Sensing Incarceration:

Mobility, Animacy, Becoming Human

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Preface

The yellow butterfly smashed into my windshield as I drove down the two-lane road leading to the Desert Echo Facility (DEF). The butterfly had little control over its body collapsing into pieces or its delicate wings shredding so violently that I could no longer make out its form. My breath escaped me in this moment, and I worried that my need to move at quick speeds resulted in the obliteration of life. I looked at the remnants of the destroyed creature and turned on my wipers because I didn’t want to see the results of my actions. Water from my car streamed onto the windshield as the wipers cleaned my conscience. The road I travelled, made of asphalt and working-class labor, ran through territories created by broken treaties and without Indigenous peoples’ consent. In the distance, past tumbleweeds, dirt, and animals of all kinds, stood large, dark buildings and towers not yet fully illuminated by the rising sun. I passed a green sign with white lettering warning me not to pick up hitchhikers because there was a prison nearby. I wondered if anyone had ever opened their car door for an escaping incarcerated person. Few people drive down this road unless they work in the area or are being transported in shackles to cages inside the prison. But the county fairgrounds were a short drive down the road – only one exit after the prison – so workers and captives at the DEF could sometimes hear echoes of concerts, fairs, and rodeos. I wondered what it took for visitors of these events to erase the people held in bondage just a half-mile away.

The research I conducted at the DEF changed how I write. Most of the time, when I sit at my computer, the drive to the prison flashes before me. I think about the songs I heard on the radio, the feelings of dread every time I arrived at the first security check-point, and the exhaustion of performing fieldwork. But I also see myself destroying butterflies and whispering that I had to kill these creatures to get to the prison, accident or not. And I remember, when confronted with a car covered in remnants of insects, washing away evidence of my destruction with wiper fluid or water from a garden hose – acts meant to cleanse myself of the blame for the creatures’ deaths and to hide my complicity in the damage I created. And those butterflies would reappear when I wrote mythical, settler words such as united states and america. When recounting this story to a friend, she explained that while language repeatedly proves generative, it also smuggles in tacit beliefs that often hide asymmetrical power dynamics and historical violence. She reminded me of what my fieldwork participants demonstrated: small actions have big meanings. It is with these lessons in mind that I chose not to capitalize specific words and use the terms “incarcerated person” and “captive” as opposed to “prisoner” and “inmate.”

As I created this book, I found myself pausing when I capitalized the words america, united states, white, western, europe, and euro-american. I wondered what my Indigenous and Chicano ancestors felt every time I hit shift on my computer to create a respectful grammar process for colonizers and their settling offspring. So, I decided not to do it. I purposefully keep these words and concepts in lower-case form to give readers pause; to bring some discomfort and to help everyone question why we honor the very peoples who cause so much destruction across numerous homelands. Like prisons, what has come to be known as the united states was built
through the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of African peoples. These violent processes have lasting effects that we are all complicit in, though some need to carry more blame than others. To leave certain words uncapitalized may seem like a small action, but readers may be surprised at how many times they pause when they come across United States or American without a grammatical title. Still, in the end, many readers may get accustomed to seeing euro-American concepts challenged with appropriate force. I make an exception for “State.” I capitalize this word-concept, not to bestow respect, but to demonstrate how systemic violence can be embodied through bureaucratic policies and practices often rendered invisible by our own active ignorance. These small acts reverberate powerfully throughout the book because they ask readers to question their roles in constructing hierarchies about who and what deserves honor and punishment in America.

My decision to use terms such as “incarcerated person” and “captive” challenges how State systems in America use language to construct threatening identities for people held in bondage. Words like “prisoner” and “inmate” are dehumanizing concepts meant to create binaries between good and evil, captive and captor, Human and non-human. State language removes context from incarcerated people’s lives in attempts to justify violence towards those targeted for imprisonment – individuals who are disproportionately people of color, queer, disabled, Indigenous, Trans, and who have access to fewer resources. When coming across words like “incarcerated person” and “captive,” I hope readers will take a moment to remember that I am talking about living people with friends and families, emotions, bodily senses, and histories. Participants are the entirety of their being and the relationships they create, not just moments in time or the worst things they’ve ever done. I chose these specific terms for research participants to remind readers that every person in this book matters to someone or something and to demonstrate that incarceration is a systemic process that destroys specific peoples for the benefit of a select few.

As a country we have chosen to destroy beings that do not fit easily into a binary world, and we seem to ignore our own complicity in the perpetuation of violent systems. I am guilty of this brutality and so are most readers. This book is an attempt to make it harder for people to perpetuate their ignorance or only hang their head in shame when confronted with their violence, as if the latter alone is enough to radically upend asymmetrical power dynamics. I hope Sensing Incarceration makes clear that we have all made power-laden choices to justify our actions, and that the consequences of these choices can’t be washed away or cleansed from our collective conscience. After all, I am proud of this book, but I killed a lot of butterflies.
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Chapter 1

Locking Down Correctional Threat

On an unseasonably warm day in March 2001, prison administrators at the Desert Echo Facility (DEF) reported the deaths of two incarcerated men to the State corrections office. Prison staff found the men’s bodies in two different housing unit cells hundreds of feet apart. The deceased men were both under the age of 35, serving less than ten-year sentences, and hailed from a city three hours north of the prison. Local policing agencies arrived on the premises and began numerous days of work where they took written reports, documented the scene, and catalogued what physical evidence they could find. Meanwhile, correctional workers locked down the facility – a practice where staff literally lock incarcerated people into their cells and prevent all “non-essential” visitors and traffic from entering the prison – and quietly began asking a question to each other and to the peoples under their control. It was clear that the men had died from strangling, but how did they die with no one seeing? After all, prison architects designed this facility with visual observation in mind and administrators staffed correctional officers (COs) throughout the compound, including the areas where the dead men resided. For days after the lockdown began, some incarcerated people yelled questions to each other through metal doors and concrete walls. Others passed notes attached to string from cell to cell, in attempts to understand who had died and what this would mean for their own immediate future. Over the next few weeks, investigators reported that the largest prison gang in the state ordered the murders due to territory disputes. The gang carried out the violence despite preventative security practices such as individual cells, locked and mechanized metal doors, and large security centers overlooking prison units and the larger compound. Despite these controls, the prison gang ordered the murders, and incarcerated members squeezed necks to prevent breath from the dead men’s lungs, bursting both the blood vessels in their targets’ eyes, and correctional staff’s illusions that they possessed perpetual control.

These two deaths have shaped Desert Echo Facility policies and practices, both institutional and in everyday life, in dramatic and consequential ways that outlast the men themselves. Upon completing the investigation, the state corrections department placed the DEF under permanent lockdown status for 18 months. Incarcerated people lived within their cells, alone, while COs placed food trays through small openings in their doors, allowed one person at a time to shower outside of their cell, and made their hourly rounds by walking past every cell to check visually on the person inside. When administrators lifted the lockdown, incarcerated people at the DEF quickly realized things were permanently different. Novel correctional practices filtered their bodies through premade categories on State paper forms, which would numerically aggregate the danger each captive represented and therefore where they should be housed. Gone were the days of moving across the compound throughout the day and fraternizing with hundreds of people at any given moment. Prison officials erected new, razor-wire-topped metal fences all over the compound. One fence quickly led to a dozen new metal barriers and the
formation of keys to open the metal locks, hinged onto thick gate pipes. Rigid schedules became the norm as people lived out administrative and disciplined routines that governed their bodies, access to materials and social relations, and their movement patterns. Talk of the time before the murders, and life after “the event,” covered the grounds like the desert dirt blowing in the wind.

Before the 2001 murders, most correctional officers believed they were under constant threat of violence from incarcerated people, but there was also a sense that control belonged to staff: that carefully selected policies and practices contained and constrained captives’ bodies and actions. The murders destroyed this belief and began a new timeline, one beset with supposedly more knowledge and understanding about the ‘truth’ of the ‘real’ and dangerous world in which incarcerated people and staff existed. Worse yet, the murders signified a correctional affective turn, changing the prison compound from a place of perceived continuous bodily control where each person knew their social rank and purpose, to an unsettling space marked by the need for all forms of captive immobility. In this more fearful setting, prison administrators and staff alike foresaw danger at every turn and sharp objects in every hand, creating threatening caricatures of people imprisoned at the DEF and an ambience of potential violence and total destruction at the behest of captives. Fully situated in a new context, and with the help of new trainings that emphasized the deviant natures of the people living in the prison, most correctional staff concluded that incarcerated people were inherently dangerous with limited potential except for that of physical violence. While captives challenged, ignored, and acquiesced to these “facts,” many staff continued to imagine a terrible future – one in which violent criminals ran amuck, threatening the foundations of human societies and humankind itself. The time had come to ensure that the danger was to be permanently eradicated, and this came in the form of controlling mobility.

In this book, I document how and why mobility in one ‘male’ prison in the American Southwest unsettles incarcerated people and correctional officers’ constructions of what counts as alive and Human. For many captives and workers, physical movement signifies aliveness: meaning that incarceration forces them to question just how alive they are, and where, and if, they fit within naturalized Human hierarchies. Restrictive movement policies manifest what I call "unsettling mobilities" or unexpected movement by inanimate objects that upends bodily senses. Precisely because captives’ own movement is so radically constricted, thereby challenging their sense of self, incarceration strips people of the movements which they intuit as fundamental to being Human. These anxieties are not restricted only to captives; correctional officers also feel as if their physical movement is radically constricted because of their work duties, and they worry that they are thus too similar to incarcerated people. As a result, both captives and correctional officers work to eradicate these challenges to their Human status. COs rely upon racialized and gendered movement restrictions that reinforce enslavement tactics, while incarcerated people trade hygiene products, create art, and try to control the movements of those they consider non-human to generate feelings of physical movement. These feelings lead both correctional officers and incarcerated people to link bodily senses tightly with movement to position themselves and others within scales of animacy and Human. In this prison context, to be
Human and alive is to feel a personal sense of physical movement while simultaneously marking oneself as an idealized being that controls the mobility of objectified non-humans. Ultimately, I argue that physical movement constructs the alive Human and that euro-americans often utilize mobility to maintain a colonial project that exterminates through incarceration.

