nathan indicated:

To be honest with you, I've found that if you come with a polite request, even if the officers can't help you, they tell you how to navigate the system. And when you make a formal request, as long as you're polite, [or it's] well written, you may not always get the answer you want but you won't get the 'oh you're a troublemaker'.

That many issues could be peacefully negotiated on the landings also pointed to the presence of certain forms of legitimacy in the daily relations of power. Regular D-wing officers appreciated the special difficulties of long-term imprisonment and were careful to explain and justify their decisions. In return, *stoics*' complaints about the regime (e.g. decisions to cancel evening exercise or raise canteen prices) and conditions (draughty cells, property entitlements) were normally expressed and resolved openly and politely. Physical and material conditions were perceived as reasonably decent: certainly an improvement on the past, when *stoics* recalled inedible food, bare and dirty cells, little access to telephones and showers, and arbitrary cancellations of visits, association, and exercise.²⁴

For *stoics*, then, the prison met basic standards in terms of its regime and the conduct of its officials. But as Sparks *et al.* (1996) emphasize, institutions may fulfil some criteria of legitimacy while failing others. In this respect, deficits in some elements of legitimacy, and the role of fatalism in the daily dynamics of power, should not be understated. Since inducements had little hold on

²⁴ However, most *stoics* expressed disappointment that the amount of physical freedom they had was not much greater than in a Cat-B prison, and that higher up the system they had faced less interference from officers, been subject to fewer 'petty rules' in relation to clothing and conduct, and had been able to exercise more autonomy, for example, in cooking their own food.

stoics, the main sources of (and targets for) their frustrations were not located on the prison landings or in the form of prison officers. *Stoics* recognized that the power to make the decisions that affected them most profoundly—those relating to the promise of release—lay beyond the staff with whom they had regular contact. Instead, most grievances and frustrations stemmed from 'the system': its bureaucratic machinations, its reliance on psychological discourse, and the impersonal qualities that it exhibited. And whereas everyday treatment and conditions could, to some degree, be worked upon, the system of power was much harder to affect. Although *stoics* articulated a bitter transcript of frustration, they did so in backstage areas and pursued their grievances with extreme caution. In public, they were resigned to biting their tongues, swallowing some pride, and living with their own aggravation. Faced with circumstances that appeared unalterable or too hazardous to challenge, most were resigned to their own acquiescence. Everyday conditions were easy to tolerate, but the everyday frustrations that related to release and other systemic issues were resentfully endured.

These frustrations varied considerably. Most involved processes and outcomes relating to sentence planning, recategorization, town visits, preparing for release and other aspects of 'paperwork'. Den complained that he had been waiting for two years to receive a decision about going to a category D prison—'nobody's telling me anything'—and at having to push to have his file updated: 'it took me five or six sit-downs with my personal officer, and only because I collared him and said "you've got to listen to this"'. George had been waiting for over five months to obtain approval for a town visit, his first in three years, and was waiting for an answer from the parole board to which he had been legally entitled some weeks earlier. All his frustrations were centred on the speed of his progression: 'the waiting, the bureaucracy of it. The system grinds on in its own merry way, and nothing you can do can change it. Just waiting all the time. The wheels grind so slowly.' As noted earlier, like many lifers, his progress had been slowed by a series of psychological reports with which he took issue for being based on superficial contact, for contradicting each other, and for providing descriptions that felt partial and objectifying. Other *stoics* complained bitterly or despondently that judgments by psychologists and parole boards were based on institutional compliance and that this bore little relation to behaviour outside

the prison; that psychological language assaulted their integrity; and that risk assessments were deeply conservative, expecting forms of behaviour that were very hard to achieve.

Tommy was several years beyond his tariff because of psychological assessments, and was in a state of deep despair about his predicament:

All that I need is an aim and a goal. If I've got an aim and a goal, then I can function. I can get on with things. When they take that away from me, then I just lose all hope. [...] I'm focused on the world out there. But it's getting over these hurdles in-between, to get out there, that I'm struggling with. [...] It's like I'm banging my head against a wall all the time. I get nowhere. [...] And to keep me in prison to do what? All my reports say I've done every offending behaviour course, I'm a nice person, I'm polite, I don't present a risk. When I got my parole board, I asked them 'if you send me back to Cat-D, what am I going to do there?' There's no courses I can do, basically, I'm just lost in the system again until my next parole.

The frustrations described here were two-fold. One was the sheer difficulty of navigating systemic requirements. In a system whose onus was active engagement, those prisoners who were not sure how to proceed were rather disadvantaged, as Tommy emphasized:

[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 was just being behind the door, and that way I'm not doing anything wrong.

The second frustration was the repeated raising of expectations. For *stoics* in particular, when targets were moved or long-term goals frustrated, it was easy to lose faith in the system and existential trust. When the system had been simpler and less exacting, there was at least some confidence in its predictable drudgery.

Criticisms of the system were pervasive. *Stoics* were the prisoners who were most cynical about the role of the IEP system, regarding it as a tool of control and a means of transforming rights into removable privileges: 'There's no carrots', said Nathan, 'it's all stick'. Courses were likewise viewed with considerable cynicism: exercises designed to give an outside appearance of rehabilitative effort, or 'for statistics' rather than to help prisoners or protect the public. Moreover, most *stoics* had been taking courses for years and felt little further enthusiasm to 'sort themselves out'.

Personal change was not attributed to the institution, at least not in a positive sense. As George noted, it occurred *'despite'* the pressures of the system, or, at best, through the 'room' provided by sustained incapacitation.

Relative to other prisoners, *stoics* were also particularly attuned to the tendencies of target culture to distort its own aims—for example, by sending prisoners to workshops whether there was work to do or not. Some prisoners were adamant that, in order to keep positive drug test figures low, the prison deliberately tested men who were known as non-users. *Stoics* rarely held conspiratorial views of the penal system—notions that it wanted them to fail, or that it was merely a self-serving system for the provision of criminal justice employment—but they despaired of its practical and ideological failings: its indifference, inefficiencies and the inconsistencies between its claims and realities.

As experienced prisoners, *stoics* were also acutely sensitive to the absurdities of bureaucracy. Den complained that he had been disciplined for possessing a forbidden article (a paintbrush), but that this had then been returned to him: 'What was the logic in doing that? If another officer comes off another wing, and it's my turn to have a search, they're doing me for the same thing. "Can I have my days back please?" "No, because you had a forbidden article". "Yeah, but you've given it back to me..."' Nathan protested that he was being moved in handcuffs to an open prison—which would have no fence and would allow him regular town visits. Asked if he could dispute the decision, he explained that: 'you can, but you don't get anywhere. It's like the authoritarian brick wall. I mean, *this is how it is.*'

Responses of this kind illustrated the fatalism that *stoics* expressed about the possibilities of exerting pressure on the system. Others used similar terms. 'You just see it as part of your position in this place', George explained. 'There's nothing you can do about it and to resist it will just cause you problems.' Tommy considered himself to be in a state of deep-freeze containment: 'It's not about punishment. I'm just existing. I switch off, and take one day at a time.' First, then, challenging decisions or making complaints was considered futile:

It doesn't matter how often you go down that office and ask what's happening. Nothing will be hurried up: it will go at the pace that it's supposed to go at. It doesn't matter how frustrated you get, there is no point in complaining, it will happen when it will happen. It's just the way the system

is.... 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. (George)

Second, as experienced prisoners had observed, overt dissent was dangerous and counter-productive:

I've seen people get up on roof tops, I've seen people kick off. At the end of the day it gets em fucking nowhere. It gets em [in] dispersal, it gets em in [Special Secure Units], it doesn't do em no favours. I've seen that, so the way that I've conducted myself in prison is different. I'll do it legally. At the end of the day, my fucking whole ambition is to get out. It's not to spend the rest of my fucking life stuck in one of these fucking shit holes. (Nathan)

So how do you make your voices heard about issues?

I don't. I just accept them. I don't let them walk over me, but I never let the little things bother me. Time and experience have taught me that if I complain about it, I'm labelled as a kick-off merchant or a ringleader or an inciter.... I just accept it. I don't like it, but I just accept it for what it is. (Tommy)

As Nathan suggested, *stoics* were extremely cautious in pursuing their grievances and objectives, doing so only through means that were officially recognized, and with care. George argued that the best way was '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.' Other *stoics* made sure only to ask for things to which they were entitled, and to do so infrequently, 'so that when I do ask it tends to be something that most people can see is fairly important' (Nathan). Those who used complaint procedures and legal channels (e.g. solicitors, the Prisons Ombudsman) to claim rights or accelerate processes did so after exhausting other options, and in ways that were not confrontational:

If I do ask for something I don't go in the office demanding this, that and the other. I make a polite request. If I don't get anywhere with the polite request I make a formal request. If I don't get anything with a formal request I'll make a formal request but this time maybe with a legal threat in it. If I don't get anywhere then, then I'll go outside the prison: solicitor, MP, whatever, just to exert pressure. (Nathan)

Stoics accepted that there were limits to what could be achieved through such methods, but feared being labelled 'trouble-makers'. They made courteous queries and sometimes assertive complaints about visits arrangements or property rules, but acquiesced completely when told that procedures were not subject to change. When polite petitions about food quality were ineffective, they took no further action. Third though, for some *stoics*, it was unclear how grievances could be pursued. As the previous chapter described, power was not invisible, but 'the system' was unreachable and inflexible to individual needs. 'Years ago I could fight it, I could challenge it', said Tommy, about parole decisions he could not understand. '[Now] I get sympathetic ears off the governors or the officers, but there's no legal process I can take to fight it.' 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. For *stoics*, this experience was especially familiar. Responsibility always lay '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 expelled only behind cell doors.

For most *stoics*, this need to contain one's feelings and submit to the carceral machine was a frustration in itself, one that supplemented the daily humiliations of powerlessness. Whereas *pragmatists* were oblivious to the terms of their submission, and were not capable of imagining alternative arrangements, *stoics* were all too aware of how penal power operated and of how they capitulated to it. Often having been more defiant in the past, they could see how resistance could take shape. But with so much to lose from fighting the system, the temptation to resist itself had to be resisted. As Nathan explained, there was something 'deeply oppressive' in this conscious acquiescence and in participating in one's 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.

Stoics therefore expressed resentment not only against the institution, but also against their own passivity and their incorporation into the apparatus of compliance.

Keeping out of trouble had implications for social life (as coming chapters show). *Stoics* had no desire to become embroiled in wing politics, trade, or social obligations. On the wings, they were loners, or picked their friends carefully. 'A lot of my friends are long-termers', Tommy explained. 'We just want to keep our heads down and get on with it.'

In accordance with their in-prison adaptations, *stoics* did not hold the same grandiose plans as their *enthusiast* peers. They were desperate for release, and confident that they would never reoffend, but after years of imprisonment their aims for the future were modest. 'I don't want anything big and massive', Tommy explained. 'I just want a job, a home. And that's all I've ever wanted.' George's expectations were equally unassuming. He recognized that he would be on the 'bottom rung of the ladder' in terms of employment prospects, and saw making friends only as a possibility. Other *stoics* had more optimism about their futures, but remained realistic about the chances of obtaining employment and re-integrating fully into society.

Such apprehensions were unsurprising. For prisoners like Tommy, who had experienced almost no adult life outside carceral institutions, 'real life' only began on release, yet it was impossible to envisage what such a life would entail. Indeed, long-term prisoners were so accustomed to the performances and repressions required in prison, and had aged so much within this distorted social environment, that they were often unsure who they would be once released. Nathan explained that the distance between his social mask and his true persona was no longer clear, and that he had no real connection to his pre-prison self:

I've done my maturing in prison so therefore the only person that exists out there is the immature kid that I was [all those] years ago. That person no longer exists, he is a dim and distant memory, and now all that exists is the person that I am now. I know that there is still a façade that I portray. Everyone does in prison. Now whether that means there is a sense of self behind the way that I portray myself, I don't know. This is something I can only explore once I'm out.

A second reason why *stoics* sought a quiet life was that they were anxious about their abilities to cope in the outside world. George described his town visits as having made him feel 'very dislocated;

more of an observer than a participant. I didn't feel connected with it in any way.' He also expressed concern about his capacity for interpersonal attachment:

Definitely over the years, I've become emotionally stunted.

'Stunted' as in you don't have emotions anymore?

Erm, well I do, but it's a very narrow range. I dunno... if perseverance is an emotion, if determination and frustration, hope, if that's an emotion. But other things, I don't know. It's difficult.... This has been my life for so long; it's very hard for me to feel any different.

Despite the kinds of profound consequences of long-term imprisonment evidenced here, *stoics* were neither the most damaged members of the prisoner community nor the most deeply resigned.

'Retreatists'

For another set of prisoners, resignation related even less to what the prison could offer, and much more to a fatalistic attitude to the self and the future. This small but distinctive set of prisoners (around one in fifteen) was highly compliant without either being actively seduced or directly subdued by the prison's mechanisms of power. These prisoners were former drug addicts who were not fatalistically resigned to the prison's dominance as such, but to life more generally.²⁵ They rejected, or sidestepped, both the means and ends of the institution (c.f. Merton 1938), engaging in minimal and selective ways with its incentive structure and declining its assumption that early release was the lodestar of the sentence.

Drugs and drug dependency were the recurrent themes of these prisoners' life narratives, and defined their adaptations to incarceration, as the testimonies of Alfie and Noah exemplified. Alfie grew up in a large family in a disadvantaged part of a Northern city. He described himself as a quiet, withdrawn child, who was abused at the age of 6 and lost his father two years later:

I don't even remember [the abuse], really. I know it happened but I sort of blanked it out, it's in the recesses of my mind.... I don't use it as a tool and say 'I was abused as a kid and that's why I'm so angry at society'. I'm more angry my father was taken away.

²⁵ Giddens (1991: 112) distinguishes between fatalism and stoicism as follows: 'stoicism [is] an attitude of strength in the face of life's trials and tribulations. A fatalistic outlook is one of resigned acceptance that events should be allowed to take their course'.

After his father's death, his mother turned to drink, as did some of his siblings—'drink is a big part of my family background'—while he had 'some sort of breakdown', for which he was prescribed valium. Hard to control, at fourteen he was sent to an approved school, followed by periods in a detention centre and a Young Offenders Institution. After a failed marriage in his early twenties, which ended when he received another sentence, he spent a happy period working for one of his brothers, but began to drink heavily and 'just became violent. I was fighting every second day'. Since this time, he estimated that he had spent no more than eleven consecutive months outside prison, mainly because of his addiction to heroin, which he had first used in prison to counteract boredom and anxiety:

I remember just sliding down the wall thinking 'oh my God'. It was just a euphoric feeling, nothing mattered. I was worried about [my] relationship with my first wife, a lot of stuff was going through my head, I was very pent up, and all my troubles just seemed to go away. I realised that heroin can take away all your problems in the short term; they're still there but you don't think about them as much. So that's the reason I've continued taking it, because my life has hurt me that much.

Opiate-dependent on release, he had begun living 'a desperate existence, living from hand to mouth' in order to try to provide for a previous partner to whom he had returned and their two children. Committing robberies and shoplifting, he was soon re-convicted, and 'came out to nothing. Two of my kids were in care, my life just fell apart.' Heroin, and the attempt to maintain his relationship, dominated his life from this point onwards, and the two were intertwined. His partner was also a heroin addict and a victim of child abuse—'that's why I can relate so much'—and their emotional and narcotic co-dependence dragged them repeatedly into spirals of addiction and offending. Together for sixteen years, Alfie said they had spent no more than five months together without the interruption of one of them going to prison. Now in his late thirties, he was serving a four-year sentence for robbery.

Noah was raised on a housing estate in a large city in the Midlands, in what he called a normal, loving, hardworking, but fairly poor family. Sport-mad as a child, he dreamed of becoming a footballer, but, from the age of fifteen, became distracted by girls and music. He left school, drifting happily in and out of work, and smoking and selling small quantities of cannabis. At seventeen, after getting involved with 'a group of lads', he served a short custodial sentence

in a detention centre, which 'spun my world around': 'I come out of there hating people, a bit angry towards things.' After losing his flat and possessions while jailed, he moved back to his parents' house, working sporadically and dealing speed (amphetamines) and cannabis to fund his social life. At twenty, he met a woman with whom he moved to a flat and had a daughter.

After another short sentence for a crime in which he had little involvement, he repaired his relationship, moved to another city, and, for a while, held down a steady job. But once he became addicted to cocaine, he quickly lost his job, leading to arguments with his girlfriend and their eventual break-up. He returned to his home-city and began re-using speed: 'but on a different level', injecting it rather than taking it in the form of pills. Noah described his first amphetamine injection and its impact on his life as follows:

And then the rush came on. And I'm standing there thinking 'fucking what a rush.' Well that day was the biggest.... I've had some turns in my life, but from then on my life has proper been destroyed in drugs. And I mean proper. I have seen and done things since then which I would never dream I would see or do. From that first day my life just turned around. *Proper* turned around. When people [talk about] 'the dark side', I believe from that day on I did go into a dark side of drugs which I never thought existed.

To feed his habit, and despite another prison sentence, Noah began stealing from student accommodation. He was soon tempted into using crack cocaine, which accelerated and intensified his decline: 'what it took whizz and draw five or six years to do,²⁶ it took not even half a year for that crack to just bring me totally to my knees'. Descending into desperate addiction, he sold all his possessions, lost a significant amount of weight, developed massive paranoia, and exploited all his close friends and family:

All I could see was a tunnel and at the end of it was that [crack]-pipe. I didn't want to rip them off but I'd become so selfish, and mean, mean, mean. That was the sickest part of my life on drugs. I remember sitting down on main roads in town, and just thinking: 'I hope the police come and take me away.' And when the police finally caught me, I didn't run away, I fell into their arms, Ben. I was thinking 'please, lock me away. Just lock me away from this fucking stuff. Because I can't stop taking it'. For the first time I was in jail, I remember thinking: 'Thank God'.

²⁶ 'Whizz' and 'draw': amphetamines and cannabis.

Although he stayed off drugs while on that sentence, he returned to crack and crime immediately on release, and was soon arrested. On this occasion, he was bailed to a drug rehabilitation hostel, where he was 'transformed'. He remained drug-free for eight months, was given insight into his drug use, and regained his self-respect. Expecting to be given a non-custodial sentence, instead, he was sent to prison for almost two years: 'everything were back to front all of a sudden. I've done everything they said, and I'm in this fucking cell.' Returning to the rehab centre when freed, he was expelled after an argument with a woman with whom he had got involved—'when I seen her out in that bikini...it's a bit like the drugs, I'm just a sucker for it'. Although he once more took up crack and heroin, he did so much less fiercely than previously, until another relationship ended, and his return to heavy usage resulted in a further sentence. After staying clean throughout another term in prison, a probation mix-up led to him only being offered space in a night shelter, where he knew that drugs would be plentiful. Turning this down, he was left homeless, and very quickly returned to drug use and burglaries. Within six months, and now in his forties, he was arrested again, and given a six-year sentence.

Such life-stories resembled those of *enthusiasts* in a number of ways. Like them, *retreatists* were afflicted by guilt for their actions while on drugs, and—despite myriad social and personal misfortunes—did not seek to blame others for their predicaments. 'I've met people who have met with genuine accidents and end up here', Noah noted. 'But I've purposely gone out of my way to take drugs and burgle. I know what I did was wrong, and I did it. Nobody forced me to.' Alfie was equally lacking in self-pity: 'I class myself as a sensible person. I've no excuse whatsoever for why I haven't made more of my life.' Although he resented the 'untold effect' that prison had had on his life, and admitted that he suppressed underlying despair, his concerns were mainly for the hurt he had caused to his offence victims, and, in particular, his children:²⁷

[They] know me by name only. They remember a thin, gaunt looking junkie getting dragged out of the house by coppers and that's the last recollection they've got of me.... I've neglected them for so long, I've never been there for them, I hardly know them, but I've still got the cheek to call

²⁷ 'In the last ten years, I've been hurting somebody every day, [physically] and financially. Sometimes in my pad at night, chilled out, I start thinking about the heartache I caused in my life.' (Alfie)

myself their father. ... We were more concerned with making money to buy more heroin than going to see the kids. It's not something I'm proud of.

However, a significant difference between *enthusiasts* and *retreatists* was the support they received from people in the community. Whereas *enthusiasts* were determined to prove themselves to partners and family members who awaited their release, *retreatists* had negligible contact with the outside world, and thus no external audience to whom change could be demonstrated. Neither Alfie nor Noah received visits. Both were located some distance from their hometowns, and both had alienated almost everyone they cared about. Alfie's family had effectively 'dis-owned' him: 'they're under the impression I'm quite happy where I am, which might be true'. He interpreted his partner's failure to contact him following her own release from prison as an indication that their relationship was terminated. His sole communication beyond the prison was with another prisoner, with whom he exchanged letters when both were inside. This level of isolation was unusual, but illustrated the minimal social ties and support that all *retreatists* recounted. In terms of family and partners, there was little for them to return to.

As well as lacking an external focus for their future hopes, *retreatists* had little inner confidence that they could change their patterns of conduct. Whereas *enthusiasts* distanced themselves from their deeds by bifurcating their identities into 'bad' and 'good', or 'false' and 'authentic', *retreatists* were much less confident of these distinctions and were less sure that they would choose the 'right path' in the future. 'The day will come when I will be back out there again'. Noah mused. 'Then that's up to me, isn't it? It's that crossroads again. Which way am I going to go?' Alfie described himself as a self-destructive extremist, and could not imagine beating his demons outside prison: 'If I could stop taking drugs, stop drinking, I'd be fine, but I can't honestly sit here and say to you I think I could. I don't think I could stop taking drugs and drinking.' Noah said he had 'learned not to kid myself. I could stay clean every day in here, but it does me diddly-squat [i.e. nothing] out there unless I walk the walk.' In contrast to *enthusiasts*, who harnessed their temperaments in their projects of self-transformation, *retreatists* resigned themselves to being puppets of their addictive personalities. They were fearful of the future, tentative in their plans, and had little trust

in themselves to control their impulses. Their designs were not grand visions of success and redemption, but rudimentary forms of contentment:

It doesn't matter what I do. Even if it's sweeping up somewhere, I'm not bothered. I can just get myself some furniture and just start to build my life up.... I can buy a little radio, I can buy a little telly.... And get meself just a normal bird, and just chill out for a bit. And I'd be happy with that—just a little place, you know what I mean? As long as the stuff in there's mine and I can open my door and can walk down the road with a bit of pride.... Just a normal bloke going to work and coming back. (Noah)

Alfie's image of his future, although perhaps realistic, presented a depressing account of his aspirations: 'I'll probably move into a bedsit, I'll have a couple of posters on the wall, my bed made, my telly in the corner. I'll probably make my bedsit into a cell because I'm quite happy with that.'

Alfie's quotation was also suggestive of his low expectations of the present. The degradations of life on the streets on drugs were such that *retreatists* had meagre demands within prison. Although they did not enjoy imprisonment, they appreciated the regularity of their sleeping patterns, meals, bowel movements, clean clothes and bedding, and the comforting simplicity of regimentation. While they recognized that such admissions were deeply depressing, in prison they felt more healthy and hygienic, more in touch with the world, more mentally stable, and more capable of normal relationships and conversation than they did as addicts outside.

Many of the conventional pains and deprivations of imprisonment were felt more keenly outside the institution than within it, as the following excerpts indicate:

You just become a slave. That's what druggies are. Just slaves to a drug. [I've] had nights where I daren't go out of my flat because I thought I was being followed. Or you're smoking [crack] with a son whose [mother has] just hustled the money [as a prostitute]. I suppose in a way I'm lucky. I know people who've died. So in a way, prison has saved me. It sounds crazy, but my quality of life at the moment is better. I'm eating. I'm sleeping in a clean bed. I'm getting clean clothes every day. And I've got some kind of order in my life. It sounds *mental*, don't it, to say that? But the life before I come in was just waking up, going out, burgling people's houses, going round [other] people's houses letting them talk to me like shit because they knew I wanted money for crack. (Noah)

I don't have control over my life, heroin has control over my life. I hand the reins to heroin. It's in prison I'm able to control my life more, and I'm

happier. I'm sensible enough to realise that the only thing I've treasured when I'm on the out is smack and in here I'm quite glad to see the back of it, glad to be deprived of that. (Alfie)

As suggested here, for such hardcore users, drug addiction meant social disrespect, moral squalor, physical degradation, material dispossession, lack of control and autonomy, psychological anxiety and ontological chaos. Prison was a respite from such mortifications (see Chapter 8), and from the temptations of the outside community. It was inside prison that these men felt safer, and more in control of their lives, however modestly. As Noah reported:

I still feel in control of myself and my emotions. We are powerless, but I still feel like I've got a bit of discipline in myself and in my life. And I earn money. I'm in control if I get myself up and keep myself tidy. Control if I keep my pad properly. Control [in] who I mix with.

This reversal of normal social yardsticks, alongside trepidation about the future, framed *retreatists'* everyday decisions and expectations. Like their hopes for the future, their current ambitions were simple: self-renewal rather than radical change, and inner peace rather than external validation. Noah liked to 'keep it simple, one day at a time. I don't even work for one day at a time. I work for meals. From dinner to tea. From tea till bedtime.' Alfie talked of his 'personal sentence plan. I just get my head down. I try and cause as little upset and unhappiness to people. I go with the flow.' They chose jobs that offered absorbing work or a pleasant working environment, or work that helped them make ends meet and afford the small luxuries that they could not supplement through private cash: 'mayonnaise in [my] cupboard, fresh milk every week, and noodles whenever I want' (Alfie). To boost their incomes further, they dabbled lightly in the informal economy, trading tobacco or brewing hooch in small quantities. When available, they smoked cannabis, but did not seek out heroin, well aware that they could not afford the amounts required to feed their prodigious narcotic appetites: 'I'd need about twenty of them, I would. And my mind's not that daft to realize that I couldn't keep it up. I haven't got that sort of money coming in.' In their minor illicit activities, they were neither cowed by the threat of being caught nor motivated by the notion of beating the system.

Nor too were they concerned about accumulating profit or status. Receiving no money from outside parties, their financial

resources were insufficient for them to incur respect through their clothing or possessions. In any case, they had little interest in the judgments of their peers. As Noah implied, this reflected the modest goals they set for themselves, and the internal standards by which these goals were measured.

My happiness now, I feel, is in my soul. I know what I've done, and I know what I can do to put myself right. [What other people think] doesn't bother me. I'm not a person who thinks 'I haven't got this and that', because I have had it. I've [also] been homeless, so people's standards don't really mean a lot to me.

As fitted such ideals, they attached importance to 'conduct': being respectful and respectable in their everyday behaviour. They were surprised by the lack of dignity with which some prisoners conducted themselves, and the lack of attention some paid to making themselves and their cells presentable: 'They're forgetting they're living here', Alfie exclaimed tellingly. However, unlike *enthusiasts*—with their fervent sense of moral righteousness—*retreatists* were reluctant to pass judgment on other people. In relation both to their peers and the prison itself, they did little to assert themselves, keeping out of trouble and mixing in limited social circles.

Retreatists were liked by staff. They were obedient and courteous to male officers, and charming and chivalrous with female staff, whose honour they often defended against the approaches and accusations of other prisoners (see Crewe 2006a). They made few demands on staff time. 'I don't ask staff for anything much. I talk to staff, but I don't really chase them', said Alfie. 'They just let you get on with your thing', said Rhys. 'I'll say hello to them and I'll be polite. But I don't really talk to them that much.' *Retreatists* accepted the legitimacy of their punishment and the legitimate authority of the prison's representatives—'they're just doing their job' was the typical refrain—and they found their treatment and conditions relatively decent. Asked about hidden resistance, Alfie declared: 'I don't think anybody has got just cause for that. Honestly, in my experience with jails, this is one of the best jails I've ever been to.' In these respects then, the conformity of *retreatists* was partly an outcome of the prison's material and interpersonal legitimacy, and partly a reflection of their modest expectations.

In other respects, *retreatists* sidestepped the prison's mechanisms of power and disregarded its ends. With their muted

daily ambitions and pessimistic projections of the future, they exhibited a form of personal fatalism that, although highly compliant, did not fulfil systemic expectations of active engagement. Prioritizing inner demons over external concerns, in effect, they sought personal reconstruction autonomously of the system. Although they were happy to take offending behaviour courses, they did so not to prove themselves to the prison authorities, but out of curiosity. They took drug tests without either enthusiasm or resentment. Everyday incentives had little potency and were dispassionately discounted. As Rhys explained: 'I don't want strikes, obviously, but it's not something I really think about'.

Retreatists had no desire for extra visits they would not receive nor for extra spending allowances for money they did not have. They did not want the disappointments and disruptions that occurred when hopes were pinned on things they might not get, which might be removed from them, or which they could not trust themselves to manage:

I'm not very bothered about Cat-D and all that business. I'd be tempted not to stay. So I'd be back to square one, I'd be on the run. I couldn't trust myself. I'll just keep myself in here for the time being. ... I'll stay here till next March, and I'll take stock [then]. At the moment I'm on course: 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, and don't want anyway. The way I look at it is, if I don't want a load there ain't a load to be took away from me. I'm not going to get upset because I'm not expecting anything. If I'm not expecting anything then my happiness is in myself and what I've built round [me]. (Noah)

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. (Alfie)

Even the prison's most powerful incentives were effectively impotent. Alfie turned down his chance to apply for parole, explaining that he was: 'in no hurry to get out. It's fast and dangerous out there. I just want a bit more time. I don't want to get out there and go back to the life I had' (see Halsey 2006). Rhys expressed a similar position:

I'm not really going for Cat-D. I'm not really trying to reduce my sentence in any way. I've got seven police days which I could have put in for. But I don't really want them. ... I could have got a tag, but I had no address, so I turned it down. ... I'm not trying to—in a way—get out of jail. I just

want to do my full sentence, and hopefully come out a better person.... Sort my head out. Get myself back to how I used to be before I got really badly into the drugs.