Throughout the book, I distinguish between movement and mobility to make clear the distinction between observable actions and my analytical framework. Utilizing Michell A. Lelièvre and Maureen E. Marshall’s scholarship (2015: 440), I consider movement to be “observable acts” where hierarchically situated Subjects and Objects “change in space and time.” Mobility should be defined as an “object of study” with a focus on “practices, perceptions, and imaginings” (Lelièvre and Marshall 2015: 7; see also Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). When I use the word ‘movement(s)’, readers should understand that I am focusing on the actions I observed, the physical processes of change in space and time, and environmental contexts. I employ the term ‘mobility’ when analyzing how power-laden perspectives about movement inform incarcerated people and correctional officer’s feelings about what it means to be alive and Human. The distinction between movement and mobility is subtle, but extremely important. As people live with harsh movement restrictions, they find themselves questioning their sense of aliveness and their Human status. Offering a mobility analysis renders visible these concerns and the nuances of prison life at the Desert Echo Facility.

Settler populations in the United States have historically utilized incarceration to create an ideal society free from ‘criminals’ who threaten essentialized hierarchies. Unfortunately, their natural order of things often comes steeped in bigoted, euro-american assumptions about who should live, where peoples should be housed, how individuals should move, and who and what have access to material and social resources. This imagined society is built upon the incarceration and exclusion of racialized, gendered, classed, sexualized, and disabled peoples who cannot fit into the social fabric because they are often not Human enough, if at all. But the open secret is that most of the incarcerated and excluded were never meant to be Human Subjects, but rather, material Objects to be controlled by the very peoples who created the hierarchies to begin with. Through these actions, settlers imagine an idyllic world filled with beings they call Human – individuals who perpetually demonstrate mastery over themselves, other creatures, and lands (see Frost 2016). The imagining continues when those atop the order, or close enough to it, pretend that their constructed hierarchies prove that Humans ‘like them’ have always been superior. The trick, they argue, is to prevent Others from infringing upon and ruining their world – a world that is nothing more than their singular hierarchical construct built upon violent lies. Incarceration remains a key component in the perpetuation of these American falsehoods, lies that dream of conjuring a country where white and heterosexist male supremacy coalesce to form a more perfect union. America, a State with expertise in excluding entire groups of people from Human and the spaces where Human roams, utilizes incarceration to disappear and exterminate the ‘things’ that its settlers feel shouldn’t exist in the first place. But hierarchies are always troubled, shaky constructions. Like prisons, hierarchies remain dynamic despite punishing restrictions, and people often create novel feelings and relationships that, once made
manifest, cannot be fully controlled. But still, for many in america, constructing prisons and the Human category offers the sleepy hope of manifesting dream worlds for themselves, while so many Others have to remain wide awake.

Because the american State currently disappears over two million captives into prisons, more than any other country in the world, I wrote this book as an act of public anthropology. Anthropologists, sociologists, and criminal justice scholars engage prison studies with a wide variety of research goals. Foucauldian theories, particularly disciplinary power, remain the dominant focus in these fields, and, because access is not easy to come by, most research is conducted through facility tours, surveys, and interviews. This book offers an immersive ethnographic perspective. It centers participants’ daily lives in order to analyze how incarcerated people and correctional staff construct what it means to be alive and Human through mobility. By exploring mobility in a prison context, Sensing Incarceration challenges common assumptions that incarcerated people lose all control over their movement, demonstrating instead that power operates from multiple perspectives, even in penal settings. This is not to deny the complex asymmetries involved in prison positionalities. My work, however, complicates standard prison scholarship by providing analysis for how and why incarcerated people creatively find ways to feel mobile and reimagine what it means to be Human despite their punishing restrictions. As imprisonment is a political strategy utilized by ruling classes to subjugate, disappear, and destroy marginalized peoples, this book demonstrates that whose mobility gets marked as dangerous, and who gets to count as alive, become central to understanding what types of people become targets for incarceration and extermination. After all, State systems often center movement, in all its forms – body, migration, imaginary, material – to construct threat, harmony, order. These practices usually Otherize beings deemed inferior, leading to scales of aliveness and categories of Human that legitimate all sorts of violence. Also, because the torture of penal punishment often remains invisible, though prison captives and materials entangle in global economies, I conducted this research to center what it feels like to live and work in a prison and documented the torturous effects of american punishment, demonstrating the necessity for prison abolition.

**Imprisoned Assumptions**

Prisons and incarcerated people are often rendered invisible, even though the prison-industrial complex involves almost every aspect of social life in the united states. Incarceration tactics often uproot individuals from their communities, painfully alter kinship bonds, plunder neighborhood resources, and profit at the expense of marginalized peoples (Davis 2003; Gilmore 2007). When non-incarcerated people who have little contact with corrections think about prisons, they often imagine places that demonstrate primordial violence, suggesting a version of premodern humanity. Prison invisibility and notions about “primitive” peoples come about precisely because most people have never lived or worked inside penal compounds. For these reasons, and to correct the substantial lacuna in american popular understandings, I conduct research to exemplify what it feels like to be held captive and socially positioned as non-human
within the United States. While I do not ever contend that I can fully describe the infinite possibilities of prison life, I emphasize the sensory feelings of everyday corrections to create dynamic portraits of individuals disappeared through penal kidnappings and economic desperation. I pair sensory foci with mobility to problematize legal apparatuses that uproot and destroy, to make clear the importance of social justice movements that work to create radical alternatives to ‘Western’ punishment.

Within popular American imaginations, incarcerated people often situate at the intersection of racialized criminal, degenerate imbecile, and manipulative monster (Wacquant 2001). As caricatures of violent creatures wandering unchecked and perpetually wreaking havoc, the dominant solution for this ‘problem’ became continuous policing and imprisonment (Davis 2003; Harvey 2005). Incarceration practices have historically targeted marginalized peoples and been utilized to prop up white supremacy, heteropatriarchal practices, and capitalism. As a result, darker-skinned peoples, queers, the differently abled, feminine-presenting individuals, and those with access to few economic resources bear the largest burden of imprisonment. As targets of this violence, these individuals and constructed collectives became marked as inherently criminal – some to greater extent than others depending on intersectional positionalities – and beings who needed to be managed, regulated, and controlled. Complicating matters, over the past 25 years, multiple television shows and movies have also portrayed prisons as sites filled with perpetually chaotic creatures who lash out without reason, constructing a version of the savage that is simultaneously ahistorical and a permanent temporal presence (see Ross 1997; Trouillot 2003). This is the version of the incarcerated person that I fear most readers will imagine when they open this book. It is my job to demonstrate the problems with these assumptions and the subtle ways all of us perpetuate this violent imaginary.

Because prisons have become so naturalized for most Americans it is imperative that readers understand what they will be encountering. This is not a work designed to titillate with salacious stories about primitive and savage peoples, nor is it a book that should fulfill racialized desires to understand the inherent character flaws which ‘criminals’ possess. On the other hand, the upcoming chapters should also not be read as an attempt to find a noble savage or to quietly push aside the fact that all kinds of people are capable of performing terrible acts of violence. There will be no stories that emphasize gang affiliation, drug usage, or so-called illicit economies because there has already been plenty of focus on these subjects (e.g., Crewe 2009; Hammil et al. 2017; Skarbeck 2014; Sparks et al. 1996). 1 Centering these perspectives often fulfills colonial desires that Sensing Incarceration attempts to avoid. If you are seeking a version of prisons similar to television shows such as Oz (1997) or Orange is the New Black (2013), this book is not for you. Those fantasies often erase the historical violence that created the capacity for mass incarceration to flourish in a white supremacist society. Prisons exist because of political choices made throughout the entire colonization tenure of what has become known as the United States.

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1 The ethnographic vignette that opens this chapter focuses on the murders of two people because these deaths radically altered the administrative policies and the everyday lives of captives and workers at the DEF. But still, this ‘event’ is an important historical moment that must be acknowledged and understood within the broader context of the book’s arguments.
They exist on stolen lands and it is no accident that prisons steal and disappear people using similar strategies that European invaders operationalized so long ago. This book is not for people seeking to validate colonial imaginings about some mythical human nature that can explain why so many people are locked up in the purported land of the free.

*Sensing Incarceration* is an attempt to challenge colonialist assumptions about incarcerated people and to demonstrate that imprisonment tortures millions of individuals in hidden and unexpected ways as a result of political choices (see Nichols 2014). I ask that readers embrace their discomfort with their own roles in crime and punishment, as captive and captor, and in enacting freedom and bondage. The forthcoming stories may at times be difficult to read because the analysis entails undermining long-held assumptions about who and what is alive, Human, criminal. There are moments of laughter and joy as well as troubling ideas and actions. This book attempts to demonstrate lighter moments, while not shying away from the horrific violence that many captives and captors enact. But as Bryan Stevenson (2014) reminds us, no person should be reduced to the worst thing they have ever done, nor should anyone be reduced to their best qualities or the persona they put forward for all to see. Instead, this book attempts to showcase the messiness of everyday prison life, the violence that States can produce, and the beauties and horrors of becoming Human.

**Knowledge Production and the Shame of Moth**

I have an X-Files tattoo. This may not seem important, but let me explain. My father taught me never to kill moths. From his Indigenous, and maybe to a small extent his Chicano, perspective, killing any moth was an affront to the Moth being itself. For him, Moth represents rebirth and change, and this being spirited all moths throughout the world. So, killing an individual moth was killing Moth. I hope this makes sense because I can’t describe it any other way. Moth is special. Not like Turtle, but special nonetheless. As a child, I always watched moths fly around our home seeking light as I observed their fragile wings. I never wanted to be the one who shooed moths out of the house for fear of damaging or killing them in attempting to get them to safety.

But when I was eight years old and playing outside, I noticed a small, brown thing hanging from a leaf. I didn’t know what it was and was fascinated by it. I thought about picking it, like the blackberries that grew in the woods by our house, but it looked like it had a hard exterior and I wondered if touching it could hurt me. So instead, I went inside, grabbed a pair of scissors, and cut the thing in half. Instantly, it began spewing and twisting as if in agony, and I immediately knew what I had done. It was a cocoon of a living being, now in the process of dying because of my act. I knew that I had taken something that didn’t belong to me and had probably destroyed Moth without meaning to. In my search for understanding and knowledge, I destroyed the very being I was fascinated by. With shame, I threw the scissors in the woods and hid my face when my mother kept wondering aloud where our scissors had disappeared to.