In such respects, *retreatists* were compliant *beyond* the system. They were aligned with the official discourses of the institution, but at the same time unengaged by them. In a system with a consumerist logic, not wanting anything was a source of threat. Passivity could represent a form of dissent as well as a form of compliance. As Alfie asked rhetorically, 'how can a prison have power over you when you're in no rush to get beyond the gate?'

'Players'

'Rituals of subordination... may be deployed both for purposes of manipulation and concealment', James Scott notes (1990: 35). A significant proportion of prisoners (around one in four) revealed that their public performances were precisely as Scott suggests: displays of compliance that were within the terms of institutional discourse but mocked the aims of the institution and masked backstage forms of resistance. These *players* were by no means 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. Indeed, they were normatively *opposed* to its practices and principles, and hostile to its staff. However, judging that the system could be neither ignored nor surmounted, they acted out the institutional script of active obedience in ways that were designed to subvert its aims and that disguised and promoted oppositional values and objectives. Behind such presentations were various forms of backstage resistance, including unstated contempt, fantasies of revenge, *sub rosa* activity invested with anti-institutional meaning (e.g. drug dealing; stealing from kitchens, workshops and classrooms) and active subversion (e.g. setting off fire alarms and buzzers). These adaptations were consistent with life narratives in which themes of power, agency, and masculine status predominated.

Ashley, an Afro-Caribbean prisoner in his late thirties, came from a large city in the Midlands, where he had been raised by a single mother alongside several siblings. He described his local neighbourhood as a multiracial 'ghetto', where criminal activity flourished: 'as soon as I stepped out of my front door, the first person I'd see is a prostitute and a pimp or a drug dealer'. He remembered having an anti-authority attitude from a young

age, never liking being told what to do and being expelled from numerous schools for assaulting teachers. He also learned the instrumental value of fear—'a very strong weapon'—threatening other children not to tell their parents about his disruptive activities at school in case they told his mother.

The relationship between violence and masculine power was a recurring theme in Ashley's life narrative. Through fights between schools, he met other boys whose leadership qualities and tastes for aggressive delinquency he identified with: 'if you've got a lad who's leading fifty school-kids on a pitched battle, he's got to have something about him, hasn't he?' On his estate, he mixed with older men, admiring the local criminals—'men's men'—who had 'respect for money' and whose violent lifestyles gave them social and sexual kudos: 'I used to watch people tiptoe around [them], and regardless of what anybody says, that's power.' For Ashley, money was the elixir of status and a means of establishing independence from his mother—a commanding figure to whom he stated his adoration and pledged to support. At the age of 16, alongside street robberies and football hooliganism, he began working as a pimp, using fear to control his prostitutes and feeling little sympathy for their plight:

Being a pimp, you don't feel sorry for a bitch. She could be fucking dead in some alleyway for all I cared.... As bad as it sounds—to be a pimp, that's one of the coldest professions. That came naturally. I'd already got my cold streak.

Ashley divided women into two categories: those within his family, for whom he expressed undying love and loyalty, and those who were 'just meat'—to be used for sex or money. In a similar manner, he would not commit to any of the mothers of his children, but claimed deep commitment to the children themselves:

If they need anything, just ask and it's there. I don't want my kids to be in the position I was in. I always want them to be aware that they can get anything from dad.... I think I've spoiled them because a lot of the time I'm not there. I'm always in prison. So I shower them with money and gifts.

The complex connections that Ashley made between love and money were particularly apparent here. He described himself as 'a family man, at heart', and insisted that his reputation ensured that his family had no troubles in terms of money or security. Beyond these loyalties, his motto was highly individualistic: 'it's every man for himself. If you've got something and I want it, I'm

taking it.' Ashley recognized the extreme nature of these categorizations and positions: 'I'm either black or white, there's no grey. I might be exceptionally loving or extremely horrible.' Describing the number of his friends who had died young, through various forms of urban violence, he veered between sentimentality and cool bravado: 'that's the life you live, isn't it? You live by the sword and you may perish by it.'

Ashley's choice of crimes also signalled the value he attached to certain forms of masculine status and agency.

I haven't got the nerve to be a shoplifter.... Shoplifting, you're not in control.... But I've got the nerve to come and rob the place blatantly. Stick a balaclava on and kick the fucking door off. I've only ever shoplifted one thing in my whole life, and I got caught. I never felt so shamed and embarrassed in my life.... The whole place stops. And they all look at you. I couldn't handle that. Whereas if I run into that same store, I'm in control: 'Get on the fucking floor and do as you're told'. I like to be in control of what I do. Everybody wants to be in control. If you don't want to be in control, then you're submissive. And I find submissive people are very weak. And I'm not a submissive person.

Ashley received his first custodial sentence as an 18-year-old, an experience that he recalled as a 'buzz', an initiation into criminal life, and a confirmation that 'violence could get you what you wanted'. On release, he came out 'meaner' and started selling drugs. He also began to carry a gun for the first time: 'it's amazing, the power of a gun. It gives you total power.' Having bullied weaker prisoners as a Young Offender, he now took pleasure in 'seeing a bigger man cringe'. After another sentence, during which he found out the value of drugs within prison, he developed a crack habit, which led to further convictions for armed robberies.

Returning to drug dealing after a long term inside, the sentence he was now serving stemmed from an attack on a rival drug supplier. Facing a life sentence if convicted of another violent offence, although he was half-heartedly considering getting a normal job, he envisaged returning to the drugs trade on release—'my method is airtight. I don't think they could catch me.'²⁸ Although he claimed to respect 'working people', he mocked the monotony of

²⁸ Ashley expressed his sense of invincibility when I presented him with my consent form before the start of the interview. As I explained the terms of confidentiality (and although he did sign the form) he declared: 'I'm not really bothered. No-one can't do me over so I ain't really bothered.'

working life and contrasted it with the autonomy and spontaneity of his lifestyle. In other respects, he sought to diminish the distinctions between his values and those of the apparently lawful, while defining himself as a 'survivor' rather than a criminal: 'There's a bit of criminal in everyone, isn't there? And aren't they just surviving? When Tony Blair goes home, Cherie's still fucking talking about getting the rent paid, you know what I'm saying?'

Wilson was a twenty-five year-old prisoner, serving a five-year sentence for possession of drugs with intent to supply. His childhood had been unsettled, as he moved between his mother's council house in one city to his father's decrepit home in another. He recalled having to take responsibility for his own welfare and for his sister from the age of around ten—'I had a lot of responsibility, so to me I was a man from then. I don't feel I had a proper childhood.' His father was strict and sadistically violent, beating him for the slightest reasons and punishing him by dousing him with water and then locking him out of the house without any shoes—'I still carry that anger about', Wilson recognized.²⁹ When Wilson was thirteen, his father had demanded that he pay rent for food and lodgings (despite giving him the smallest bedroom in the house when a larger one was available—as Wilson remembered with bemusement and bitterness), which led to him shoplifting and loaning out his dinner money for interest. He enforced his debts through violence, and fought whenever he felt personally slighted—either disbelieved or disrespected. The roots of his hypersensitivity were clear:

I like to be heard, for someone to say, 'I believe you' for once, because my dad would never believe me.... I used to fight over the smallest little thing. If a man didn't pay me I'd beat him up. I knocked out a friend—for a joke he said something about my mum so I knocked him out. I beat up a kid, we were arguing over a pen or pencil. I just used to fight over silly things.

Leaving school without qualifications, Wilson continued to steal cars and shoplift, activities that provided income, social and

²⁹ Wilson recalled a number of acts of cruelty: 'The one that sticks out the most was when he got a Christmas hamper and he wasn't back yet, so I opened a can of chicken, heated it up in the microwave. When he came in he saw the can in the bin and he just waded into me, had me pinned on the floor, kneeling on my face. He was like, "don't touch my food until you pay rent, you're not living for free in this house". I stopped crying in front of him to not give him the satisfaction and just let it out in my room.'

sexual credibility, and excitement: 'it was like a game of cat and mouse.... They knew what I was doing but they couldn't catch me doing it, it was a good buzz.' Joining a street gang, he was initiated into a more violent and organized culture, with an almost paramilitary structure that enabled drug distribution in the local area. Gang life involved trials of strength and character: being attacked and tested by older members ('toughened up' and 'getting wise'), and having to commit random acts of violence in order to 'earn stripes'. The gang also provided forms of social and emotional support that had been absent from Wilson's family life:

If one [person] got into trouble they'd all look after that person. If you had no money someone would buy you something to eat; if you had no weed someone would split it with you. [...] It was like a family, I'm ready to go all out for you, are you ready to go all out for me, type of thing. They look out for you.

Wilson's ideals and self-image reflected his premature initiation into adulthood and his feelings of social and emotional alienation.³⁰ Life was about 'going through shit, and not giving a shit, but coming out on top'. He described himself as 'a grafter, a proper hustler, because put me in any situation I can get money. I will not go hungry and I will never sleep on the street.' He expected exceptional levels of loyalty from others, but put little trust in anyone else. His vocabulary of 'feds' (the police), 'beans' (girlfriends) and, 'licking shots' (drug dealing) borrowed directly from the tropes of American gangsta rap, which also provided his heroes. As was also consistent with his 'bad-ass' ideology of cold self-protection, the ethics of drug dealing were dismissed as irrelevant. Wilson recognized that heroin and crack cocaine 'fuck people up'—enough for him never to have tried either—but his approach to his occupation was instrumental and self-serving:

I don't worry about them, that's my money. Some of the girls [who bought drugs from me] I used to say, 'what are you doing? You're a pretty girl, get off this shit. If you weren't on it you could be my wife'. That's their life, I'm only responsible for me. If I weren't here, someone else would be here, and they were on this before I even met them, so it's not like I pushed it on anybody, they had the habit already.

³⁰ Wilson's early life appeared to be a classic example of premature autonomy: being pushed too early into adulthood, and clashing with those who do not provide the 'respect' or allow the autonomy to which one consequently feels entitled (Toch 1992).

Wilson's mentality was rooted in his emotional history: 'when you get passed from pillar to post you've got no self-worth, you feel like an unwanted dog or some shit like that. It's just, fuck the world, fuck everybody, just do whatever is right for me.' His pre-occupation with respect and disrespect likewise reflected the ease with which his self-doubts could surface:

I don't like taking crap from anyone. If I do I feel like a pussy.... I feel like a wimp, like I've got no heart, no backbone, like I'm not strong, I'm just weak and pathetic, and I don't like that feeling.... When someone seriously disses you, it's a pride thing.

Women posed a particular threat to Wilson's self-esteem. He found it especially hard to take 'attitude' from them, and to resolve his desire for emotional nurture with his fears of rejection and betrayal. Thus, it was only with girlfriends that he was able to show his 'soft side', and he was attracted to women who were 'shy and innocent', but he described his current girlfriend as 'the kind of woman I love to hate. [...] She fucking does my head in, the stupid little bitch.' Women were 'dangerous' and emotion was 'not a good thing to have, because when you get emotional that's when people do shit. If you don't care about shit, then nothing can hurt you.'³¹ Again, the links to Wilson's childhood were evident:

The more someone knows you, the more they can exploit or seek out a weakness, so it leaves you weak and vulnerable.

Has that happened to you?

³¹ Wilson described Shakespeare as one of the only things that had interested him in school, and provided a striking and significant explanation of his fascination with *Macbeth*:

I think I just like the way the man got fucked up, his wife was controlling him, and the power struggles he had going on, he wanted more, he wasn't going to stop. It's the fact that it's a woman fucking him up completely. She's like, 'kill the king, you'll get the crown', so once he's done that he's got to keep on killing to keep what he wanted, whereas if he'd just been patient he would have got what he wanted anyway.

Why did you like the fact the woman encouraged him?

I suppose because people have this tendency to see women as the weaker sex, when to me I think women are dangerous. There are men in here that are in here because of some shit their women did and they went out on a mad one, they lost control. They've gone on a mad one for the love of this woman and that is some dangerous shit. Women are dangerous to me. The witches are quite interesting, that little twist in it, 'not born of woman', so he's thinking, 'I'm invincible', but he wasn't born, his mum was cut open, and he's thinking, 'oh shit', so he knows he's going to die. I think it just shows our lives are twisted.

I think my mum exploited me, because she knows I'll protect her whatever. [But] she's supposed to protect *me*, that's her natural, maternal instinct, but leaving me with a madman, I think that's just fucked up and wrong. All she had to do was pick up the phone and say, 'meet me here, pack a few things, and I'm going to take you away', that's all she had to do, she didn't do it. So if you can't trust your mother, you can't trust no-one'.

Many of these views and preoccupations were relevant to *players'* in-prison behaviour, as coming chapters will detail.

Like *stoics*, *players* were conscious of how power was exerted on them and were acutely aware of the need to act within the terms of institutional discourse. But whereas *stoics* claimed that their prison identities were sincere—that they had to repress their frustrations, but were not acting in ways that were strategically subversive—*players* emphasized the degree to which their public personae were mere performances—'for the paperwork', or for other forms of personal gain. Indeed, these prisoners were acutely aware of the need for self-management and the benefits of doing more than merely following orders.

Players monitored themselves both at work and on the wings, working at double-speed when officers were present, and managing the details of their visible social activity: 'I even think about who I walk round on exercise with and what I have on the walls of my cell, things like that', said Stephen. 'You're being watched all the time', claimed Leon. 'You check who's listening to how you speak to people. You're constantly aware, you've got to [be], so you're seen to be on your best behaviour.' As such efforts implied, prison was consistently described as 'a game', a terrain of tactics and strategy, in which officers were perceived not just as custodians but as active and calculating opponents.³² For *players*, the tools of the game were wits, guile, and anticipation. 'I'm like a salesman, I talk my way out of trouble', claimed Wilson, 'you've got to have a quick mouth, quick brain, think on the spot'.

The game metaphor that *players* employed was congruous with their perceptions of life outside. Paul described his method as

³² Wilson deliberated as follows: 'I've noticed that when you go for something [e.g. parole] they start fucking with you even more. I don't know why it is, it's just a little game for them. I can't be sure, but I feel certain officers are trying to push my buttons.'

being 'whatever they want you to be in their eyes', a strategy he had employed in various contexts:

Like when you're younger you show one face to your parents and another to your friends. The Police: you show one face to them, another face to your friends. Officers: you show them one face and behind their back you're someone else.