Five years later, on an episode of *The X-Files*, I watched as Dana Scully lay dying in a hospital bed as her mother narrated a story about the character’s childhood. A young Scully had
gone shooting with her brothers and targeted a snake for their killing. But as they continued to
shoot, Scully realized that the snake was dying and, when it finally did, through tears she
realized she had taken something that didn’t belong to her, not understanding the consequences
of her actions until it was too late. Watching this brought up the shame of destroying Moth, and I
cried watching that moment. I also made the decision that I would never destroy anything in
search of knowledge, ever again. I don’t know if that is a promise that can ever be kept, but I
have since tried my hardest to keep true to those words. I got my X-Files tattoo before leaving
for fieldwork and every time I was in the prison facing tough decisions about how much I needed
to know and how I should go about obtaining that information, I looked at that tattoo and felt the
shame of Moth.

**Delicate Fieldwork**

Conducting ethnographic research in prisons brings forth many concerns about
participants' anonymity and safety. Incarcerated people already live as disappeared peoples with
little oversight for how they are treated, and correctional officers constantly worry about how
they are perceived and portrayed, often as sadistic enslavers who get pleasure from holding
people captive. Also, attaining access to conduct fieldwork at the Desert Echo Facility required
many signed forms, State and local corrections approvals, and continual promises that this work
would not include real names or easily identifiable personal creations. As a result, I have come
up with different ways of keeping these promises, and actively demonstrating the utmost care for
all participant’s personal safety and emotional health, while also showing what it feels like to
live and work at the DEF. It is for these reasons that *Sensing Incarceration* is written a bit
differently from other texts.

Most of the people I conducted research with asked to be written about only as
pseudonymized portraits, and questioned how I would make sure their words and actions could
not be traced back to them. Others requested that they be openly identified, and only agreed to
pseudonyms after understanding that anonymity depended on everyone. If one incarcerated
person or correctional officer used their real information, everyone could be identified with a
simple search. Even so, some participants demanded that I identify them or not be allowed to
write about them at all. I chose the latter option because the vast majority of people asked that I
protect their identities.

In order to provide some anonymity and to prevent people on the DEF compound from
easily identifying participants, I create individuals out of two separate people who have similar
backgrounds and prison narratives. I developed these portraits for each individual’s protection,
while trying to keep true to both the spirits of who all the participants are, and what each person
revealed of themselves throughout the fieldwork tenure (see Marcus and Fischer 1986, 1999;
Saunders et al. 2015). Understandably this can cause concern about the validity of the analysis in
*Sensing Incarceration*, because one can wonder how ‘real’ or ‘truthful’ the representations of
people are. But this is true of all anthropological writing. Everything is filtered through one or
multiple authors with diverse positionalities that influence who gets written about and how all
‘characters’ are portrayed. The act of creating individuals from multiple people is necessary for this type of research.

I was given unprecedented access inside a State prison. I was alone with incarcerated people in their cells, units, and work spaces. I stayed with them as they travelled across the compound. I listened to their life stories, jokes, and concerns, and read their judicial files. I also worked with COs, though never doing their actual labor, observing job duties, listening as they spoke about their lives, and performing semi-structured interviews. Because so many people gave so much of their time and themselves, it is my duty to respect their concerns for anonymity and to go as far as I can to make sure their words and actions do not create blowback or make their lives less safe. The quotes from ‘individuals’ are also pieced together from two separate people as a means to include captives’ and workers’ words, but without attributing them to one person. And because prison workers could confiscate my materials at any time, and keep them, I did not write direct quotes unless they were short and could not be attributed to anyone. I did move across the compound with bright yellow, green, and red notebooks as a reminder that I was always ‘taking notes’ in some form or fashion, but most of these notes were in scratch form to protect identities in case my materials were taken away. I wrote most of my fieldnotes in my car after I had driven off prison property, and I left all detailed notes in my apartment. When actual quotation marks appear, these are word-for-word quotes that I was able to notate. The large block quotes are always pieced together from two people who make up the ‘individual’ identity. While these remarks cannot fully be verified as exact quotes because I wrote them based on scratch notes after I left the prison, they are as close as possible to the original words that captives and workers provided. I was also not allowed to record conversations – nor did I want to – because the dangers of having recordings confiscated by prison administrators were not worth the risks to the people who graciously allowed me into their worlds. Part of protecting participants requires constructing individuals and their words in ways that feel real to readers and to people who live and work at the DEF. I only hope I have done enough in ensuring anonymity as people come to know many participants in this study.

I also do not use the real name of the prison, nor do I name the state in which it is located. I came up with the name Desert Echo Facility because it denotes a physical environment, a sensory process, and a government compound. In English, the acronym also flows easily because of its alphabetical arrangement. I try not to provide too many details about its exact location, including not describing much information about how the land was purchased, how large the property is (other than inside the prison perimeter), the exact year the compound was built, and how close it is to cities and landmarks. I do this not to ignore history, but to acknowledge that this is not essential information for readers. Instead, I focus on the prison itself, captives, and workers and situate all of these contexts within historical processes that continue to influence multiple forms of relationships.

As a representational choice, I do not capitalize america, united states, europe, western, and euro-american because I take the position that invaders don’t deserve to be recognized with this respectful action. Incarceration on this land exists as the dominant form of punishment
because of the continuous genocidal and colonizing practices of individuals and collectives who should not be allowed to lay claim to lands they stole and plundered. Providing them with a grammatical title is something I’m not willing to do. I still use the names as a shorthand for readers, but I want to make clear that, for many, ‘america’ exists only in the imaginations of peoples so immersed in white supremacy that they cannot dream different worlds, nor can they come to terms or recognize how ‘america’ was created. Like prisons, the united states was and is built through the genocide of Indigenous peoples and through the enslavement of African peoples. Similarly, european invaders, and their settling offspring, will not be given the benefit of the doubt in this book. They won’t even be given a capital letter. The only exception to this rule is when these words are used in quotation and for individuals’ personal identities. If someone wants to claim an identity that utilizes america, I capitalize it out of respect to the participant, for example: Mexican-American, Native American, etc. Finally, I use the term euro-american as a shorthand for settlers of european ancestry. While some readers may feel this is a broad category, I utilize this designation because incarceration is a product of european ideologies and practices which settlers expanded upon once they colonized what they called the ‘new world.’ euro-american is meant to be a bit broad to show that naturalized assumptions about incarceration run deep and stretch wide, but also to demonstrate that while there is now enough blame to go around, euro-american settlers remain directly responsible for the continuation of incarceration in the united states.

Another writing choice represents the ethnographic narratives from the perspective of research participants. Every word in these vignettes was constructed from captives’ and workers’ personal statements, their observations, the feelings they voiced, and my observations. Because most people have never lived or worked inside a prison, this form of writing is meant to help readers understand what it feels like to be an incarcerated person or correctional officer. The narratives should provide readers with a strong foundation for imagining another person’s life even though they have not met, and will most likely never meet, any of these individuals. Some readers may have concerns about how I wrote these sections, making claims that it lacks objectivity or that they cannot provide the whole perspective. But ethnography is always partial because it is always authored (Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar 1996; Binte-Farid 2018; Rosaldo 1989 [1993]). Incarcerated people and correctional officers did not write this book; I did. This is an important fact to remember. I do my best to describe how people do things, how they feel, and what they imagine. But I am not them, and I don’t pretend to be. This writing choice is only meant as a helpful guide for readers who don’t yet understand what incarceration really means.

Like most researchers, I made a lot of mistakes during fieldwork and held a number of problematic assumptions about all types of people and things that live and work inside prisons, which greatly affected how I wrote this book. I try to be as honest as possible about these issues by emphasizing my ignorance and the problems that arose from them. I purposefully include these parts of myself to highlight naturalized prejudices. I know that every person is more than their mistakes, but it’s important to acknowledge how damaging unquestioned beliefs can be. There are multiple points throughout this book where I use myself as a stand-in for readers’
ignorance, a word I use with the kindest possible intention. No one knows what they don’t know, and at times, this not-knowing can provide solace from the pain and shame that knowing can cause. I hope this book can make it a little harder for readers to use the “I don’t know” excuse when it comes to the torture that imprisonment creates, while also helping people to understand their own complicity in mass incarceration and its punitive, historical predecessors. The fact that prisons have become so naturalized in our societies, despite the continuous damage they produce, is a testament to the ignorance of our own destructive actions. Ignorance is a form of knowledge production and, in this way, we are all children holding scissors, taking what does not belong to us.

Foundational Literature

While every chapter contains a literature review pertinent to the central theories and arguments to that specific section, it is important to have some basic understanding of the foundational scholarship about mobility and confinement, sensory anthropology, space and social exclusion, and contemporary prison studies.

Historically, the scholarship on confinement and mobility have informed each other, even as many researchers have framed these two practices as separate concepts. Scholars who focus on confinement have largely concentrated on the ways in which restricted movement constrains interpersonal relations and constitutes normative models of sociality that reify existing power regimes (Foucault 1977; Goffman 1961; Rhodes 2004). Using notions of the panopticon (Bentham 1791, 2008), these scholars centered their research within institutions like prisons, asylums, and concentration camps in order to demonstrate how state officials employed disciplinary techniques within penal and genocidal compounds (Casella 2007; Reed 2003; Starn 1986; Sykes 1958). Current research on confinement makes clear that administrators manage emotional relationships and intimacy formation within carceral institutions (Kunzel 2008; Lindahl 2011), even as many have moved their theoretical frameworks outside of "total institutions" in order to demonstrate the historical and contemporary links between acts of physical and social confinement, and new constructions of sociality and State violence (Alexander 2010; Caldeira 2000; Chiang 2018; Davis 2003; Garcia 2008; Gerard and Pickering 2012; Netz 2004; Wacquant 2001).

Since the late 1970s, mobility research has interrogated the presupposition that physical and social movement is inherently a positive phenomenon (Casmir and Rao 1992). Focusing on cultural ideals of mobility, scholars argue that western societies have historically been suspicious of unregulated movement (Cresswell 2006; Deleuze and Guittari 1987; Rosaldo 1988) and that naturalized mobility assumptions may depend upon feelings of agency about particular migrations and bodily movements (Adey 2006). Contemporary mobility studies highlight the dynamism of mobility, rather than spatial and temporal borders (Freund 2001; Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013; Lean 2012; Urry 2007), and considers its role in constructing conceptions of the inferior Other (Salazar 2011). Scholars also describe how life may be considered a “meshwork” of interconnected webs of movement that demonstrate the entanglements and creations of
mobility (Ingold 2011; Stewart 2005; Stoller 1989), and make evident how social processes that create mobility can also confine and exclude (Tsing 2005). This book expands upon literatures of confinement and mobility to materialize both practices and understand how they inform the sensory in an American prison.