Players accepted that the public roles available to them were 'largely scripted from above' and had to 'reinforce the appearances approved by the dominant' (Scott 1990: 35). 'It's their world—they've got all the power in here', Wilson acknowledged. 'They've got the keys, you want the keys, so you've got to play their game'. Ashley concurred that 'you've got to be adaptable. When you really want something, then you have to learn to eat humble pie'. For *players*, it was not simply that explicit resistance was considered futile, but that to be themselves would also be counter-productive. Instead, they recognized the necessity of frontstage compliance and performed commitment, and the potential for using the system to their advantage:

Like cards, you've got to have bluff. You win if you get out as early as possible. If you're fighting and being messy, you're going nowhere. You've got to get them to believe you're not high risk, not going to re-offend, that you realise your mistake, you're fully rehabilitated, you're never coming back to jail, and they think, 'he's a good lad'—[so] 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. (Wilson)

The way that's useful for me is manipulation. ... Being summat you're not, most of the time. Letting them think that you're this good person, and you do this to help other people. It's knowing what to say, when to say it. Playing the system. When I went to sentence planning, and he asked me how I thought about my victims, I knew what he wanted to hear. I says to him, '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, I suppose, because I wouldn't say I'm an angel on the landing. [But] that's how I want them to see me. Because it'll all go [well] for me in the end, when it comes to [them] writing reports. (Leon)

As these quotations show, reform and contrition were acted out strategically to accelerate progression through the system. Crucially, this was not the submission to power found among *pragmatists* and *stoics*. By actively deceiving the system and playing the game to their own advantage rather than yielding

to institutional dominance, *players* could present themselves as agents rather than objects of power. ‘It’s their hand, but you play it your way’, one prisoner summarized (fieldwork notes). They were not the only prisoners keen to be released as early as possible, nor were they unique in their cynicism about the prison’s normative basis. However, their antagonistic orientation towards the prison was such that they perceived release as something that the system sought to deny them, and whose achievement therefore represented a triumph over the institution:

I don’t want to give [officers] or the system the excuse to keep me in longer. That’s the reason I don’t misbehave. Because I see that as a loss, a defeat, to do an hour longer than [the day of] my release. And until I’m out of the gates and see him on the street, then that’s a proper victory. In the prison, it’s worthless. I have the last laugh because eventually I’ll be going out of the gate. (Stephen)

Players could offset the indignity of their apparent subservience by defining their superficial compliance as a temporary measure that would reap long-term dividends. Isaac recounted the same logic: ‘Everything I do in here, I make sure I think: “it’s not about in here, it’s about outside”.’ Through such terms, *players* constructed their behaviour as defensively oppositional and resistant: not being ‘broken’ by prison (Wilson), not becoming ‘one of their success stories’ (Stephen), doing ‘whatever it takes’ to survive (Paul). Acts that appeared trivial or conformist were re-symbolized as marks of agency and autonomy. Thus, by closing their cell doors before officers did so for them, *players* could appear compliant to staff while retaining their sense of personal power: ‘I am being compliant, but I’m not being told to do something. I won’t give them the pleasure of banging me up.’ While many prisoners highlighted the prison’s overwhelming dominance, *players* emphasized their agency and autonomy:

I chose to work in that workshop. No-one forced me. I could stay in my cell. Most of the things they say you’re forced [to do], well I don’t look at it like that, I do it because I want to do it. I could just stay in my cell. If I wanted to rebel and I wanted to prove [something] to everyone I would do. So, yes, there’s rules but only if you want to abide by them. You’ve still got choice. You’ve got a choice whether you want to take drugs or not, whether you want to eat or not, what you eat—you’ve still got a choice of menu. (Paul)

Certainly, *players* sought out jobs and activities for strategic reasons. Some took up vocational training to comply with sentence

plans, but did so with contrived enthusiasm. Some became Listeners with highly cynical motives, either to appear pro-social or to exploit the trust and freedom that the position involved. Others gained jobs on their wings that allowed the frontstage performance of effort while facilitating backstage trade:

You're cleaning, mopping, sweeping, doing whatever they say. You finish your work, you then start doing what you're doing: double-bubble, selling drugs whatever.³³ You show them that you're willing to do the work and you're polite; whatever else you do in your own time is nothing to do with them. (Paul)

As this explanation implied, *players* were aware of those domains where their behaviour was most under scrutiny. VJ confirmed that, with a little care, it was possible to combine surface compliance with surreptitious illicit activity: 'If you're on a parole sentence, do all the courses they offer you, don't get too mixed up with people. You can [still] do what you're doing, but keep yourself to yourself. And you just go home.' For most *players* though, wing jobs symbolized subservience and had value only in specific circumstances. Thus, after obtaining a good parole report, Paul's efforts at the servery diminished considerably—'they kicked me off because I didn't really care no more'—after which he eventually acquired a post in the work area most suited to drug distribution, alongside several other *players*. As Ashley summarized—with characteristic bravado—'I don't come to jail and work. I sell drugs in prison. I scam and deal.'

Trade was only one of many forms of hidden resistance in which *players* engaged, and which gave them various forms of gratification. Most other prisoners expressed resentment about petty rules, poor treatment, and systemic inefficiency. These frustrations tended to be reactive and, in the face of the prison's overwhelming power, they were generally suppressed. In contrast, *players* held values that placed them in everyday, ideological opposition to the establishment and its staff. Behind façades of conformity and despite their relative powerlessness, they did not seek to contain these values. Where *stoics* were resigned to their own resignation, *players* were dedicated to resistance. To counteract penal power, they worked in its margins, outside its disciplinary gaze, or using its

³³ Double-bubble: lending or borrowing goods at high rates of interest (see Chapter 8)

own mechanisms of control and compliance. This was not just frustration with the system, but often contempt for what it symbolized and an active commitment to defiance: 'I know there's nothing I can do to change my routine each day', said Pierce, 'but give me half the chance to do something I shouldn't and get away with it, and I'll do it'. Stephen expressed similar sentiments of generalized opposition and barely contained hatred: 'I do the bare minimum. All the silly things you have to do here, them daft little rules. But given the opportunity, I would break every rule they'd got.'

In relation to uniformed staff, *players* harboured views that were far more hostile, rigid, and categorical than those of other prisoners. They expressed little sympathy or understanding for officers—'they've got a choice [to] be here, I haven't' (Paul)—and although they disliked some less than others, even these officers were branded 'dumb and stupid—that's why they're in this job' (Ashley). At their most extreme, views towards officers involved violent fantasies of revenge:

Every time an officer gives me an order I want to smash his face in. I just want to push their face into the back of their skull. With a [female officer] I want to kick her fanny up into her brains when they give me an order: 'who the fuck are you talking to?' (Ashley)

Taking orders was a particularly galling dimension of imprisonment for *players*, reflecting not just their anti-authority feelings but also the preoccupation with 'respect' that their life stories emphasized repeatedly. To counteract this resentment, they used a number of symbolic inversions to prove their superiority. Custodial work was portrayed as mindless, subservient, and amoral:

Most of the people in prison are here for trying to get money. [Officers are] here for the same reason, they're no different from us. The only difference is that when we finish our sentence we go home, they come in every day. I wouldn't come here by choice. I know in my heart I'm above them because the job in here that they do is no different to being in prison yourself. They're bored out their skull just like we are. They've got to open our door and shut our door, go on counting: what kind of brains does that take?

Through such denunciations, *players* reduced the moral distance between themselves and their captors while reversing the arrangements of power and status that applied within the prison. On these terms officers were socially beneath them. They were people who, outside prison, *players* disdained and would not mix with.

Male officers were 'bullied at school', and used their power to seek revenge on more powerful, charismatic men. Female officers were portrayed as sexual failures who used their position to punish men or exploit their sexual desperation. Given the scripts of masculine potency that most *players* presented—and since absolute victories over officers were hard to achieve—it was not surprising that *players* advanced such inversions of power, status, and masculinity. 'Out on the road, none of these guys could tell me shit', Wilson declared. 'They would humble themselves if we were on road. It's only because we're in here that they've got the balls of King Kong.' 'I don't class them as men', said Ashley. 'I mean, who wants a job opening doors for arseholes all fucking day long? They're weak. They are weak.' Fantasies of revenge were common: 'I'll smile at them if that's what it takes for me to get through my sentence comfortably', said Ashley. 'But woe betide, if I bump into you outside, because it's your turn to smile. You smile for me now.'

Governors received little less hostility: 'a bunch of wankers' (Wilson); 'they're all arseholes, they ain't got a clue' (Kieran). Ashley described them as 'pricks in suits', worse than officers, 'because they're just not with the real world [yet] they've got this image that they're big and bad and hard.... It galls me to think about it.' Masculine inversions were significant here. Governors were considered naïve frauds, who would struggle in the environs that *players* had mastered and were powerful only in the safe haven of the prison. Some staff were seen as benign—in particular, education staff and some gym officers. On the whole though, *players* bracketed together all prison employees as representatives of the system to which they were opposed and which they considered an appendage of state authority. 'They're all just police', said VJ. For Wilson, psychologists were 'people trying to fuck with your head', drug counsellors could not be trusted, and he was 'no more of a criminal than the government and the police—they have orgies, they're high all the time, smoking spliffs with them posh selves—it's two-faced'.

In contrast to most prisoners, *players* made few distinctions between male and female officers (see also Crewe 2006a). As was consistent with their trenchant, anti-authority views, for *players*, role trumped gender as the primary basis for judgment. They saw 'the uniform before the female' (Stephen), and were the prisoners least likely to express protective or chivalrous views. Female officers who took 'a man's wage', should expect to take a 'man's beating' (Riz) if they overstepped the line of acceptable practice. Wilson explained that he

would intervene to stop a female officer from being attacked, ‘not for the sake of her; more for my sake—it looks good’. Masculinity was asserted through claims to be impervious to the social and sexual charms of female officers. Whereas some prisoners flirted with female officers to affirm to themselves that they retained sexual charm, *players* were more likely to try to cultivate sexual relationships, not only to satisfy their desires, but as a way of exerting masculine dominance and corrupting staff into aiding illicit trade.

In other respects, the relationships between *players* and officers ranged considerably, from barely concealed hostility to feigned friendship. *Players* were skilled exploiters of officer discretion and manipulated the blurred lines about which other prisoners complained, as Fin recounted:

Getting out of my cell, I’d say: ‘well that screw said I could come out’, knowing that the screw’s not going to be on for another couple of days. Getting extra dinner or extra brew, saying: ‘you didn’t give me one’ when I’ve already given it to somebody or taken it upstairs to my cell.

Some *players* developed disingenuously friendly relationships with officers to appear pro-social and achieve their ends. ‘The more screws on my side the better it is for me’, said Wilson. ‘I’ve been caught with a razor and I should get a strike for that, but because I’ve got a relationship with them they let me off, they just take it away’. He was always careful to apologize when he lost his temper, so that such slips would be seen as ‘out of character’. Morgan described how years within state institutions—children’s homes, as well as custodial institutions—had educated him in the art of fake charm and manipulation:

If I want something off the officers, I know how to act. I’ve been playing the system for years.... I just humour them, say ‘have a safe journey home’ and ‘are you alright?’. And then if I need anything I can say ‘do this for me, sort this application out for me’—this job [for example]. When they shut me door at night, I’ll say ‘safe journey home’, and just have a joke with them. And if it’s hot: ‘are you having a barbecue this weekend?’ Behind it, I couldn’t care less if they had a crash on the way home.

Such strategies of public civility and deference, accompanied by concealed dissent, were reported by a number of prisoners. Isaac explained that: ‘if they say the grass is blue, then grass is blue. When you get behind your door, grass is green. That’s the way you have to be. [...] You have to give them a bit extra. But I still like to mess about.’ ‘I’ve said ‘yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir’,

said Asif. 'But when I've needed to be cunning and conniving, I've had to be.' This was not the resigned compliance of *stoics*. In their frontstage performances, *players* exhibited more commitment and enthusiasm than *stoics* could muster. In their backstage transcripts and transactions, they were more bitter and resistant than *stoics* could care to be or risk. Rather, this was a form of strategic reciprocity—an act of interpersonal respect designed to obtain returns, but committed without normative sincerity.³⁴

The returns sought by some *players* were considerably more serious than others. Some merely sought minor perks or positive reports. Others tried to persuade staff to import goods by fashioning the semblance of friendship, and making requests that were initially fairly harmless.

Be friendly with them, have a laugh, but then put a little bit of pressure on them: 'that whisky you've got.'... I got into football with him, and I says 'I'll get you some tickets to go and see Arsenal and you get me some things in, surely you can do that once or twice'. (Leon)

Such requests were soon intensified, and were backed by threats. Here, prisoners used several forms of power normally used against them (threat, reward, and conditioning) to subvert the terms of power (see Chapter 8).

Players struggled to contain their feelings, and to behave docilely and obediently, particularly when they felt provoked or belittled. But unlike *pragmatists*, whose outbursts were uncontrolled and often misdirected, *players* channelled their frustrations to hug the boundaries of lawful conduct. Orders were 'misheard' or 'misunderstood'. Hints were dropped about the pleasures of resistant activity: '[An officer will say] "what do you know about [the false alarm bells]?"—"I don't know nothing, I'm just saying it's keeping you lot busy isn't it, running up and down"' (Paul). Insults were shouted from concealed positions, with unclear targets, or with sufficient ambiguity to be defensible ('you really love this job, don't you?'). Tone and manner were managed carefully:

You put them down in front of everyone. You don't raise your voice, you don't swear at them, you don't do anything they can nick you for. They know you're putting them down and everyone else knows you're putting them down. But if they was to put it on paper they'd make themselves look stupid. (Pierce)

³⁴ Officers were sometimes aware when they were being manipulated, and sometimes suspected so even when they were not.

While most prisoners followed even those orders whose legitimacy they doubted, a minority of *players* were prepared to stand up for those rights to which they were entitled, even when (and sometimes because) doing so was likely to provoke wing officers. Again though, resistance was constituted with forethought and care:

I will [only] go so far. Like the banging up scenario, I know I'm right. I don't have to be in my cell till half past. I don't care what they say because I know you can't nick me. You can hate me, you can say I'm a trouble-maker, but you can't do me nothing, so I'll take that to the limit. I'll stay out till twenty-nine minutes past then go in my cell and I know you're pissed off and I know if you could nick me you would, but you can't. (Paul)

Other forms of resistance could be committed semi-covertly, or—since *players* tended to be relatively powerful prisoners who could pay others to carry out their wishes—in *absentia*. Fire alarms could be activated by blowing smoke into them; cells could be set on fire or flooded. Such acts aimed to make life difficult for officers, to aggravate them and wear down their morale. They also demonstrated to officers that they should not take co-operation for granted.

Strategies of this kind—the proficient performance of ignorance, borderline provocation, the pushing of rule boundaries, and so on—required levels of bluff, organization, and intelligence that not all prisoners possessed. Furthermore, in being relatively open forms of dissent, they carried considerable risk. *Players* who wanted positive reports adopted more cautious methods to contest staff decisions. Although they could not always bring themselves to act in the ways required to become enhanced prisoners, nor did they break rules or exhibit hostility overtly. Threats to take up issues through legal channels were delivered with sufficient politeness to provide a protective veneer of submission. *Players* also counter-deployed in their favour the tools by which they were censured and regulated:

I write everything down. They say 'the pen is mightier than the sword', and they'll try and damage you with the pen. I've got to use the same weapon. I defend myself with the pen. If I see something, I will challenge it and say: 'if you're going to make an accusation or remark, substantiate your claims and I'll substantiate why your claims are wrong'. (Elliott)

Through such practices, *players* illustrated how, in a system based on documentation, hidden transcripts mattered less than the public simulation of compliance: 'it's how it looks on paper',

Elliott continued. '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'. Stephen articulated similar sentiments:

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 can use against you is that they'll smile and talk 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 give 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.

Other *players* used these arguments in relation to illicit trade. 'They suspect me of many things—being involved in drugs transactions—but without proof, unless you catch me.... That's the whole game of prison' (Paul). Although they walked a risky line, and were unlikely to be given the benefit of doubt in decisions that involved discretion, *players* benefited from the burden of proof that bureaucratic demands for accountability and transparency necessitated. Thus, even public masks could slip a little if prisoners could still maintain documentary transcripts of compliance.

It was because *players* were so preoccupied with interpersonal power that officers were the primary focus of their resistance, and the main targets for their transcripts of resentment. 'However, 'the system' was also a source of frustration. To achieve their ends against it and combat what they saw as systemic stupidity, *Players* applied a number of strategies of manipulation and counter-discourse. First, some *players* capitalized on the prison's attempts to achieve greater legitimacy by exploiting its sensitivity to claims of racial discrimination. One prisoner fought to get soy sauce placed on the prison's canteen list by arguing that it was 'an ethnic product' and that its absence was 'a race issue'. Wilson recounted another incident where he had mobilized race strategically.

He spoke out of turn, so I've gone, 'I'm not going to be talked down to like that. Give me a form and I'll put in a racial complaint in about you right now'. And when I came back later he said, 'sorry about this morning'. He didn't want a report in so he had to humble himself. (Wilson)

Second, some *players*—and some disillusioned *pragmatists*—drew on human rights discourse to dispute orders.

If it's something like banging up, that's just the general rules, which you've been told when you come in. But if an officer asks you to clean up mess which ain't yours, you're in your rights to say 'no, it's not my mess and I don't want to do it'. And they can't make you. (Jordan)

These men were more aware than most prisoners of their rights and were more vocal in demanding institutional answers when the prison did not meet its obligations. As VJ noted, 'I'm entitled to exercise, so I'm entitled to an explanation if it's cancelled'. Grievance procedures could be exploited to turn the prison's rules against it.

A third means of counter-discourse was to exploit the prison's aversion to risk and its duty of care. Prisoners could rid wings of their rivals by hinting to staff that others on the wing were preparing an assault—a strategy that achieved its primary goal while also promoting an image of pro-social concern. Prisoners who did not want to cell-share could claim mental instability or pretend to be violent racists. As one officer noted, 'you'd have to take that threat as being real, and you'd have to work accordingly. You might know it's manipulation, but you can't ignore it.' Here, like staff, *players* sought to resist not by expressing their own voices, but by ventriloquizing their interests through the mouths of others.

The prison's rehabilitative ambitions were also open to manipulation. Fourth then, many prisoners believed that the best way to advance through the system was to show improvement, by 'acting up' at the start of the sentence and then improving one's conduct over time. Some manufactured histories of drug addiction in order to be seen as 'victims' that the prison could then claim to repair. Paul elucidated this logic:

I said that I was a crackhead and I only sold drugs to maintain my habit, which was a lie, but it worked. When you come to prison, you have to have something to blame, something to correct. Their job now is to try and help me address my drug problem. [It] Helps you get parole and stuff. Because [in their eyes] they have rehabilitated me. As far as they were concerned, I was a raving junkie when I came to prison and now I'm not. If I come to prison and say: 'I sell drugs cos I like money' that would never work. You can't stop me from wanting money. If I said: 'I don't take drugs, I don't drink, I haven't got an anger problem, I just sell drugs' they'd say: 'Well how are we going to do this?'

Such strategies subverted the prison's progressive ideals. They also corrupted institutional data in ways that falsely affirmed its priorities.

Offending behaviour programmes were also exploited for unintended yields. Although *players* obliged the prison by attending whatever courses were required, they did so with cynicism and contempt, regarding them as empty lessons that served only to legitimate imprisonment to a wider public. They feigned interest, commitment, and change, parroting the requisite language without inner conviction, and absorbing what they could for oppositional purposes. As Ashley scoffed: '[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 there.' The prison's rehabilitative aims were either summarily dismissed—'I think they don't really give a shit' (Wilson)—or they were ridiculed as irrelevant to the criminal lifestyles that *players* expected to resume on release. Like Ashley, most *players* could not stomach the tedium or pay of mainstream work—especially when placed in comparison to the lifestyles they could afford through criminal activity. Imprisonment did little to inculcate them with 'pro-social' values, indeed, the opposite was often the case. As Wilson said: 'I hate the system even more now, definitely hate the police more than I did in the first place. I hate authority even more now.'

The establishment's operational imperatives and procedures could also be turned against it. In particular, the prison's need to keep the segregation block as empty as possible was a potential source of leverage. Refusing to bang up, threatening a member of staff, or claiming to fear for one's safety meant being taken to 'the block', at which point one's negotiating power could be considerable. 'They don't like keeping you [there]', said Darren. 'They'll come and offer you jails. And if it's not the one you want you go "no, I'm staying here". You're holding a gun to their heads. They give in, in the end.'

Likewise, the obligation for a governor and medical practitioner to make daily visits to segregated prisoners provided a potential short-cut to influential personnel who were otherwise difficult to see. Indeed, the disdain that *players* had for the power and efficacy of officers and the inefficiency of the application system were such that, to chase up their concerns, they often tried to bypass wing procedures, both formal and informal. As Amar stressed: 'you have to go straight to the head. You have to physically and verbally talk to someone. They can't see a person on paper, they can't see your needs on paper.'

Finding such shortcuts required a certain amount of prison nous. *Players* were adept at such tactics—at working both *around* and *within* official procedures. Those who wanted to get to the prison's reception and distribution centre would make appointments to go to the healthcare centre nearby and make their way from there. Pierce explained a similar method that he had used to jump the queue to see a dentist:

Instead of saying that I wanted to see the dentist, I knew that the dentist comes in every Friday. So on the Thursday when I came back from gym, I said: 'I've got to see the doctor'. And because it's a gym injury, they've got to send you to the doctor. I said: 'I've got a real bad toothache'. And she said: 'Oh, you need a dentist'. So she give me a couple of painkillers for that night, and said: 'I'll put you down for the dentist tomorrow'. So instead of waiting six weeks, I got to see him the next day.

Other *players* took advantage of the goodwill of civilian staff, such as drug counsellors, workshop instructors, and education staff. 'Blagging' them included faking distress to try to gain support for changing wing or simply charming teachers to bring biscuits to their classes. Gaining the support of psychologists demanded special performances:

I get to know them straightaway, I introduce myself. If somebody's got to write a report about you later on, you're best at least communicating with them. It's like juggling. With a psychologist, you might want to come across as being a bit weak and timid. But on the wing, if you come across like that, the screws don't like you very much. If you're in for a violent offence, they expect you to be pretty solid. (Stephen)

There were also means of avoiding, fooling, or escaping mechanisms of compliance and punishment. Some *players* excelled in beating disciplinary charges or complicating adjudication procedures (and in advising others how to do so), for example, by exploiting technicalities, delaying procedures or calling for McKenzie friends.³⁵ Many boasted of their ability to hoodwink drug tests, by corrupting urine samples, paying other prisoners to claim they had spiked their food with drugs, or substituting someone else's urine for their own. Such methods—the subjects

³⁵ A McKenzie friend is a prisoner or member of prison staff who can be chosen to assist and advise a prisoner during a disciplinary hearing if he (or she) has no other representation.

of much bravado and one-upmanship—often failed. Nonetheless, *players* had further means of complicating proceedings:

[If the test proves positive] They've got to send it off to be analysed. That takes a week. Then it comes back, I'll send it off again for a second analysis, which takes another week. Then when they send it back, and they say it's still positive, 'I'm not happy with that. I want to send it to my own scientist', so I'll contact my solicitor.... (Ashley)

Again, such approaches required a confident knowledge of prison rules and personal rights. Only some prisoners were sufficiently shrewd and self-assured to adopt them with the appropriate level of assertiveness.

The final, and perhaps the most significant, mode of resistance took the form of illicit trade. This ranged from the minor lending that many other prisoners did to 'get by', to more organized and significant activities such as drug dealing, and stealing from workshops and kitchens. For *players*, such pursuits served a number of purposes that were consistent with their behaviour outside prison. They satisfied the drive to maintain control of the social milieu: 'even though they've took my freedom away, they can't take away my freedom on the fucking landings. I'm still in control of my environment', Ashley boasted. They allowed *players* to maintain the status, self-image, and lifestyle to which they were accustomed outside, albeit in relative terms. Paul explained that:

Even in prison it's all about money. You just live on less in here. Most of the things you need to get by you can afford but it's like in life: it's nice to have a bit more than you need. Like phonecards, you can maybe survive on two but it would be better with eight or ten. It's your aims isn't it, it's how much you want, how much you are willing to settle for, isn't it? You can get by, a lot of people get by and then there's people that don't get by and end up borrowing and I've always rather been the person that [lends] than be a borrower.

The money and power that could be accumulated from prison drug dealing was considerable (see Crewe 2006b). Ashley argued that it enabled him to live 'a lot better than the enhanced prisoner', without having to comply in the manner required to earn this official status. It also meant that he could continue to provide for his children, and could 'keep my brain active', a benefit that several other *players* noted. Such motives flagged up some important psychological functions of *sub rosa* activity. For prisoners with oppositional attitudes, it also represented, in fairly explicit terms,

a subversion of institutional dominance and a personal triumph over the apparent supremacy of custodial staff. Paul claimed to flaunt his activities to staff (see Crewe 2006b), knowing that, without proof of his misconduct, the prison had a limited capacity to punish him:

They would always say: ‘What are you up to today? What drugs have you got?’ I’d say, ‘Everything, what do you want?’ [Laughs]. They’d say ‘we’ll get you’—I’d say ‘yeah, keep on trying’.

Ashley’s testimony offered a similar celebration of illicit activity:

I get my victories by selling drugs. They pay me £11 a week. I live well above that. I can have what I want.... I don’t like to just survive. Just surviving is having what the officers say you can have. I like to have plenty. If they say I can have an ounce of burn, I like to have two ounces. The meal that they give me—I’ve got a guy in the kitchen who’s bringing me three times as much food, I can’t even eat it all.... And that’s enough victory for me. When a screw comes in my pad and sees my pad overflowing with food and tobacco and just everything, that’s good enough for me. Just to let them know ‘you can’t stop me’. No matter how much you say I can spend, I’ll have more than that. [And] I like to come into their world and make money underneath their noses. They couldn’t come into my world. They wouldn’t survive two seconds in my world. Man to man, in a dog’s world, they wouldn’t survive a second. But I can survive in their environment very well.

Through such terms, *players* presented themselves as above prison staff, unmarked by the prison experience, and undefeated by the ultimate aims of imprisonment.³⁶ They mocked peers who were subservient to the regime or who were unable to channel their frustrations. As Wilson said: ‘They’ve got caveman syndrome or some shit like that. Their style is so old-school, they need to think and act differently.’ As suggested here, some forms of resistance were more suited to the times and context than others.

Discussion

Typologies are always approximations of social life and always present distinctions that are more marked and rigid than the messy realities. As well as to flesh out each prisoner ‘type’, and illuminate the links between adaptations and biographical narratives,

³⁶ Ashley claimed that the only thing he lacked in prison was regular sex.

one aim of providing case examples has been to demonstrate that these types are more than just caricatures. Nonetheless, as exemplars of each adaptive category, these were not typical of the adaptations that most prisoners made. The majority of prisoners could be clearly identified as one type or another, but not all fell cleanly into a single category and there was some degree of bleeding between each adaptive style.

More significantly, many prisoners had ‘changed’ identity over the course of their sentence or during their prison career. Life stories often revealed behavioural arcs in which involvement in or seclusion from trade and exploitation deepened at certain stages of the sentence or points in the life-stage (Wheeler 1961). For some prisoners, these shifts were strategic. *Players* in particular were conscious of the need to wean themselves off illicit activity as they neared release; adaptation was thus different—at least in degree—in a Cat-B or maximum-security prison.

These arcs also had institutional determinants. The most instructive prisoners in this respect were the *disengaged*: prisoners whose self-interests were no longer yoked to institutional contraptions. While *retreatists* found purpose in the prison through the desire for self-renewal, prisoners whose engagement had been lost during their sentence experienced a dangerous state of anomie and alienation. In the absence of narrative lifeboats, these men could be drawn towards more resistant forms of behaviour, forms that would provide them with meaning and motives. Other slippages occurred across surprising boundaries. Some *enthusiasts* had initially been *players*. But in finding their artificial compliance rewarded in unanticipated ways, they had been converted by their own performances. Kyle provided a striking example:

I was pretending, and then after pretending for so long I sort of drilled it into my own head. They started throwing more trust towards me, and I thought: ‘I’m onto a winner [laugh], this is a good thing’. Before, they’d only give me jobs like in the packing workshop—they started giving me more trustworthy jobs. Before, I’d be like Jekyll and Hyde, two different people. Now I’m just me, I find it better.

The opposite trajectory was also possible. Behind the confident optimism of their proclamations, the identities of *enthusiasts* often appeared fragile and unstable. By committing all their existential eggs to one basket—investing in an unambiguously

pro-social identity, which left no room for moral failure—they made themselves highly vulnerable. If they could not live up to their own expectations (for example, by succumbing to drug use), or if they encountered immutable obstacles to their ambitions, the grand edifices on which their identities depended collapsed.³⁷

A second possibility for these prisoners was that their fixation on personal integrity could turn them from committed supporters of the regime to its most rabidly censorious critics. When *enthusiasts* perceived staff as corrupt or uncaring or saw the system as deficient, righteous indignation became proof of their virtue. In such circumstances, they embraced the moral legitimacy of their punishment, but fiercely resented the hypocrisies and shortcomings of its execution. These were hyper-censorious prisoners—‘crusaders’—who pledged allegiance to pro-social values and made projects of scrutinizing the prison to ensure it matched the integrity of their beliefs. As Scott (1990: 107) notes, this is a particularly powerful form of dissidence: ‘The disillusioned mission boy... is always a graver threat to an established religion than the pagans who were never taken in by its promises.’

Other prisoners were in different kinds of transitions. Both Fin and Alexis had been manipulative and rebellious on previous sentences, but were looking to reform their lifestyles and identities. Both had gained character insight from offending behaviour courses, and talked of ‘working on themselves’ with the prison’s encouragement.³⁸ At the same time, they lacked the inner conviction and absolute certainty that *enthusiasts* exuded. Fin acknowledged that ‘as much as I feel I’ve changed while I’ve been in here, there will always be a part of me that’s programmed to [have a] criminal side’. Alexis pondered that ‘everyone’s got good and bad, haven’t they?’ As with *enthusiasts*, the process of self-questioning

³⁷ At the end of my fieldwork period, rumours emerged that Zack was re-using heroin, something that would have shattered the identity that he had constructed around him. It was interesting too that both Ian and Zack described educational attainment as the kind of ‘buzz’ that drugs used to provide, suggesting that their addictive tendencies may simply have been transposed from one sphere to another.