When a prison guard walks down a DEF corridor, their keys echo figuratively and literally, reminding incarcerated people of the power structures in which they live. Because this project explores the linkage between mobility and bodily senses, I engage literatures on sensory anthropology. Historically, two methodological approaches have defined sensory anthropology: (1) descriptive ethnographic representations of sensory information (Desjarlais 1992; Jackson 1983; Stoller 1989; Taussig 1993), and (2) cross-cultural comparisons of sensory case-studies (Classen 1997; Guerts 2003; Howes 1991). However, sensory theory within anthropological scholarship often created and reinforced racist stereotypes and privileged euro-american perceptions about bodily senses (Howes 2003; Edwards 2006). Within these practices, researchers claimed that euro-american peoples were dominated by the mind while all other peoples were slaves to their bodily senses (Richards 1998; Stewart 2005). Despite these problems, many researchers continued to focus on the importance of sensory practices, arguing that touch and media helped to construct sociality and that sensory assumptions were central to analyses of myth (Levi-Strauss 1964; McLuhan 1962; Mead 1935). During the 1980s, anthropology of the senses began to focus on how people construct meaning and sociality through their sensory practices (Herzfeld 2001; Jackson 1983; Seeger 1981; Sullivan 1986). Specifically, scholars have focused on how different peoples create social worlds based upon auditory habits (Boivin et. al. 2007; Bull and Beck 2003; Corbin 2003; Feld 1982), how cultural memories are embedded in smells and tastes (Seremetakis 1994; Stoller 1997), how material vibrations generate movements (Bissel 2009, 2010) and how sensory foci can marginalize, hierarchize, and create categories of Others (Ingold 2000; Marks 2000). Tracing how sensory practices create affective relations (Hamilakis 2014), this book expands upon this literature by focusing on how incarcerated people generate feelings of movement that lay claim to scales of aliveness and human-making, through the interlinkage of bodily senses and everyday materials.

While incarcerated people utilize sensory practices as powerful acts that assert their aliveness and to construct the Human, they do so within architectural structures that often manifest spaces of isolation. Since Goffman's seminal work on stigma (1963), scholars who focus on social exclusion have concentrated on marginalized peoples in order to analyze structural violence and inequality, highlighting how social categories can create and disrupt intersubjectivity (Bourgois 1996; Holmes 2013; Phillips 2012; Rosaldo 1989; Schepet-Hughes 1992). However, researchers have also argued that within practices of social exclusion, oppressed people can exert power in ways that shape the larger society (Gaunt 2006) and form communities in places imagined to be hostile (Gray 2009), demonstrating how lived spaces can be produced through diverse meaning-making actions. Because space always embodies multiple meanings (Bourdieu 1977; Lefebvre 1991; Moore 1986), people often construct and produce space by negotiating and contesting asymmetrical power dynamics (Low 2011). Working within
Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological framework, researchers have argued that: habitual bodily practices create time-space routines that give meaning to places (Harvey 1973; Seamon 1980); different bodily directions, velocities, and temporalities intersect with a multitude of mobile elements in order to create embodied space as a practiced place (De Certeau 1984); and that people create mobile spatio-temporal fields that stretch from an individual's body throughout many different locales, constituting social relations and processes of exclusion (Low 2003; Munn 1990). Essentially, there has been an academic move to place a sense of dynamism within spatial conceptions, or to turn space into movement itself (Giddens 1990; Munn 1996).

Because I concentrate on how mobility, bodily senses, and incarceration informs scales of aliveness and Human-making, it is important to include a brief review of current prison scholarship. Following Loic Wacquant’s (2002) call for conducting more research inside carceral institutions with a focus outside of the united states, and Lorna Rhodes (2001) foundational review of anthropological imprisonment literatures, social science scholarship has recently begun to challenge long-held assumptions about incarcerated people and their everyday lives. While Black Feminist and Womynist scholars have long argued for these same foci (see Collins 2012; Crenshaw 1991, 2017; Davis 1983, 2003; James 1996; Shakur 2001), anthropology has only recently begun to center prison research. Historically, american prison ethnographies have been hindered by lack of access, funding, and interest, leading anthropologists (and sociologists) to focus mostly on european and South and Central American contexts. In doing so, these scholars delved into the workings of carceral institutions and prison expansionism (Becket and Western 2001; Feely and Simon 1992; Garland 2001; Harcourt 2011; Simon 2007; Wacquant 2008, 2009; Western 2006), often attempting to challenge the notion of a unified and centralized State (Bennett et al. 2008; Bourdieu 1994 [1998]; Carrabine 2004; Cheliotis 2006; Crawley 2004; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Liebling and Arnold 2004; Lipsky 1980). Others focused on how administrators constructed rationales for prison policies such as risk management, rehabilitation, psychological treatment, individual responsibility, and retribution (Bryan 2007; Carlen and Tombs 2006; Crewe 2009; Gillespie 2008; Kendal and Pollack 2003; Haney 2010; Hanna-Moffat 2001; Rhodes 2004; Whitman 2003). These arguments have often been shown as normalizing tactics that naturalize incarceration as a necessary form of punishment built on the falsehood that prisons keep individuals safe (Cunha 2014).² Prisons have also been shown to be porous institutions that impact families, economies, and land usage rather than places existing outside of society (Braman 2004; Clear 2007; Cunha 2008; Mills and Codd 2007; Pandovani 2013; Travis and Waul 2003), while also demonstrating that minoritized peoples often bear harsher burdens of the carceral reach through financial penalties, policing strategies, and resource theft (Barbosa 2006; Biondi 2010; Comfort 2008; Cunha and Granja 2014; Gilmore 2007; Wacquant 2013). This scholarship greatly informs Sensing Incarceration, even as I expand

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² Manuela Cunha’s (2014) article provided much help when beginning to read new literatures about incarceration around the world. She created a document that describes recent trends in carceral studies while also making clear the dangers of ignoring historical inequities.
upon these literatures by offering an ethnographic portrait of everyday life for dozens of incarcerated people and correctional officers in an American prison.

**Architectures at the DEF**

In the early 1980s, local construction crew members, supplied with State funding, built the Desert Echo Facility (DEF) in the American Southwest approximately 14 miles outside of the nearest city center and near the county fairgrounds. Because of this location, incarcerated people can sometimes hear music playing, animals herding, and crowds swaying on carnival rides and high-fructose corn syrup, while the former sit in their 8-by-12-foot cells. Originally designed as a minimum-security prison to hold 300 individuals, the DEF quickly expanded to include high-security housing as a result of the legislated collapse of social welfare programs and continual racially and economically punitive government policies such as the War on Drugs and Broken Windows policing (Harvey 2005). Today, the facility contains 1,000 incarcerated people and employs approximately 450 workers, including 175 correctional officers. The captives include predominantly Hispanic, Mexican American, Latino, and Chicano peoples (approximately 65 percent) followed by Caucasians (approximately 15 percent). Indigenous, Indian Americans, and Native Americans make up approximately 10 percent of the overall population, with the approximate percentage of African American and Black peoples being around eight percent. The remaining populations, which the State classifies as Other, includes Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and individuals with two or more races. Overall, captives are majority brown, bilingual English and Spanish speakers, with access to few economic resources. Correctional officers follow a similar demographic pattern. Most COs identify as Mexican American, Hispanic, Chicano, and Latino (approximately 80 percent). Caucasians make up approximately 15 percent of the CO workforce followed by African Americans (approximately three percent), with the remaining 2 percent classified as Other (including Asian and Indigenous peoples). COs are also overwhelmingly brown, bilingual English and Spanish speakers, and individuals with access to few economic resources.

The prison sits on a large piece of land purchased from the federal government at a cheaper than average rate. State administrators applied to buy the plot specifically for the purposes of building a prison. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials approved the transaction, advising that a prison must be constructed on the property or risk paying full price for the land. Some 30 years later, I spoke to a BLM employee in the town near the prison, who explained that if the State had built a school or community center, the price would have tripled or quadrupled. Apparently, land is given from the American government at lower costs as long as it holds people captive. Once used for animal herding and open grazing, the land where State officials built the DEF now contains metal and electric fences, mechanized doors, chains that outline borders and shackle people, guns, tasers, gas bombs, batons, barbed wire, correctional staff, and incarcerated people. The land may have been inexpensive but it came at a large price.

The prison architects who constructed the DEF modeled the facility after the campus design – compounds that consist of freestanding buildings with large open spaces between the
concrete structures – but created the internal living and working quarters (known as Units) on semi-circular Benthamite panopticon principles. Visual surveillance is a strong component of the supervisory and disciplinary tactics utilized at this facility, demonstrated by the large number of watchtowers where correctional officers observe prison staff and incarcerated people’s movements, and by the fact that the internal structure of every prison unit clusters around a surveillance center two stories high that faces every cell, 16 in total, within the structure. From the perspective of many prison scholars who see pictures of these types of prison facilities, but never actually step inside one, vision appears to be the dominant sensory concern. 3 But the architectural design of the DEF should not be reduced solely to the visual. Penal space can often be structured to impart environmentally particular feelings for specific punishments (Casella 2012; Vaughn 2011). This book aims to contribute to the growing scholarship that challenges ocularcentrism while providing readers with a sensory portrait of what it feels like to live and work inside this prison.

Architects designed the DEF to keep order inside and outside the prison, but after the 2001 murders, for many workers it appeared that captives wielded more control than COs. As a result, State legislators and administrators instituted specific housing guidelines for new arrivals focusing on adjudicated crimes, imprisonment length, and supposed gang affiliation, guidelines that morphed into the current policies. There are currently four security-levels that house incarcerated people at the DEF, including Levels II, III, IV, and VI. 4 The Level II section of the prison is the lowest security ranking. Here, administrators allow all incarcerated people to walk around the inside of the facility at certain times, but captives must return to their bunks for a mandatory body count six times throughout the day. The Level II facility is structured in a way that forces all individuals inside the building to acknowledge the security apparatus at all times. All employees, visitors, and incarcerated peoples must wait at the front entrance until security staff release the mechanical locks on the door from a central security location. Upon entering the facility, all must walk through a metal detector and place an identification card into a small opening in the wall. The living quarters are divided into four housing units that each hold approximately 46 people. This building is fully surrounded by a large fence with barbed wire on top of the entire structure. The individuals who reside in this facility are all set to be released from prison within the next four years. I did not conduct research at the Level II facility, but individuals residing in this building can be transferred into the higher security facility where I conducted fieldwork, which sits approximately 200 yards away from this building.