³⁸ Such transitions were effectuated by the prison’s character and location. Fin and Alexis had both sought out a place at HMP Wellingborough because they knew it was a ‘quiet prison’, in which they could avoid being caught up in drug culture, prison politics, and the loyalties which would have dragged them into conflict in prisons closer to their homes (see Chapter 6).

and the constant reiteration of personal change were themselves part of the change process. Yet these prisoners retained some suspicion of the prison's 'hidden agendas' (Alexis), particularly when decisions were delayed or went against them. This ambivalence made their conversions partial and precarious. They wanted the prison to recognize their internal struggles and to support their attempts to bring out their 'good side' through reassurance that they were 'doing the right things'. Without such reinforcement, it was all too easy for them to revert to the more resistant behaviours to which they were accustomed, and which gave them more existential security. Highlighting the predictable outcomes that resistance provided, Fin talked of 'a boundary—and when you step over it, you know you're going to get punished'. Alexis deliberated as follows:

There's a battle going on inside me. I do generally wanna sort myself out. I'm trying to get help, and when I can't get that help it's frustrating. Sometimes I think to myself 'would I be better [off] if I went back to where I was and what I was', but then I think of my family. (Alexis)

For these prisoners, the prison and its staff played a crucial role in steering possible futures.³⁹ Feedback and the nature of their treatment could channel them down what they called the 'right' or 'wrong' path, and could bring out their 'good side' or 'bad side'.⁴⁰ The binary language employed here was striking, suggesting an

³⁹ Officers differentiated prisoners in a number of ways. One senior officer divided them into 'players', who looked to make money in prison, 'cons', who wanted to do their sentence with minimum fuss, and 'wannabe players' or 'nob-heads', who lacked the means and maturity to be players. Another officer classified prisoners as 'shitbags' who made 'no effort or contribution' within the prison, 'barrack room lawyers', those involved in drugs, either as dealers, users or intermediaries, and 'alrights', who caused no problems or concerns. Another senior officer explained that:

You make a decision in a matter of minutes of speaking to a prisoner what sort of group he falls into. You get the quiet prisoners who aren't a problem. You get other prisoners who are quiet, weak and inadequate and they have victim written all over their forehead. Then you get what I call 'Jack-the-lads'. And then you get your older, sensible prisoners. And then you get your out-and-out shits, and you do very, very quickly put people into those categories.

In summary, most officers classified prisoners in terms of institutional compliance or resistance ('good lads' or 'trouble-makers'), in terms of strength, weakness, use of power, and ability to cope (bullies and victims, including 'fraggles' and 'mup-pets'), and according to role and involvement in the prison's informal economy.

⁴⁰ Many prisoners talked about 'hanging with the wrong crowd', a term that implied moral censure.

almost schizophrenic sense of self. Whether this derived from the terms of the prison's cognitive behavioural courses or from its language of 'basic' and 'enhanced' was hard to decipher. But it left little room for ambiguity, ambivalence, or the benefit of doubt, and invoked a rather simplistic notion of identity. In a context of risk-aversion and where power could be so unforgiving, prisoners who struggled with change had little margin for error, as Alexis complained:

I am gonna make mistakes. But I'm gonna learn from that. I'm not gonna make the same mistake when I do eventually get out. Why should I be punished for making a mistake, a genuine mistake? I haven't gone out of me way to disrupt anything or get meself in trouble—help me put it right, y'know. [...] What do they expect? That you're gonna get up every morning smiling and happy?

The dangers of penal power

Such comments alert us to some of the dangers and ironies of a system with such profound imbalances of power. The first of these relates to the issue of *agency*. Each prisoner type emphasized the degree to which compliance—however shallow—was ultimately 'for me and my benefit' rather than to gratify the prison. This refrain meant different things for different prisoners: for *enthusiasts*, it spoke of an innate goodness that was not just the outcome of institutional compulsion. For other prisoners, the point was to highlight the pragmatic benefits of compliance. Each type made a different virtue out of the same necessity. Likewise, it was important for prisoners to feel that they were changing themselves rather than having change forced upon them. The majority of prisoners defined 'going straight' as a matter of cognitive transformation, an act of individual will rather than social opportunity.⁴¹ In doing so, they portrayed themselves as agents rather than objects of power. In this respect, the subjectifying tendencies of penal power were in some ways highly effective—allowing prisoners to feel responsible for making choices and resolutions that, in reality, they could barely refuse. But for those prisoners who were aware that their decisions were circumscribed by coercive parameters, to resist prescribed

⁴¹ Such a definition was consistent with the rational-choice view of offending that most prisoners propounded and which was emblematic of the almost complete absence among prisoners of more radical, politicized interpretations of crime.

options was a tempting means of exhibiting agency. As penal power increases, this temptation may become more potent, not less.

A second outcome of this power surfeit was that legitimate grievances were frequently suppressed. Many prisoners were scared to raise concerns, even when these related to legal rights, entitlements and reasonable expectations of the system—‘you can only push so much’, noted Tyler. Yet to be passive—to fail to remind officers of their responsibilities, to allow repeated delays in important decisions, or to let yourself be ‘brushed off’—also had harmful consequences, particularly in a context where officers took little initiative. Being suitably assertive was difficult:

If you’ve got a bad attitude around the wing and you go and scream up, you’ll be unlikely to get it, but if you don’t, and you only rear up once, they go, ‘yeah, he’ll be alright tomorrow, he’ll be back to normal’. (Alexis)

In effect, resistance was redefined to include some matters that prisoners should not have needed to pursue. At the same time, intended forms of resistance either became less overt or took shape in elaborate texts of dishonesty. The surfeit of power thus caused its own problems. As coming chapters show, these ironic outcomes of managerial power—which led to aggression and abuse taking evasive forms—were also germane to the social world of prisoners.

At the institutional level, the implications were complex. For prison administrators, there was a need for more nuanced measures of consent and dissent. The rigour and rigidity of managerial power pushed resistance into clandestine forms: hostility to officers became ‘secret’ (Paul), rebellion was driven ‘underground’ (Ashley), and unlawful activity became more surreptitious. Figures on staff assaults and positive drug tests capture these things in deeply limited ways. They are unreliable indicators of normative consent. Order in Wellingborough was cemented by everyday legitimacy, even if, as in all prisons, it was ultimately buttressed by coercive scaffolding. But the primary bases of compliance were personal morality, instrumental pragmatism and fatalistic resignation.

When compliance is achieved through such mechanisms, and when the armoury by which it is sought is so large, it is easy for the normative dimensions of order to be disregarded. The prison’s moral mission may be easily neglected when the imperative for smooth governance is so compelling, and when the official

transcript of calm efficiency is so important. Managerialism also undermines its own legitimacy if it appears to operate for its own sake while ignoring real needs, or if it pursues targets as ends in themselves. For prisoners in Wellingborough who were marked down as engaged in constructive activity while playing cards in idle workshops, the fetishism of targets was deeply alienating.

Further, if order is the organizational priority, it may be fulfilled at the expense of sincerity, consent, and legitimacy. An excess of power may be more effective in producing hollow performances of commitment than producing genuine contrition or persuading prisoners of the value of change. 'They have got all the power', stated Pierce, 'so you're always just telling people what they want to hear'. To use Scott's (1990: 3) terms, 'the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask'. Many prisoners were adept at rehearsing those scripts demanded of them, but experienced the insistence on such performances as an affront to personal integrity. Other prisoners were in effect punished for speaking unacceptable honesties or acknowledging human frailties, while skilful actors progressed. This too undermined the legitimacy of the system.

Order forged on this basis should give little grounds for confidence. Even when surface compliance predominates, penal order is always fragile. A simple act of insubordination 'pierces the smooth surface of apparent consent' (Scott 1990: 205) and serves as evidence to others that their resentments are shared. Fatalism may appear a solid basis for social stability, but where prisoners feel powerless to alter their circumstances, it may rapidly transmute into despair or desperate rebellion (see Carrabine 2004). As George described it:

A guy on our wing went on hunger strike he got so frustrated. He knew damn well that, if anything, [it] would just delay the decision, because the lifer division would see it as being blackmailed and would stop the process until he came off it. He knew that. But it's just that feeling of frustration, of powerlessness. You feel you've gotta do something just to show that you're not just a bloody cog in the machine.

This attitude of impotence was not shared by all prisoners. *Players* often rehearsed the sociological cliché that staff relied on the co-operation of prisoners to keep order. On D-wing, although prisoners required no cajoling to comply with the regime, their familiarity with prison regulations and their readiness to use legal channels gave them some sense of power over staff. 'We only have

as much control as they let us', noted one officer. 'Anything that involves interpreting the rules, they challenge—"you'll be hearing from my solicitor"',⁴² Yet the vast majority of D-wing prisoners perceived themselves as highly compliant, collectively weak, and socially atomized. This attitude was even more apparent elsewhere in the prison. Compromises and trade-offs were everyday occurrences, but they were not the major corruptions that Sykes (1958) regarded as unavoidable. Officers were confident of their dominance and self-assured in their feelings of control (see also Drake 2007). The majority of prisoners were in no doubt that power lay with staff, even if not directly in the hands of officers. Indeed, although prisoners relied on officers to deliver the regime, the staff responsible for the decisions that affected many of them most significantly were beyond their reach. Like officers and governors above them, they felt that they had few means of defining their conditions and were largely submissive in the face of power. By pulling power to the upper layers of the organization, managerialist control mechanisms exacerbated the tendency for all penal strata to feel that power was elsewhere.

Order and Resistance

Resistance and the social context

The tapestry of dissent is more than a compilation of the individual adaptations that I have detailed above. Resistance is constituted through social interaction and it reconstitutes the potential for further action. Minor forms of opposition are, as Scott argues, more than just 'harmless catharsis' (1990: 187). They test the limits of acceptable practice and have the potential to aggregate. In Wellingborough, when individual prisoners stuck pornographic posters on their cell walls, when they moved their furniture into unauthorized arrangements, and when Muslim prisoners began to pray together on the prison landings, they sought to repaint the lines of permissible conduct in ways that would have collective consequences. Resistance is also kindled and sustained within a social community. Practices of defiance are informed by

⁴² The examples given here were policies that allowed staff to open prisoners' letters and allowed female officers to conduct rubdown searches. It should be noted that only a minority of prisoners were challenging in these ways, though their persistence could make life very difficult for staff.

ideas that circulate within the prisoner world, and their success relies on mass collusion. While the compliant majority may themselves follow rules, they can at the same time instigate, support and delight in the rule violations committed by their peers. When prisoners brew hooch or pilfer from kitchens, they depend on collective complicity.

The reasons why prisoners allowed such infractions to occur—why they did not ‘grass’, for example—varied considerably, as Chapter 8 discusses. More significantly for current purposes, it is worth tracing the form of social solidarity that existed among Wellingborough prisoners. The social terms that incite and allow oppositional activity can also inhibit it. Where community support for oppositional practices is weak, prisoners with resistant tendencies are discouraged from the individual acts of resistance that require passive collusion (e.g. drug dealing, escape attempts) and from the collective challenges to power which require active support (such as protests). Prisoners in Wellingborough who proposed protests were met with uncomfortable silences, muted enthusiasm, or frank refusals. Whether made sincerely or out of bravado, these propositions—e.g. to refuse *en masse* to lock up, to have a sit-down protest, or to intervene radically on behalf of one’s peers—did not progress beyond verbal machinations or lightweight appeals. Petitions about food quality were polite, unthreatening, and occasional. When potentially inflammatory policies were introduced, such as a new pin-phone system, staff were surprised by how passively prisoners accepted them.⁴³

There were a number of reasons for this collective passivity. Most prisoners were aware of the long sentences given for ‘prison mutiny’, a charge introduced following the 1990 disturbances. Most recognized that situational measures made collective protest difficult. Most also saw ‘no just cause’ (Alfie) for wholesale resistance, in an era when basic rights such as regular phone calls,

⁴³ This was a transition from a phonecard system, which allowed prisoners to call whomever they wanted, to a pin-phone system that required them to specify the numbers they wanted to use. Prisoners resented the policy for three main reasons: first, because it added an extra layer of scrutiny to their contact with the outside world, which for some prisoners included criminal associates; second, because, under the new system, call recipients would be told that the incoming call was from a prisoner; third, because prisoners feared that the removal of phonecards from the internal economy would reduce currency on the wings and make illicit transactions more difficult.

showers, and visits were assured, and when improvements in the physical environment, shifts in the attitudes of officers, and the introduction of a range of privileges had reduced the depriving and confrontational nature of imprisonment. Wellingborough's location within the prison system was also vital. 'In a B-Cat', noted Nathan, 'the outside world's unreal. Your dream is to get out, but it has an unreal quality to it, it has no substance.' Once prisoners reached the Cat-C estate, however, freedom was tangible. Very few prisoners were prepared to risk their release date for the sake of peer solidarity, as Callum's view illustrated:

If I see a screw jumping on somebody's head, I'm not going to get involved, no way. Because I'd be the only one on the wing that did, and I'd be the only other one getting my head stamped on. You see people getting dragged away from visits all the while, but people don't get involved: 'That's his business. I'm going home in four weeks'. [And] there is no way on earth you're going to get me in a protest about anything. There is no point in me getting [added] days to get something sorted for long after I'm gone for somebody else to benefit.

This attitude of prudent individualism was not universal, as Chapter 7 details, but it was the dominant mindset of the prisoner community and found expression in a number of its daily idioms. Common phrases such as 'do what you're doing' captured its values of self-determination and mutual toleration. Such slogans partly reflect the 'situational moral sensibility' that social theorists have identified throughout late-modern societies (Garland 2001a: 88; see also Bauman 2000). In Wellingborough, they were refined by the proximity of freedom: 'Everybody is just greedy for that date to come', Jacob summarized, 'everybody is just doing their time'. As suggested here, for some prisoners, this ethic represented a culture of selfishness and fear: 'Fear of the system. Fear of losing' (Pete). For others, like Alexis, it was a release from the burden of other people's interests and campaigns: 'nowadays, everyone's getting on with their own sentence, instead of doing someone else's'.

Stephen described the culture of atomized self-interest and self-regulation as follows:

It runs itself. They don't need to control anything. Because we all want a quiet life, we all want to get out. It keeps you under control: getting into getting out. [...] I'd like to think that I'd still speak up, but I might not go as far. I might back down if it came to the crunch—if I was gonna end up in the block. [...] The majority of people have got it in their head: 'I'm going home in a few weeks, I'm not interested'.

The proximity of release inflected the tone by which resistance was conceived. Anger and frustration were offset by thoughts of freedom; victory over the system was redefined by many prisoners as ‘getting out on time’—a formulation that assumed that the prison wanted to keep prisoners inside for as long as possible. As *players* illustrated, self-esteem could be derived from notions of status in the outside community, a rationalization that was more difficult higher up the system. As Isaac stated, by the Cat-C stage of the sentence, ‘everything’s about outside’.

While diluted by the prospect of freedom, solidarity was also splintered by the everyday incentives through which prisoners were addressed. First, everyone had more to lose from collective involvement. Second, the IEP scheme differentiated prisoners’ lifestyles so that they were rarely fighting the same battles. In the past, everyone had been entitled to the same goods and treatment, minor and strict though these were. This had resulted in clear demarcations between prisoners and staff, and clear solidarities within the prisoner community:

It was ‘them’ and ‘us’. You had nothing, they gave you nothing, there was nothing to take away. (Darren)

Say the rule was that you could have your radio. Everybody had the same. Nobody got any more, nobody got any less. You couldn’t lean against a fucking wall—strange—but *everybody* couldn’t lean against a wall. You were all the same. Now we’re all individuals. That’s what’s caved in. (Pete)

For many experienced prisoners, the IEP scheme’s ambitions to refashion these antagonisms and affiliations represented an underhand attack on the clarity of the inmate identity and the integrity of the prisoner community. Changes in rules now had uneven consequences and policies had differential significance. For example, prisoners who could supplement their meals with large spending allowances cared less than those without such resources about the quality of prison food. In such respects, prisoners walked ‘their own little avenues’ (Dave), pursuing their interests as individuals. There were fewer issues around which to unite, and, even for those prisoners who were inclined to protest, the hope of reciprocal support was diminished. Solidarity can form through alienation or affinity, but the IEP scheme led to decreases in both. It reduced the *basis* of collective identification. Meanwhile, by easing the material deficits of imprisonment through formal channels

(rather than allowing them to be alleviated through informal arrangements between prisoners) it also reduced the *need* for peer solidarity.⁴⁴

Specific components of the IEP scheme and the regime also altered the dynamics of prisoner social life, hindering the development of collective culture and dissent. As well as providing diversion, televisions and PlayStations encouraged self-isolation. Some experienced prisoners described in-cell entertainment as a kind of pacifier—‘visual Mogadon’ (Matt)—and attributed the decline of ‘the social prison’ to its stultifying effects (see Jewkes 2002):

They’re basically just sitting in their cell watching telly. Basically doing nothing. That’s how it’s changed. At one time you would get a group of lads together and they’d be sitting talking about things, having a laugh, playing dominoes, going down to education. I mean education used to be full at night time. Now you’re lucky if you get twenty people. (Den)

Many prisoners recognized that having a television discouraged them from cerebral and social activity, and from the kind of discussions that developed group empathy and consciousness. Situational measures such as the end of communal dining and limits on movement between wings also reduced social mixing.

Peer solidarity was also eroded by the culture of hard drug use that had developed across the prison estate from the late 1980s (see Crewe 2005b; and later chapters). As Stephen detailed, heroin encouraged a range of activities that undermined trust, goodwill, and mutual identification:

Smack—that’s what’s changed things a lot in prisons. People would never steal from people or grass each other up. Now that’s just commonplace: grassing and co-operating with staff. . . . It’s lowered general morals in the prison system. Proper heroin addicts have got no morals, y’know, they’d steal from their mum, they can’t be trusted with anything. . . . So there’s a kind of general mistrust around the place. The violence levels have gone right up because of drugs as well, over [debt]. It’s hardened people’s feelings

⁴⁴ The Director General of the Prison Service, Phil Wheatley, had been impressed by histories of anti-terrorism in Northern Ireland which argued that the best way of eroding terrorist influence was to tackle the issues (such as housing provision and crime control) around which grievances could unite and unofficial bodies could provide solutions (Wheatley, pers. comm.). The same principles could be applied to the prison, where the aim was to ensure that prisoners could not (or did not need to) organize around collective issues and to prevent power from coalescing around influential individuals.

towards their fellow prisoners.... The heroin culture has destroyed the humanity that was to other prisoners, that's gone now. That's why I think there's more slashings, because people don't look at each other as humans anymore, especially if they're smackheads—that's all they are: they get that label and they're finished.

Non-users were suspicious of the motives of their peers and were unwilling to promote the interests of strangers. Those prisoners who were involved in the drugs economy were more preoccupied with the acquisition and distribution of heroin than with collective interests or identity. As one prisoner explained: 'drugs have killed the morals of the prison. [Heroin's] a hungry drug: your mind, spirit and emotion are owned by the drug' (fieldwork notes). In such circumstances, collective action was less tenable. 'It's not us against *them* anymore, it's us against *us*', one prisoner argued. Another laughed when asked about loyalty between prisoners: 'the only loyalty here is heroin'. These various forces of individualization influenced all aspects of the prisoner social world, as coming chapters will describe.

While keeping collective opposition in check, these conditions also threatened backstage resistance by creating a climate ripe for informing. Prisoners seeking protection to escape drug-related debt were pushed by staff to reveal the names of drug dealers and suppliers; those looking to avenge market exclusion or exploitation, and those seeking to purge rival traders from the market, were also tempted to inform (see below). Men looking to enhance their living standards or advance through the system could improve their chances by leaking the details of *sub rosa* activity. Such betrayals were perpetrated with the knowledge that the same factors that inhibited resistance also meant that many code violations were not severely punished, as Chapter 8 details. This is not to say that backstage opposition or resistance were rare, or that they were always hidden. But the fragile nature of trust between prisoners contributed significantly to the forms in which opposition and resistance were expressed.

Forms of resistance

One of the foremost aims of this chapter has been to illustrate that, contrary to Foucault's vision, the prison does not produce 'homogenous effects' (1977: 202). Prisoners managed and counteracted power in diverse ways, according to the differential experiences of

power that their values, needs and expectations engendered. The motives for resistance and compliance ranged enormously, reflecting very different interests and frustrations, and different perceptions of the location and extent of the prison's legitimacy deficits.

Enthusiasts were disinclined to challenge the terms of a system with which they normatively identified. They were censorious about individual officers and institutional failures, but embraced the ends and means of the system. *Pragmatists* accepted rather than supported the goals and techniques of the prison. To them, the techniques of power were invisible or unalterable. They had no conception of strategic resistance and much to gain from toeing the institutional line. They were more liable than *enthusiasts* to criticize the prison in private and quicker to lose their tempers in public. Nonetheless, the extent of their criticisms was limited, focusing on service delivery, interpersonal disrespect and systemic inefficiency rather than the principles and methods of imprisonment.

In contrast, *stoics* were critical of the terms of the system, in particular, psychological power and the policies that officers implemented. However, they were often sympathetic to officers and tolerant of their everyday treatment and conditions. They recognized that the staff on whom their hopes most relied were beyond their grasp. This was a significant frustration. But *stoics* were also well aware that they were the tools of power, and that to resist too visibly—to relinquish self-control—was tantamount to self-punishment. As a result, their compliance was a matter of discontented resignation. *Retreatists* made no conscious effort to resist, although their indifference to the system threatened its logic of active engagement. A very small number of *disengaged* prisoners practised 'passive dissent' more consciously, asking nothing from the system so as not to 'give them the satisfaction of saying no'. *Players* were more active in their resistant activities and more extreme in their censoriousness. They disparaged officers and disputed both the principles and techniques of the system. For these prisoners, resistance was meaningful, desirable, and beneficial. For others, it was unnecessary, unimaginable, pointless or counter-productive. These different perceptions were indicative of the differential significance of legitimacy, fatalism, self-interest, and coercion in securing individual compliance.

These were very significant differences. However, some general comments can be made about the predominant forms of

resistance. Within any social domain, the way that forms of power are combined to establish order creates a broad topography of resistance (Wrong 2002). The institutional environment structures the meanings of and motives for resistance. It makes some forms of assertion more likely than others. Nathan summarized these general tendencies as follows:

The more authoritarian the prison is, the more violent it is. Because in many ways, it's more *directly* frustrating. Now, don't get me wrong, being in a bureaucratic prison is bloody frustrating. But there's more movement, there's more negotiation possible. When you're in a more directly authoritarian place, where everything's 'no', 'NO', and that's right there in your face, that's more directly frustrating, therefore you get more explosions, more outbursts of violence.

No formula can predict the precise form that resistance will take within a particular context of power. But there are clear links between the aims and techniques of power and the means by which it is defended, subverted, and counteracted. In the past, when the system demanded passivity, it was no surprise that resistance often took the form of active confrontation (see, for example, McVicar 1974; Boyle 1977; Parker 1990; Scraton *et al.* 1991). Violence was provoked by the aggression and indifference of the prison and by corrosive cultures of staff hostility. Now that active engagement is the aim of the system, passivity and performance become more salient forms of subversion. Meanwhile, the prison's bureaucratic organization, its reliance on discretion, its increasing use of psychological power, its more positive staff culture and its enhanced baseline of legitimacy invite manipulation, counter-discourse, censoriousness, and legal challenge.

These are not new styles of resistance. Prisoners have always played games, sought out 'angles', acted out improvement and found means of manipulating the system (see Boyle 1977; King and Elliott 1977; King and McDermott 1988). But the primacy of these modes of counter-conduct and their particular forms reflect the nature and organization of contemporary penal power. Resistant attention is directed at 'the system' as much as 'the landings'. Meanwhile, the almost total absence of organized or collective resistance speaks, in part, to the way that power has been designed to individualize prisoners, by addressing their individual interests and differentiating their needs. Prisoners did not resist for different reasons, but almost all had a relatively individualistic attitude—or only limited

loyalties (see Chapter 7). Even those with solidary inclinations recognized the futility of attempting organized dissent in such an atomized culture, where support could not be relied upon.

Resistance has been individualized accordingly. The collective tactics of mockery and re-signification used in other penal contexts had little such purpose in Wellingborough (c.f. McEvoy 2001; Buntman 2003). Likewise, when prisoners used the law to pursue their grievances, although their efforts had collective consequences, they were undertaken for personal rather than collective ends. Few prisoners expressed the kinds of political conceptions of status or the shared notions of identity on which collective resistance is normally founded.

Lacking both the options and the motives for collective assertion, prisoners generally pursued their ends through individual staff and individualized strategies.

Everyone is in different circumstances, everybody wants something different, so instead of going to the screws as a whole, saying 'We're changing this and that', you get on friendly-ish terms with one or two of them, you sort of make arrangements. You can't push them as a group, you do it on a personal level. (Callum)

Connections with individual officers were sometimes based on genuine affection or affiliation. But they were also sought out to gain favours and bypass bureaucratic obstacles (e.g. seek job transfers, expedite the passing on of handed-in items). This strategy—cultivating a relationship and 'sticking with [it] until he's got it done' (Jacob)—was encouraged by the nature of staff power. Officers were not a homogenous bloc, united in style and severity. Personalities differed, as did the ways that officers used authority and discretion. Prisoners looked for natural affinities, pursued 'good screws', who could be relied upon to make extra effort, or searched for chinks in staff consistency. For officers, discretionary culture could be a burden, leaving them feeling powerless and compromised, without clear boundaries through which to gauge requests.

When grievances were shared and prisoners were united in their interests, they remained reluctant to work collectively. Instead, as Kyle illustrated, they were more likely to achieve group goals by working as un-coordinated individuals:

Everyone has a little nibble. It's like one member of the lion family will go for the throat, one will go for back leg, one for the stomach—everyone

has a limited ability for something. I can't think of one where we've all gone for the same part of the body, I've never seen that happen. They'll all have a little nibble, not at the same time, [and will] run off with the bit they've got.

Resistance and pressure were not the organized and ostentatious assertions of power documented in some studies of prison life (Jacobs 1977; McEvoy 2001). They were unorganized, furtive, disguised: *concealments* of power. Even prisoners who were openly seditious—disputing prison decisions or challenging officers in their use of power—were careful not to be labelled 'ring-leaders' or provocateurs. Visible agitators lasted little time in Cat-C conditions. This almost total absence of active rebellion was striking.

The most visible forms of resistance did not come from the prisoners with the most resistant sentiments. They came from those prisoners least capable of either disguising their frustrations or identifying alternative channels through which to resolve them. Very occasional dirty protests were more often acts of despair than concerted strategic decisions (c.f. McEvoy 2001). Other open expressions of dissent—'kicking off' and 'smashing up'—were effective methods of gaining attention and resolving some issues. Ultimately though, they were counter-productive, resulting in long-term costs that outweighed their short-term benefits. In this respect, the losers of the system were the *pragmatists* who were its most vulnerable members. Prisoners with more guile and experience scorned the naivety of unplanned outbursts. As Paul declared, direct confrontation could always be avoided:

To get nicked in this prison you have to go out your way. In most prisons now you have to be an out and out idiot really [to get nicked]. There's ways and means you can go round and do everything you've got to do and not get into a confrontation.

Illicit activity was also heavily disguised. Prisoners involved in prison drug supply could orchestrate activity from a distance and through less powerful peers (see Chapter 8). As Ashley noted, drug users also had to conceal their consumption: 'When there weren't [drug tests], you could walk around the wing stoned out of your face, and they couldn't do nothing. Now you can't afford to—you're losing bad. You've got to be more devious.'

Moreover, with trust between prisoners so low, dissonant practices and opinions were not always exhibited or revealed,

even in the absence of staff. Although most prisoners disclosed hostility among their peers, a minority sustained their performances throughout the public spaces of the prison. Self-regulation applied not just in the face of the system, but also in relations with other prisoners.

When this noisy guy moved on, people said ‘look, I’ll just put up with it. I’ll put my headphones on. I’ll turn my telly up louder. I don’t want to get involved’. Whereas ten years ago, when they were first sentenced, they’d have been in there smashing the guy up. (Stephen)

As coming chapters will detail, most prisoners readily admitted that, with release in their sights, they bit their tongues, unclenched their fists, and restricted their personal loyalties. These forms of self-regulation aggregated into a culture of relative indifference, recursively fuelling feelings of social fatalism. As such, they formed part of the social dynamic of institutional order.

Order and social relations

In the prisons described by Sykes and Irwin, the social world was a domain of relative autonomy. Within a highly authoritarian system, prisoners were left more or less unhindered or were required to collectively self-govern. ‘Order was maintained in Southern prisons [in the US] by elevating some prisoners to trusty positions and giving them power to beat and kill other prisoners and enforce discipline’ (Irwin, pers comm.). In prisons in the American North, the administration maintained the institution’s perimeter but left convicts to ‘virtually run the prison’, with a system of leaders taking responsibility for encouraging compliance and brokering peace between prisoners (ibid.). In both cases then, prisoners were essential components of institutional government (Irwin 2005). The focus in research of the time on the codes and hierarchies of the inmate world reflected an era when everyday order was accomplished *through* the prisoner social community. Globally, some prison systems continue to operate along these lines, with officers rarely entering residential spaces and prisoners developing extensive, sovereign subcultures with extended hierarchies of informal power (see e.g. King 2007). In the prisons of England and Wales, however, it is not the collective so much as the self that is expected to self-regulate. Power is not ceded to gangs or powerful individuals. Instead, order is contracted-out to the sphere of the individual.

Nonetheless, order in Wellingborough had social dimensions that supplemented the forces of individual self-government. A common way of ‘running’ wings in the past was to appoint powerful prisoners as wing cleaners and servery workers, and give them perks in return for them ensuring relative peace among prisoners.⁴⁵ In the pre-IEP era, when there were few other ways for prisoners to obtain privileges such as better cells or extra time out-of-cell, this arrangement relied on a number of factors: first, the desirability of illicit incentives; second, the willingness and ability of staff to impart these privileges with relative impunity; and, third, the readiness of staff to turn a blind eye to the illicit violence that resulted when they devolved power to the prisoners supposedly in their charge. In UK prisons, this custom—‘using them to do our job for us’ (King and McDermott 1990: 462)—has been largely superseded by a belief that ‘we [should] do the job we’re paid to do: we manage prisoners, we don’t use other prisoners to manage on our behalf’ (governor, HMP Wellingborough).