The higher-security prison houses people at Levels III, IV, and VI. Like the minimum-security building, all must wait at a door until a correctional officer allows you to enter, where metal detectors await your arrival and COs ask about possible contraband on your person. Prohibited items include recording devices, cameras, cell phones, glass containers, non-plastic silverware, narcotics, and anything considered a weapon. Correctional officers may move a wand over visitors’ bodies to ensure that nothing metallic is brought inside the facility and they may

4 Confusingly, there are four levels, but because there is no fifth level, the highest is six.
also rifle through workers’ and visitors’ bags. Once past this checkpoint, everyone must wait at another security center, known as B Control, and then walk through two more mechanized doors that lead to a 150-foot corridor and locked gate. Once allowed to enter into this section, individuals now have a panoramic view of the entire facility. On the left and right of this entrance you can see towering housing units for Level IV incarcerated peoples. There is also one unit where Level VI captives reside. Individuals housed in Level III units are placed in buildings directly in front of this entrance, approximately 500 feet away. The Administration, Medical, Chapel, Gym, Dining (known as Chow Hall), and Education buildings are stationed in a quad, all within approximately 80 yards of each other. There are also large amounts of barbed-wire atop cyclone-style fences lining the border of the prison, surrounding every housing unit, and atop every building alongside dozens of locked gates.

The Level system directly correlates to housing priorities at the Desert Echo Facility. All incarcerated people reside in Units where a total of 46 people live, alone, in 8-by-12-foot cells. Inside these units, individuals are stratified into two tiers, top and bottom, and, depending on the security level, they are often not allowed outside of their cells with more than seven people and do not move to the rec yards or the gym altogether. From both tiers of the unit, captives face the security center where COs could watch them for the majority of their day. The security center is an impressive sight from the perspective of anyone sitting in these units: a display of power and surveillance enshrined in the room, and a constant reminder of the power of the prison system itself. Individuals marked with Level III housing are allowed to be outside of their cell for most of their day, unless administrators call for a lockdown or after 8 PM, with all 16 unit-mates. They are also allowed to walk to their jobs across the compound, attend religious services, and go to Education classes. Level IV captives live alone in their cells for upwards of 20 hours a day and are only allowed out of their cells with their tier mates for four hours daily. Level VI captives live alone in their cells for 23 hours a day and are allowed outside in a one-person cage for one hour of recreation time.

Fieldwork Methods

To collect data and formulate my book arguments, I conducted participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and mapping of movement at the Level III, IV, and VI units. Performing these methods in a prison environment came with a number of benefits and drawbacks that I will discuss throughout this section. It is important to note that my methodology changed dramatically throughout fieldwork as I learned from participants and realized what was possible in this particular bureaucratic institution. I also centered mobility as a structural and analytical concept, and not just a physical movement or individual action.

Participant Observation

I struggled with calling the research I conducted at the DEF participant observation because I worried that I could never really participate in research as an incarcerated person or CO. I was never in any real danger of becoming imprisoned. I did not live on the compound (in fact, I spent
an average if 8-12 hours a day at the DEF and then left for the comfort of my apartment). I never stayed in a cell for more than one day. And I was not held in bondage by the State. But I remembered what I learned in an Ethnographic Methods class, taught by Ira Bashkow in 2014, about the limitations of participant observation: everything is partial and to pretend that anyone can ever be completely immersed in a new context where they understand everything about everyone and everything is foolhardy. That’s not anthropology – it's fantasy. And I spent thousands of hours inside the DEF, upwards of 3,800, with a total of 74 incarcerated people and 41 correctional officer participants over the course of 12 months. I stayed with many captives as long as I could, and as long as they allowed in their cells, classrooms, and workspaces. I moved with them (sometimes alone but often with multiple people) throughout the units, across the compound, to their visits, and through bureaucratic processes that crafted movement policies and practices in the facility. I observed everyday lives, relationship formation and termination, movement patterns, food habits, creative endeavors, lock downs, conversations, administrator and captive discipline, fights and negotiations, media programming, work habits, architectural structures, sensory practices, violence, rituals, clothing, confining and mobile materials, and important life events. With COs I observed everything that I did with captives, but added their work practices on and off the compound, their home life, and administrative meetings specific to their work duties. I performed these actions to try and understand how participants construct mobility and how and why it manifests, how and when people do or do not move and at what speeds, how and why materials that move between people and spaces – including common hygiene products and artistic creations – create feelings of personal movement and sensory practices, or vice versa, and how bodily senses and mobility interlink. I followed people and materials all over the compound to understand how mobility, bodily senses, animacy, and Human inform one another through these participatory methods. But there will be no stories similar to Clifford Geertz’s (2005) Balinese cockfight. I was never a captive or CO, “one of them,” nor do I pretend that I was.

With permission from participants and the State Corrections Department, and through constant negotiations with prison staff, I stayed inside incarcerated people's cells and units to focus on how they occupied their time throughout the day. I scrutinized their physical creations in order to understand how mobility manifested through materials, and how and why these creations connect to the way many people sense their worlds. I documented which materials became associated with particular senses, such as hygiene products, sugar, and cloth. I followed the participants and the materials they passed along to other captives in order to trace how mobility and sensory practices materialized. I also moved with participants throughout daily activities, including moving through the tower/facility to go to recreational time outside of their building, following individuals throughout work routines, and moving with them throughout educational and therapeutic programming. With correctional officers, I followed them throughout their work routines, sat with them as they observed captives, went to some of their homes, and observed their training practices. This provided a foundation to understanding their movement routines while also allowing me to map personal, collective, and material movement
and sensory patterns. I also followed particular materials, such as paper, hygiene items, and artistic creations throughout the facilities to understand how embodied materials can create feelings of movement though captives often remain locked in their cell.

**Semi-structured Interviewing**

I interviewed a total of 150 incarcerated people and prison staff, often alone but sometimes with others present. Utilizing participant observation methodologies before I conducted interviews allowed me to build rapport with many participants, and I followed the interviewee's lead when interviewing (Briggs 1986; Jackson 1987). I began by asking about all participants’ life histories and what their average day was like. These questions allowed participants to speak as freely as they wanted and it allowed individuals to engage with topics of their interest. I usually spoke with incarcerated people as we sat in their cells or moved across the compound, during their work shifts and rec or gym time. I also asked participants about mobility, confinement, their dreams, what it feels like to live in prison, how they would describe themselves and other captives, what relationships were important to them, how they maintained and ended relationships, what materials they preferred and which ones were important to them, how they viewed COs and other staff, spaces in the prison that felt safe (if any) or dangerous and why, how the architecture of the prison made them feel, if and how their bodies had changed during imprisonment, what it means to be Human or to be alive, and any other questions pertinent to individual conversations. Based on topics suggested to me by incarcerated people themselves, these questions were designed to illuminate connections between mobility and sensory practices by focusing on participants’ ideas and perceptions about what it feels like to live through the corrections systems in the united states. I conducted follow-up interviews throughout fieldwork to see if individuals answered differently or provided new information.

In addition to interviewing incarcerated people, I asked questions of and listened to correctional officers in order to understand their perceptions of themselves and captives and what it felt like to work in a prison. This method also allowed me to ascertain which materials they knew moved throughout the facility and at what speeds, which are preferred by incarcerated people and the items that COs worry about (and do not). I also asked about material confiscations, relationships between incarcerated people and their relationships with staff, and if and how different scales of confinement produce particular material and social relations. Similar to interviews with captives, I began by asking COs about their life histories and everyday life before asking specific questions. This method also allowed me to adjust questions depending on the context and to explore nuanced perspectives depending upon individual conversations. I also asked COs about their concerns of working in prison, what they wished non-imprisoned peoples and workers understood about their labor, and how they feel about regulating captives’ movements throughout their day. Because my project focuses largely on men living through incarceration, I sought out female COs and captives and relational kin in order to garner different gendered perspectives. As with interviewing captives, I found that answers changed over time, and previous scholars have argued that many people living through united states corrections
systems may seek to hide aspects of their lives out of fear of judgment and negative consequences (Garfinkel 1956; Goffman 1963; Schlosser 2008). To ensure that I received a spectrum of answers, I re-interviewed individuals throughout the tenure of my fieldwork and followed-up on these interviews using participant observation methodologies.

**Mapping of Mobility, Relations, and Sensory Materials**

I originally planned to ask incarcerated participants to draw maps of their personal movement, the prison, the kinds of social relations in which they participate, and the sensory materials that move between captives. I quickly ended this method because I learned that if incarcerated people drew maps of anything at the DEF, they could be charged with creating escape paraphernalia and have nine years added to their sentence. I also learned that if I drew maps, I could be charged with aiding captives with escape and subject to legal repercussions. Instead, I asked people to explain what a map might look like and tried to recreate their images through writing. I also followed-up with interviews and participant observation to ensure that I received first-hand accounts of participants’ perspectives about mobility, sensory practices, and what it means to be alive and Human, rather than relying solely on my own ideas about how and where participants move, the sensory materials involved in movement, and their sociality. I also followed materials around the prison – such as artistic creations, hygiene products, and small food items – and documented them in my notes when I was off prison grounds. Utilizing this method allowed for tacit knowledge to come forth in physical form, while also allowing for creations to be analyzed at a later date. Within this process, I documented the links between circulated materials, movement patterns, and sensory practices.