This shift is the consequence of a number of developments. First, the IEP scheme has institutionalized the provision of perks, giving them an official and more accountable outlet. Incentives can be gained through co-operation rather than corruption. Second, an anti-bullying policy focus has shifted staff perceptions of how power relations among prisoners should be managed. As one senior officer explained, ‘the guy [to whom we] used to say “we’ll [help] sort you out if you keep the wing quiet”, [now] he’s a “bully”, and we don’t tolerate bullies’. Prisoners obtained influence with staff by being friendly and obedient: ‘a decent lad who talks civilly; not a screw-boy, just someone sensible’ (senior officer).⁴⁶ Third, the empowerment of staff in the mid-1990s encouraged and enabled them to take greater control of the landings. Although a small number of Wellingborough officers extolled the model of delegating power to ‘number one prisoners’ as easy and effective, most took pride that their hold on power had been tightened. Officers emphasized to prisoners that they had the monopoly of legitimate authority, and that prisoners should not

⁴⁵ ‘You would have what they would call the “number one” on the landing and then a “number one” on the wing, and you would have a definite pecking order, and if there was a guy playing up on the wing you’d go to the number one and have a word. And the guy would [soon] be walking round with a black eye’ (governor, HMP Wellingborough).

⁴⁶ A ‘screw-boy’: a prisoner who is close to or sycophantic towards officers.

take it upon themselves to discipline each other:⁴⁷ ‘Now, we don’t let prisoners sort each other out—we say, “come to us”’ (senior officer); ‘[we say] “if you know who’s doing it, let us know, don’t sort it out, tell us, and we’ll get them off the wing”’ (wing officer).⁴⁸

There was some evidence, nonetheless, that staff still sometimes enlisted the coercive capacity of powerful prisoners. When officers circulated threats about ‘banging up early’, or asked prisoners to ‘have a quiet word’ with one of their peers, they recognized the possibility that their interventions were endorsing violence: ‘people understand the threat and that others will be pissed off if they smash windows again’. One principal officer regularly addressed the most influential prisoners on the wing in order to resolve problems, with a clear understanding that persuasive influence often had coercive foundations.

My expectation was that they would go back and spread the word to the prisoners that I was going to lock them down if this did happen, and I knew that the strong ones would take the people who they knew were doing it to one side and say: ‘Look, if I lose my association tonight because of you, I’m going to come and get you tomorrow’, type of thing.

Officers claimed that, since violence was not tolerated in such situations, it was highly unlikely that it would result: ‘they know that if somebody “fell in the shower” the next day, so to speak, with a black eye, that I will straight away go to them and say: “I know one of you has done [this]”’ (ibid.). The line between disseminating information and sanctioning violence was in these situations rather fuzzy. The same was the case when a governor advised senior officers that one way to reduce the amount of litter being thrown out of cell windows was to appoint someone with ‘clout’ to be in charge of clearing debris from the wing perimeters. Elsewhere, the stimulation of violence was barely concealed.

You let it be known that next time they’ll be locked up—[you say:] ‘you know who’s doing it, just have a word with him but don’t let me see it’. You say it out loud, as you’re walking along a landing. But you don’t [directly] target one prisoner to go and hit another.

⁴⁷ It could be said—in certain prisons in particular—that what officers hold is *control* rather than confident, legitimate authority, but certainly the yielding of authority to prisoners makes it hard to claim any kind of staff legitimacy.

⁴⁸ Prisoners corroborated these claims, contrasting current policy with times when staff would unlock prisoners who were involved in disputes during quiet periods and simply allow them to ‘sort things out between them’.

Such procedures were not the norm, nor were they the principal means by which control was achieved. Nonetheless, they pointed to the persistent, low-level involvement of illegitimate devolution in the maintenance of everyday order.

Prisoners employed on the wings as cleaners and servery workers (sometimes referred to as ‘trusties’, and the nearest equivalent of ‘red-bands’) provided another mechanism of regulation from within the prisoner community. However, their role was not one of enforcement and their status among their peers was mixed. Picked on most wings by informal polling among regular wing staff, these prisoners were generally strong enough to defy intimidation by others, but were not so strong that they might abuse their power or prove difficult to control. Occasionally, prisoners who were suspected drug dealers were placed in trusted positions so that officers could ‘keep an eye’ on their activities (with limited success). More often, officers chose prisoners who were dependable, obedient, who might ‘tip you the occasional wink’, and could be relied upon to act as figures of sense.

These prisoners served as conduits for information rather than direct agents of control. Through them, officers spread a range of messages, from information designed to clear rumours (e.g. about prisoners accused of being sex offenders) to details about regime changes and warnings about the consequences of continued misconduct (e.g. newspapers being thrown out of cell windows); expressed at their most forceful, ‘tell that prick that unless he calms down I’m going to have to deal with him’ (senior officer).

In the other direction, officers regularly received warnings from wing workers about tensions between prisoners (e.g. problems between cell mates and grumblings about food), minor acts of subversion (e.g. prisoners pressing alarm bells, brewing hooch or breaking windows), and sometimes more serious matters, such as drug dealing and incipient violence. In informing about such matters—often trying to avoid ‘naming names’—wing workers often hoped that issues could be handled without resort to formal measures. Here, they partly protected their own interests. Any serious trouble could lead to a temporary lock-down of the wing, and this curtailed their freedoms. But they also acted to some degree as collective peacemakers, helping to smooth out problems that would be hard otherwise to resolve, and serving as mouth-pieces for feelings of collective frustration.

In return for their goodwill and assistance, wing workers received a number of illicit but minor perks. These included surplus meals and occasional pouches of tobacco or phonecards. They were also given extra assistance to resolve any problems, more positive reports for things like HDC applications, and 'a bit of leeway' (officer interview) to roam the wings and beyond. Such arrangements made wing positions particularly attractive to *pragmatists*, who coveted everyday incentives, and *enthusiasts*, who sought out trusted jobs to demonstrate their integrity. Prisoners involved in informal trade could capitalize on the relative freedom that wing positions allowed, but the trade-off for this was oversight by staff and the need to subordinate oneself to orders. Only a minority of drug dealers felt able to combine wing work with *sub rosa* activity. Experienced prisoners reported that, since the nature of wing jobs had changed, 'the lads' no longer worked on the servery.

As Max explained, reciprocity was built into relationships between wing workers and officers.

You can use [the relationship] as a bit of leverage. You say to your personal officer: 'I've done you a favour. I've found you this and that, what are you going to do for me? Are you going to have a good word for my Cat-D, are you going to put in for my enhanced?' It's give and take.

Relationships of this kind lent themselves to informing. Indeed, 'grassing' was a natural outcome of systemic pressures. In particular, the desire among prisoners to obtain early release and the difficulty of doing so through formal channels incited prisoners to promote themselves informally to staff. This mechanism served as a further source of prisoner self-regulation.⁴⁹ Experienced prisoners claimed that the frequency of grassing had intensified over the years, eroding interpersonal trust. Whether true or not, the widespread suspicion that grasses were ever-present restricted prohibited activity.

Informants were also cultivated in more formal ways. The prison had over ten 'official' informants, each with their own handling officer. These prisoners had mixed motives, ranging from moral objections to drugs and bullying to self-interested

⁴⁹ Most officers reported having three or four prisoners who provided information to them in return for low-level assistance e.g. in getting jobs or items from reception.

hopes of reward e.g. obtaining transfers. In effect then, it was not so much powerful prisoners within the inmate hierarchy who were employed to curb the activities of their peers, but prisoners on the lower rungs of the social ladder. These were men who struggled to secure privileges through other means or who resented their more powerful peers. As one governor noted: 'If you've got people prepared to rise to the top of the pecking order, they will have made enemies on the way.'

As the chapters that follow will show in more detail, drugs were one of the main sources of power in the prisoner world. It is therefore unsurprising that they played a major role in determining order, disorder, and the structure of informing. In times of shortage, when drug prices were high, it was debt that most often led to grassing. Prisoners who could not repay their arrears had to go to the segregation unit, where pressure was placed on them to reveal the names of drug dealers. When supply was stable, grassing was more likely to be an outcome of resentment about market exclusion: 'a dealer will say "I'm not selling to you because you didn't pay me last time", so the person dobs him in and says "he won't sell it to me so no-one can have it"' (governor). In times of surplus, informing was less common—'because everybody's happy' (governor). At such times, disputes related to turf wars between dealers over market share.

Like all prisoners involved in illicit activity, drug dealers had much to lose from close policing of the wings. For these prisoners, a peaceful wing meant good business. While violence was woven into the everyday fabric of their trade, and served as a form of market regulation, dealers also discouraged disruptive behaviour if it jeopardized their interests. Activities that attracted the attention of officers, e.g. fighting, commotion and conspicuous commercial traffic, were therefore inhibited. In this respect, dealers had much to gain from maintaining a certain form of everyday order.

It was hard to evaluate whether prison staff colluded in the fragile peace that dealers encouraged. Some prisoners suggested that, at the least, officers were aware of who dealers were and their stabilizing influence:

You can see where all the main heads⁵⁰ are on the wing. The screws know where they are, what's happening, what they're doin. They know it's not

⁵⁰ A 'head': a powerful prisoner, a prisoner with reputation or influence.

them that's kickin anything off on the wing. The wing's quiet because people that bring the wing on top⁵¹ will get hurt, because [the heads] don't need it. (Bradley)

Descriptions of some other establishments—mainly local prisons and prisons with traditional cultures—pointed to a more active employment of drug dealers in the achievement of control:

In [prison x], the main people on the servery are drug dealers and the staff know. [Dealers] get turned a blind eye because they keep the wing quiet. They know that they can't fucking *do somebody in* for debt [but]. They'll give them a slap. But they can't do them in. The staff in there will know whether an inmate will comply just to that edge—[so, a dealer on the servery isn't] an out-and-out thug. He's got a brain, basically. He says 'right, this is the game I'm playing now, and I've got to give [something to staff] for them to give [something to] me. I've got to give them a quiet wing' (Fin).

This was not the picture at Wellingborough, where staff recognized that delegating power to drug dealers meant being complicit in intimidation, exploitation, and drug culture. Inasmuch as prison drug dealers contributed to institutional order, they did so alongside, not in league with, official policies and mechanisms.

The rules by which prisoners negotiated everyday frictions also represented a form of collective self-policing. Although frequently breached, nebulously defined, and differentially enforced, norms about noise, boundaries, and exploitation contributed to the precarious harmony of the wings. In some situations, these norms were agreed explicitly. On many spurs, prisoners decided that in-cell stereos should not be played loudly at weekends until a particular time, to allow everyone to sleep late. Everyday culture thus contributed to order in important and unseen ways. In other respects, the prevention of conflict was a result of interpersonal affiliations. As the chapters that follow will show, prisoners curbed aggressions and hostilities to prevent the escalation of conflict, albeit in different ways according to their adaptive patterns and their resulting social loyalties. This was not order through the prisoner *community* as such, but through a series of interlocking and counterbalancing social relationships. But institutional power primarily

⁵¹ 'Bring the wing on top': attract staff attention, cause trouble.

addressed the individual rather than the wider social network, and it was individual rather than collective self-government that was the primary source of order.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed five main adaptations to the terms of a contemporary prison. These can be summarized as: committed compliance born of personal morality (*enthusiasts*); two forms of resigned, pragmatic compliance based on different states of need and powerlessness (*pragmatists* and *stoics*); passive compliance, founded on personal fatalism (*retreatists*); and feigned compliance—or normative opposition—performed alongside (and as a form of) resistance (*players*). Neo-paternalism was experienced by these prisoners in different ways, due to significant differences in penal predicaments, personal resources, backgrounds, and expectations. Its ‘soft’, neo-liberal core was harnessed by *enthusiasts*, resented by *stoics*, exploited by *players*, and accepted or submitted to by *pragmatists* and *retreatists*. Material inducements raised legitimacy in the eyes of *pragmatists*, *enthusiasts*, and *retreatists*, but were perceived by some prisoners as a form of manipulation. The distributive power of officers was more potent for poor coping *pragmatists* than for experienced *stoics*. For prisoners on parole sentences, psychologists rather than uniformed staff were the core agents of control.

The de-coupling of wing staff from the wider system also had various consequences. It encouraged greater empathy and intimacy between prisoners and staff, and this contributed in certain respects to the prison’s legitimacy. For some prisoners though, it enabled corruption and collusion. *Players* sought to manipulate friendly relations and exploit inconsistencies. For other prisoners, the discretionary buffer created new aggravations, such as uncertain expectations, which complicated demands for compliance and often felt like ‘tests’. Put more summarily, shifts in the nature of power created distinctive frustrations, but the differential experience of power meant that these frustrations also varied. In effect, imprisonment entailed different deprivations for different kinds of prisoners (see Toch 1992): for *pragmatists*, the primary concerns related to safety, security, and material goods; for *stoics*, they were issues of autonomy and self-identity; for *players*, imprisonment challenged assumptions of interpersonal power, masculine status,

autonomy, and material comfort; for *retreatists* and *enthusiasts*, external experiences of powerlessness and moral degradation meant that the deprivations of imprisonment took on particular kinds of meaning.

Order was accomplished through this *individualization* of experiences and interests, and through multiple strategies of compliance that targeted active, *individual* subjects (Garland 1977). Although aided by currents within the prisoner world, it did not *rely* on enlisting the influence of individual prisoners or social groupings. Indeed, institutional policies fragmented the prisoner community to the degree that there was little collective power available to harness or accommodate. The strength of a subculture depends upon common plight, mutual reliance, relative isolation and a lack of mobility out of the shared predicament (Scott 1991); these are conditions that a modern Cat-C prison does not ordinarily present. Yet the production of order did not bypass 'the social' completely, relying on tough, faceless governance to stabilize the institution and promote rehabilitation (see DiIulio 1987). Staff-prisoner relationships contributed significantly to smooth governance, making order in part a *relational* achievement. These social dimensions of order are more restricted than those reported in the classic studies, but they remain critical to institutional maintenance, and to the prison's tentative legitimacy (Liebling 2004).

The disaggregation of prisoner interests imprinted and constrained prisoners' loyalties and behaviours in significant ways, but did not do so homogenously or in the absence of other social forces. Institutional pressures to comply with organizational goals and limit their social affiliations acted in tension with structural impulses that simultaneously encouraged prisoners to form social allegiances and relationships. The relative pull of these 'vertical' and 'horizontal' influences reflected differences in prisoners' frustrations, needs, and preoccupations, and structured their differential involvement in the prisoner social world. All prisoners engaged in certain forms of social interaction. As Sykes noted, the prisoner world can only be 'an aggregate rather than a social group, a mass of isolates rather than a society' if prisoners are 'locked forever in their cells, shut off from all intercourse with each other' (1958: 5). Once interaction occurs—however cautiously, under whatever conditions—it creates 'the realities of [a] prison social system' (1958: 6). It is to this social system that the book now turns.