The field notes I created and participants’ artwork were coded based upon themes that emerged after careful examination of the data; such themes included ‘animacy’, ‘Human’, ‘gender’, ‘sexuality’, and ‘violence’. I utilized analytical notes throughout the coding process in order to continually evaluate data, to complicate central arguments, and to illuminate further questions and ideas in regards to participants’ movements. I also encoded data based upon participants’ length of incarceration, severity of confinement, access to material and social relations, personal movements, architectural sensory patterns, and sensory practices. These processes ensured that mobility surfaced while also tracing the construction of animacy and human hierarchies. Specifically, I analyzed the relationships between mobility and the ways in which people interact with each other and the structures that encompass their lives by detailing the historical contexts of incarceration, mobility, and bodily senses. The combination of these methods and my analysis produced detailed ethnographic data that materialize how participants sense incarceration in their daily lives, demonstrating how and why captives and COs creatively upend their incarceration, reassert gender hierarchies, and interlink mobility when constructing what it means to be alive and Human.
Chapter Descriptions

I placed the book's chapters in this specific order to help readers understand how incarcerated people and correctional staff construct the category of Human and scales of aliveness through mobility. In chapter two, “Mobility Matters: Unsettling Punishment at the Desert Echo Facility,” I argue that the DEF creates unsettling mobilities that torture incarcerated people in often invisible ways, such as the experience of moving walls and vibrating paper. I define ‘unsettling mobility’ as unexpected movement by inanimate objects that upends bodily senses, and disrupts naturalized Subject/Object and Life/Non-Life binaries. As DEF captives live in worlds of violent displacement and incarceration, their bodies become sensitive to the movement and vibrations of Subjects and Objects around them. Operationalized unsettling mobilities at the DEF permeate everyday life, resulting in incarcerated people feeling as if ‘inanimate’ materials are alive, while DEF captives themselves are not. Rather than homogenized, easily distinguished movement-practices, I assert that captives’ and correctional officers’ movements enmesh with each other in numerous ways that challenge current conceptions of what it means to be mobile or confined. An ethnographic mobility analysis from the perspectives of DEF incarcerated people also demonstrates that, although many imagine prisons to be places of social and material restriction, prisons exist simultaneously as spaces where specific relations become amplified during everyday correctional operations. Following repeated requests from the men and trans women held captive at the DEF, I here attempt to make readers feel their movements in order to challenge rigid preconceptions about correctional life.

In chapter three, “Masculine Hysteria: Dirty Work and Gendered Touch,” I describe the gendered concerns of numerous correctional officers about what it feels like to hold people captive. I argue that correctional movement restrictions at the DEF demonstrate staff’s hatred of women and the desire to control gender. I provide evidence that DEF correctional officers feel tainted by the work they perform because their bodies are the sites of mobility controls. They collect and analyze mobility data through sight, sound, and touch, and in so doing, find themselves physically and socially “too close” to their captives. Attempting to convince themselves that they are distinct from the people they oversee, they create affective caricatures of incarcerated people and correctional workers. Male correctional officers believe that captives, as beings hierarchically similar to women, must be punished through restricting their movements. As this occurs, COs begin to worry that their own movement is also controlled within the prison, threatening their masculinity. Male COs then emphasize masculinized mobility controls to administer prison policies, in attempts to exert their manhood over feminized populations. As men working in the prison utilize these gendered constructions in their daily work, they place all incarcerated people hierarchically beneath them and on the same level as women. Most DEF captives identify as men, so, from many COs’ perspectives, this action serves to further punish incarcerated men by feminizing them while simultaneously buttressing COs’ fragile masculinities. This hatred of women informs how staff enact mobility controls, demonstrating the belief that to punish a man, you must treat him as a woman.
In chapter four, “Killing With Impunity,” I examine how correctional officers control incarcerated people’s physical movements in ways that disrupt rigid timetables and unsettle asymmetrical power dynamics within the prison compound, in order to demonstrate that COs utilize mobility to assert their power to kill. In continuously upending the prison timetable, staff undermine their argument that scheduled living equates to safety, and they display feelings of discomfort with the work they perform. I then connect these practices to COs’ desires to be viewed as law enforcement agents. Many COs speak about their desire to be given the same benefits that police officers receive in many American contexts, and they actively perform trainings where they rush into units, cuff captives, and hold weapons ready to engage in further violence. I argue that COs demand to be perceived as law enforcement because they believe that the latter state agents have been given the right to kill with impunity. Many DEF correctional officers feel as if they must perform gendered labor that gifts captives with the bare necessities to maintain a base level of life, when their own duty should be to kill. COs then turn to the one thing they believe solves this problem: Mobility. They take control of movement to assert themselves as more alive than those they oversee, marking themselves hierarchically distinct from incarcerated people and placing their captives closer to death. In so doing, they situate themselves as State agents who take life instead of giving it. In controlling movement, they obtain the power to kill.

In chapter five, “Moving Scents and Controlling Animacy” I demonstrate that DEF COs and incarcerated people pair mobility with smell to place themselves and others within animacy categories. Many correctional officers use smell to create taphonomic death processes to situate captives as dead and decomposing things. For some, these smells become so powerful that they cannot wash it off their bodies even after they leave the prison, so they attempt to eradicate and contain the incarcerated stench by relying upon stringent mobility controls. Because mobility is tightly linked with animacy at the DEF, COs feel they must do the maintenance work of ensuring that less alive/dead things don’t move, including their smells. In doing so, they construct a blurry divide – hazy but distinct – between alive Subjects and not-alive Objects on the compound, which placates their troubled mobility and sensory assumptions. I then show how many incarcerated people rely upon smell to feel alive and mobile even though they remain in their small cells. Many captives use and share everyday hygiene objects and in doing so, create feelings of movement through the scents borne of these synesthetic objects and themselves. Through these practices, they form communities in a place designed to disappear, divide, and establish hierarchies between themselves and individuals whom they deem to be non-human. As they create these communities and generate movement, they upend their confinement, disrupt correctional assumptions, and reconstruct animacy and Human hierarchies.

In chapter six, “Becoming Human,” I concentrate on how many incarcerated people construct ‘Human’ by violently restricting physical movements of those they consider less than or non-human. Incarcerated men and women perform these actions through: physical attacks and intimidations; utilizing paper to imagine non-human captives as abstract crime; and controlling access to material and social relations. These actions, and the scales of humanness they create,
link physical movement with the Human that have unintended consequences for everyone on the compound. Furthermore, because physical movement often signifies aliveness, I demonstrate that mobility remains a central concern for who gets targeted for incarceration and extermination. I examine how many captives write letters, create poetry, produce artwork, and share everyday materials to construct and perform Human. Through these actions, incarcerated men and women create an individual sense of Human and immobilize temporality to place themselves and Others hierarchically within animacy and Human categories. These men and women demonstrate that to be Human at the DEF is inextricably linked with the power to control, but also that not everyone agrees as to how hierarchy should be constructed. I argue that how captives create the Human category, often fraught with conflicts and negotiations, produces many of the justifications used by prison administrators to continue the level system that serves to control movement across the facility. This reality places captives in a difficult position; to be Human is to exert control as a means to liberation, resilience, and movement, but their controls often lead to restrictive measures that can make them feel as if they have little say over their bodies, materials, and mobility.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I focus on how the construction of prisons and Human are tightly linked, and I demonstrate that incarcerated people seeking to become Human, and captives and correctional officers performing Human maintenance work, cannot be simplified into easy narratives or good/bad binaries. After all, survival often relies upon tough choices and uncomfortable feelings. To finish this book, I provide some practical changes that participants believe should be implemented at the DEF.
Chapter 2

Mobility Matters: Unsettling Punishment at the Desert Echo Facility

A small, brown bird flitted between the razor wire atop the security fence dividing the prison compound. On one side were prison housing units One and Two, the education building, and the sergeant’s work area. Prison housing units Three through Five, Medical, Chapel, and the Chow Hall sprawled across the other side. Mr. Thomas lived in what was known as the “5 As.” Prison administrators placed validated gang members in this building where they resided, alone, in their 8-x-12-foot cells for 20 hours every day. Mr. Thomas often looked out his thick plastic window, stained by weather and scratches, and watched birds move between the cyclone fences that blocked his own everyday movement. He often dreamed of running miles into the desert, hoping the sun would bleach his bones before he could be brought back to his cell. While often wishing for permanent release, he didn’t dare bring physical harm to himself for fear of looking like a victim who could not handle the violent onslaught of American punishment. Instead, he watched the birds, and today his eyes caught the wren moving with ease around the razor wire. This bird was a nuisance. Its tiny feet pounded in Mr. Thomas’ chest, like a second heartbeat, every time it hopped in the air and landed on the fence, producing labored breath and small beads of sweat on his forehead. It reminded him of what he could not do. He couldn’t move between the cages and he definitely couldn’t fly away. He was forced to sit in this tiny room where his outstretched arms almost touched the width of the white, concrete walls. He watched the wren intently, trying to understand why it was allowed to move in ways he was not, feeling more confined with each move the bird made. He usually hoped birds would fly away from this place and make a home somewhere safer and less metallic. But when it finally glided out of sight, he hated that bird. He felt so lonely watching it soar into the distance, fluttering over the horizon that caged him. Still, he hoped that bird found a new home, one more hospitable, less austere. But if it ever came near him when he was outside, he would smash it with angry fists and feet, destroying its ability to leave this prison and ensuring it would never again move between the fences so easily.

Mr. Thomas turned away from the window only to find his walls moving once again. He took three deep breaths to try to make them stop, but when he inhaled the walls moved towards him, and only moved away upon exhaling. His breath was regulating wall movements again and he needed to make it stop. He grabbed a piece of paper only to feel it violently vibrate in his hand, when he realized it was classification paper that bore the name of the prison embossed on top. He balled it up and threw it on the floor near his cell door. He grabbed a blank piece of paper he received from an education worker and breathed a little easier. The paper was college-ruled and felt safer than the State paper he had just tossed. He began writing a letter to his girlfriend, telling her how much he loved her and that he hoped she could visit soon. The wall movements began to slow and eventually grow still once again, save for an occasional ripple that made his body jerk and pause. He had to make sure the walls didn’t keep moving, because that
would lead to the floor tossing like a wave which, in turn, made time slow down. The letter writing helped but he knew it was only a matter of time before he lost full control of the materials around him again. Time was against him, but all he had was time.

Mr. Thomas came to the Desert Echo Facility from a neighboring state where he was convicted of his first crime at 16 years old. Once imprisoned, he murdered an incarcerated man and associated with the Aryan Brotherhood. Although he maintains that he had no interest in white supremacy, prison administrators punished him for gang membership and placed him in solitary confinement for a decade. Currently serving a life sentence without parole, he often details how it feels to have his body catalogued with point values within categories he did not create. Upon arrival to the DEF system, Mr. Thomas was immediately fingerprinted, photographed, had his body inspected for tattoos and other markings, and his DNA processed. He was used to these procedures after spending more than two decades in State prisons, but he still hated the feelings created when they photographed him without his permission and spoke about him in such a clinical manner. It felt as if he was not a human being, but rather a specimen to be studied and categorized in ways he could not fully understand. Worse, he felt cloistered: pent into physical spaces as small as the boxes on the premade forms where correctional workers marked his height, weight, aliases, race, date of birth, social security number, and a list of his enemies. No one asked him what it felt like to be ‘processed’ in these ways. Instead, they ordered him to take off his clothes, sign numerous paper forms, and spoke to him in an abrupt manner, as they noted his white skin, bald head, brown eyes, muscular build, and numerous tattoos. The nakedness didn’t bother him anymore, but the glaring staff made him want to shrink into himself or rip out his watchers’ eyes.

Once correctional workers completed this initial intake he was passed along to Behavioral Health and Medical workers who classified his physical and mental status by asking questions from more forms. When he attempted to provide details as to why he was feeling anxious or how he may have a heart murmur, he was quieted and told he was providing too much information, and that there was not time for all his concerns. Another correctional worker told him that he was an escape risk, and would be flagged in a paper file folder and in computer files as a continuous threat who needed close observation. He tried to explain that the ‘escape’ was really something small that took place over 20 years ago, when he ran away from a cop car after being handcuffed. It didn’t matter. The escape was noted and flagged in the prison system. For all the questions and accusations thrown his way, no one had introduced themselves. Maybe they did and he just couldn’t remember their names because they all acted towards him in similar manners. He kept looking for empathy or a glimmer of understanding in his captors’ faces, but found only distant looks, exhaustion, judgment, and apathy. Another correctional worker sat in front of him and demanded his attention. His surroundings came into focus and he realized he had been sitting in a small, sterile room on a backless stool for hours. The room echoed with every movement and smelled of coarse chemicals, purchased at the cheapest price through State contracts and with no concern for the health problems they could create. He became irritated and refused to answer more questions. The officer advised him that he was with the Threat Action
Unit (TAU) and that his questions would be answered. Mr. Thomas acquiesced and replied “No” to all the queries that seemed to center around gang affiliation and drug use. These were the prison cops, so they were never to be trusted or reasoned with. After the cop left, he sat in the room handcuffed to his waist and forced to lean forward, which hurt his back and made it difficult to breathe. The metal rings made his hands numb and he felt the familiar panic about his vascular circulation. Mostly, he wondered why they felt the need to cuff him in the middle of the prison. Where was he going to go, anyway? And he wouldn’t do anything violent unless they forced him. He became angry and yelled that he wanted to get out of the room. No one replied and he knew no one would listen to him even if they returned. If only they would loosen the cuffs, he could breathe easier and adjust his position. Forty-five minutes passed before a worker came back into the room to tell him where he would live for the rest of his life. The monologue went something like this:

You’re a level IV inmate which means you will live in a cell by yourself for most of the day. You received too many points to be placed at a lower level and you’re an escape risk. We discussed your situation and determined that you are a security threat and we must treat you as such. You may have intentions that we cannot ascertain and we can never really know what you’re going to do. Sign here so we can get you to your cell.

Mr. Thomas signed the form, wondering what the point system meant and how he could be considered such a risk after all this time in prison. They took him to a large building with ‘5A’ painted on it but never took off his handcuffs. He thus had to walk hunched over, attempting to move faster when they ordered him to keep up. His body ached and his arms felt as if they could fall off at any moment. In the distance, he heard birds chirping and passed two millipedes wriggling across the hot concrete. He stepped on the insect nearest him, and enjoyed hearing the small explosion and feeling the crunch under his foot. He followed them through a mechanized gate and two large metal doors that he was not allowed to touch. When he saw his cell, he panicked; claustrophobia set in along with the realization that he would die in that tiny room.

**Locking Down Mobility**

Desert Echo Facility incarcerated people often asked me if I understood why correctional administrators and staff worried so much about physical movement in the prison. In the early days of fieldwork, I was never able to provide a satisfying answer, and I usually irritated the people I countered by asking them why they found that particular question so important. It became clear that I needed to provide an answer. Looking around the compound, architectural features marked the efforts to control physical movement through every construction: not only due to razor-wire-topped fences and locked cages, but also in how incarcerated people followed paths laid out before them. This particular mobility concentration centered on correctional beliefs that captives’ physical movement must be constrained and managed for the safety of all workers, ‘inmates,’ and society at large, but also to ensure ‘improper’ relationships did not manifest on the
compound. Prison administrators placed incarcerated people in individual cells facing a security center, hung locks on every fence, and held captives in stratified security levels. They used computer programs for gate and housing access, watched video surveillance, filled out paper forms to document incarcerated people’s physical locations and their movement patterns for employment or programming needs, and listened for trip wires bordering a desert that would sound an alarm, to make escape both physically and imaginatively dangerous. The men and trans women held captive at the DEF also maintained specific routes held together by concrete, detailed schedules, spatial constructions, and speed patterns. “Pay attention to why they lock us up and lock us down” is something I would hear most days from people living within cells and slightly larger cages. “Come back here when you really paying attention.” However, paying attention required a closeness (both physically and interdependently) that was strongly prohibited at the DEF. Staff frowned upon and actively guarded against any worker (or confused researcher) who touched an incarcerated person, even in handshake. They also constantly feared sexual relationships and the sharing of contraband materials between incarcerated people and everyone else.

As I repeatedly returned to people with attempts at answering their question about physical confinement, I was usually told to leave again, because I had not yet learned anything. I found this response frustrating for several reasons, but especially because it was so difficult to meet with incarcerated people at higher security levels (in this case, Level IV). Prison administrative polices required that I wait at dozens of blocked entrances – locked gates, mechanized doors, metal detectors – and move through burning summer sunlight, wind-swept dirt, and correctional-worker stares. Always a hot mess when I finally arrived at this unit, I would glare at the individuals who told me I understand nothing, and worse, that I was wasting their time. Wasting the time of people locked in small rooms for 20 hours a day? Months into this cycle, I lost my temper when Mr. Ruiz, a heavy-set Chicano man in his early 30s and already incarcerated for 11 years, told me I was doing nothing more than metaphorically “jerking [myself] off,” beginning the conversation below:

MG: I can’t believe you’re making me come out here every day and then immediately telling me to leave. I get stopped by all these locked gates, and correctional officers treat me like I’m doing something wrong.

Mr. Ruiz (with lips pursed, eyebrows up, and mocking tone): And how does that make your feel, bebito [baby boy]?

MG (loudly and arrogantly): I’m not acting like a baby. I’m just tired of doing this over and over. I’d rather just stay in one area than move across this compound every day. At least then so many staff members wouldn’t worry why I move around so much. Maybe then I’d be treated better and not feel so isolated while I’m here.
Mr. Ruiz (ever the charmer, looking intensely in my eyes and leaning towards me): You can come back tomorrow. But first, imagine how it feels for us to be here day in and day out. You whine because you have to feel isolated for a few hours a day when we live this all the time. You don’t get to be our friends, mijo [my son]. We don’t get to walk outside whenever we want. We have to live by their [referring to correction staff] rules and your rules. And every day is harder than the last. The lockup weighs you down more and more. You feel it in your bones, mijo.

Embarrassed by my ignorance and the sarcasm in his chosen words bebito and mijo, I left the unit understanding that mobility entailed more than moving physically from one place to another, or being confined and transported against your will. By placing incarcerated people in small cells and on rigid schedules, prison administrators simultaneously blocked access to and emphasized specific material and social relations, suspending them in sensorial spatio-temporal constructions that some people felt “in their bones.” Mr. Ruiz lives inside an 8-x-12-foot cell, 20 hours every day, feeling the vibrations of the concrete structures, the echoes swirling in the air and into his body, the green and red cleaning chemicals burning his throat and coating his tongue, the walls moving towards and crushing him, the glares of correctional workers, the absence of sunlight and wind, the torn cot mattress, the stale air tearing his skin at night as the State-issued blanket left his feet uncovered, the blinding flashlight the correctional workers pointed in his direction, and birds chirping and moving freely outside his unit.

In this chapter, I argue that the Desert Echo Facility creates unsettling mobilities that torture incarcerated people in often invisible ways, such as the experience of moving walls and vibrating paper. I define unsettling mobility as unexpected movement by inanimate objects that disrupts naturalized Subject/Object and Life/Non-Life binaries. As DEF captives live in worlds of violent displacement and incarceration, their bodies become sensitive to the movement and vibrations of Subjects and Objects around them. Operationalized unsettling mobilities at the DEF permeate everyday life, resulting in captives feeling as if “inanimate” materials are alive, while they are not. Instead of homogenized, easily distinguished movement practices, I assert that DEF mobilities enmesh in innumerable ways that challenge current conceptions of what it means to be mobile or confined. An ethnographic mobility analysis from the perspectives of DEF incarcerated people also demonstrates that, although many imagine prisons to be places of social and material restriction, prisons exist simultaneously as spaces where specific relations become amplified during everyday correctional operations. Following repeated requests from the men and trans women at the DEF, I here attempt to make readers understand what it feels like to live inside a prison in order to challenge rigid preconceptions about correctional life.

Mobility remains a central concern for many in the united states, exemplified, for example, in manifest destiny, the american dream, slavery, a progressive teleology, reservation

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5 I utilize the regional terms united states and america because the scholarship I read often mentions locations within the imagined borders of this national conception. I do not deconstruct these notions because this has already been done in a far better way than I am capable (see Anderson 1982; Handler 1988; Watts 2015). However, it must be
systems, ghettos, and mass incarceration. It is nonetheless extremely difficult to disentangle how mobility intersects with perceptions of status, ability, and potential across and between constructions of the ideal American Human who is able to move freely, and in specific ways, sense their worlds and form socially sanctioned relations. After all, what gets counted as ‘American’ depends upon whom, where, and when you ask. I center on incarcerated people at the Desert Echo Facility to situate mobility in sociohistorical contexts. However, it is important to remember that the DEF sits on landscapes imagined, created, maintained, and carved by Indigenous peoples and within contexts of contemporary enslavement and genocidal State practices. Prison architects designed the DEF through local and global visions of containment, punishment, and austerity. Staff participate within economic practices that slowly break their bodies and damage their children. Incarcerated people disappear from their communities into desert compounds, where State workers bid with national and international corporations to provide them with the cheapest, most stringent, and shoddiest materials. Though in later chapters I attempt to show how Mr. Thomas and Mr. Ruiz, along with their fellow ‘convicts,’ create novel movement feelings and are more than their confinement, it is important that I first try to make their worlds accessible to readers, in order to explain why watching a bird moving outside one’s window can make a person want to kill.

**Mobility, from Whose Perspective?**

Scholars have long utilized mobility as a structuring concept even if they had not interrogated their assumptions about the category itself. Early anthropological works crafted ‘Native Others’ and ‘Savages’ partly based upon ethnocentric mobility conceptions. In the latter, Indigenous peoples *either* became creatures bound and confined to specific locations, marking them pristine and authentic to ‘mobile’ outsiders (Frazer 1890, 2012; Morgan 1877; Tyler 1871; see Narayan 1993; Salazar 2011) or rootless nomads incapable of forming ‘civilized’ lifeways (see Rosaldo 1988). Philosophers concentrated some time on roadways, bridges, intersections, and airliners to formulate theories about mobility’s importance to spatial constructions and power, asserting the dynamism inherent in these creations (Marx 1992, 1887; Gluckman 1958; Heidegger 1977; Lefebvre 1974). But what counts as mobility never materialized within these works, possibly because many euro-american researchers assumed mobile universals. After all, numerous

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6 Incarcerated people at the DEF refer to themselves and many others as convicts. This term signifies someone who is currently imprisoned and is “doing their own time” (see Sykes 1958). This phrase specifically refers to a person who does not call attention to themselves due to excessive drug use, sexual overtures, and who doesn’t get overly agitated by correctional officers’ attitudes or actions. Only convicts at the DEF are allowed to refer to incarcerated people as convicts. The term “inmate” is considered State terminology by most incarcerated people, though captives often use this term for someone who allows correctional officers to agitate them, gets addicted to drugs, snitches, or breaks down as a result of not being able to “do their time.” I utilize the terms incarcerated people, incarcerated man/men, incarcerated woman/women, DEF captive(s), and simply men and women, in an attempt to respect the wishes of most people who asked me not to use “convict” or “inmate” when referring to them or their lives.
enlightenment stories, writings “from Montaigne to Rousseau,” utilized mobility metaphors and terms as stand-ins for rational thought and identity markers (Benhabib and Resnik 2009; Van Den Abbeele 1992). In these works, who and what mattered often arose through assumptions about movement.

Across theorizations and disciplines, mobility has long been a central problem difficult to unwind. How can some ‘primitive’ and Othered peoples be represented as mobile, while others remain immobile, and what does this say about ‘civilized’ euro-americans? To be civilized (read: cultured), in part meant that you had some form of physical rootedness, but also the individual ability to move in ways you deemed important and necessary, moving cyclically from fixity to movement and back to fixity (Tsing 1993). This mobility model linked directly to colonial practices where euro-americans created degrees of movement and overlaid them onto diverse peoples, in attempts to craft manageable populations (Rosaldo 1988). From such a sedentarist perspective, uncivilized populations also need to be surveilled to ensure they did not cross constructed borders and moved in inappropriate ways. It was clear to many, but not all, that State systems – created by and filtered through embodied peoples – viewed particular physical movements negatively, whereas territorial fixity was deemed positive and enlightened (Cresswell 2006; Deleuze and Guitarri 1987; Scott 1998; Tuan 1977).

Countering notions of immobile, authentic natives and challenging the necessity for State surveillances, literatures establishing movement as the natural state of humanity arose. Suddenly, mobile people were everywhere and they were acting as concept metaphors for descriptions of social practices, such as de Certeau’s “pedestrian” (1984), Said’s “forced migrant” (1993), and Deleuze and Guittari’s “nomad” (1987). Anthropologists and philosophers investigated and called on their comrades to trace routes in order to view culture as situated but also in motion (Clifford 1997), and to think in terms of flows when considering people, ideas, and capital (Appadurai 1996; Baumann 2000, 2002, 2007; Castells 1996; Harvey 2005). By attempting to reconfigure previously imagined immobile peoples, scholars made everyone and everything mobile, but these conceptions and languages created “frictionless” and naturalized societies without sociohistorical contexts (Rockefeller 2011; Tsing 2005). Seeking to upend this ahistoricity, endeavors to view mobility as paradigmatic made waves (Urry 2007). For a moment, it seemed the mobility problem had been solved, but only because old dichotomies grew in shade. New paths needed to be realized.

In response, scholars removed physical movement as mobility’s sole arbiter to pairing it with imagination (Brann 1991; Glick-Shiller 2010; Robinson and Anderson 2002; Salazar 2010; Salazar and Smart 2011; Sturma 2002), affect (Stewart 2007; Stoller 1989), space (Massey 1994; 1995).

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7 In Travel as Metaphor, Georges Van Den Abbeele wonderfully details how the metaphor of travel – moving from a ‘known’ place to an imagined “far off” destination – was often likened to an exploring and innovative mind. Rational thought was perceived of as a quest for enlightenment through a pedagogical voyage. Examples include Montaigne’s equestrian and Rousseau’s literate traveler.

8 I owe a great debt of thanks to Noel Salazar for providing literature about mobility. His work made this review possible and offered dozens of resources that I may not have found on my own. For these works, see Salazar 2011, 2012, 2013; Salazar and Smart 2011.
Munn 1990; Sassen 1999; Wolf 1982), the body (Foucault 1977), and disability (Davis 2013; Freund 2001; Garland-Thomson 1997; Shuttleworth 2012; Walker 2007). This scholarship made clear the importance of contextualizing mobility within local practices, placing ethnocentric assumptions under scrutiny. Conventional anthropological ideas cropped up with arguments for the necessity of emic interpretations and analyses, and cross-cultural comparisons. Once again, the progressive valence connoted to mobility – e.g., the ability to move in specific ways, equating mobility with positivist and teleological change, and that movement is the natural state of the world – moved aside for new and challenging ideas. Mobility and immobility came to be viewed as dialectical processes (Salazar 2011), relational (Anthius 1998), and practiced within simultaneity (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Scholarship now calls openly for increased scrutiny towards mobility power relations and the continual need for unwinding the constructed mobile/immobile dichotomy (Salazar 2010).

Unsettling mobilities brings new dynamics to these theoretical arguments by once again grounding mobility within contextualized practices created by people with bodies, who animate very particular materialities, sensorialities, temporalities, and relationalities. People incarcerated at the DEF feel unsettling mobilities viscerally, materializing spatio-temporal fields as consequences of their confinement, and operationalized power relations enacted and enforced by everyday correctional living. While spatio-temporal fields can be mobile (Munn 1990), they can also be confining, contributing to sensory overload, relational deprivation, and uncontrollable urges or bodily reactions. Most importantly, not all movements feel the same or carry equal meanings to different peoples. How does one define Mr. Thomas’ movements? Is he immobile due to his incarceration, even though he can still physically move (in the ableist sense) and imagine movement? Is his movement lessened or weakened in his current state, or is it just reconfigured? What does his mobility feel like to him, and what power dynamics construct his feeling as mobile, or not? What makes Mr. Ruiz feel mobility “in his bones?” And what happens when different mobile spatio-temporal fields fold into one another, challenging unsettling mobilities in lived spaces?

Mr. Thomas’s and Mr. Ruiz’s movements, like that of many of their cohort cannot be easily contained within distinct, premade categories, and they have different ways of feeling movement that are not easily viewed because they are smelled, touched, tasted, and spatialized, and relational, temporal, material, simultaneous, and powerful. Demonstrating that mobility should not be thought of in terms of metaphorical stand-ins for social practices, but rather, as manifestations worthy of their own study, I center mobility at the DEF without naturalizing stasis or movement of any kind. Following Salazar and Glick Schiller’s (2013) call to scrutinize mobility power relations, this research makes evident how mobility is infused with cultural meanings (Frello 2008; Greenblatt 2009), but also how it produces hierarchical practices often used for punishment.
**Moving Walls and the Power of Vibrating Bones**

Mr. Ramirez lived a few cells down from Mr. Thomas and they gradually became confidants, though they never fully trusted each other. Most incarcerated people found it hard to believe that anyone could be completely trustworthy in an environment built on oppression and deception. Returning to prison due to a parole violation, Mr. Ramirez largely blamed harsh societal judgments and a deceptive ex-girlfriend for his return to the DEF. Unable to secure permanent employment due to his criminal record – digitized and papered portfolios that followed him long after he exited prison – he became depressed and angry. After smacking his ex-girlfriend in the face during an argument about his parental and visitation rights, a judge revoked his parole and placed him back under direct prison control for the next eight years. Mr. Ramirez often cried in his cell thinking about how both his daughters would grow up without a father in their life, but always made clear that his brown skin, Spanish surname, and working-poor background did not define his existence. Because Mr. Thomas had lived through incarceration for decades, he knew the dangers of isolation and the resulting destruction it could cause, so he ‘befriended’ his neighbor, Mr. Ramirez, to help him survive the parole revocation, and to ameliorate some of his own loneliness.

Within months, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Ramirez developed a bond that challenged their perceived gang statuses. They shared stories, food, paper, and hygiene products, and coordinated television program-watching from their individual cells. Mr. Ramirez, a Mexican-American man with darker brown skin, found Mr. Thomas’ white supremacist history to be a result of prison racial politics. Staff openly wondered how these two became close ‘friends,’ though neither Mr. Thomas nor Mr. Ramirez ever called themselves that. Important to both men, they worked as sanitation specialists which allowed them to be outside their cells and unit more than other people. They earned reputations as hard workers who caused no trouble. But even with the added time outside his cell, Mr. Ramirez began to deteriorate and become noticeably agitated. His restricted physical movement, paired with the surrounding confining architectural structures, shook his body uncontrollably; he experienced his legs quivering, eyes fluttering, hands jittering, and breath moving in and out in shallow spurts. Worried he would be perceived as weak by correctional staff and incarcerated people alike, he often retreated to his cell. Feeling like a caged animal pacing in his small room, his heart pounding and anger rising, Mr. Ramirez would fall to his knees, cover his ears with his hands in attempts to block out the noises around him, and whisper words of encouragement to himself. “It’s only seven more years,” he repeated. The cell walls closed in on him as his heartbeat quickened and extremities went numb. He wanted to cry and shout but instead, kicked his cell door and ripped some classification papers. He would regret these actions later, but for now, he needed to stop the walls from vibrating and closing in. He kicked at them until they stopped moving, only to realize that two correctional officers were standing in front of his open cell door. He didn’t remember the door opening and he was confused as to why they were ordering him to exit the cell slowly. He didn’t listen, and instead charged at them before they could shut the door. He would not be locked inside this cell again and he would make these officers let him out of this prison. The correctional officers did what
they had been trained to do. They knocked him to the ground with pepper spray, fists, and harsh words and escorted him to the level VI units, where his physical movement would become even more restricted. Mr. Thomas watched the officers drag Mr. Ramirez past his cell with his hand on his small window. Mr. Ramirez passed out of sight and the mechanic doors that guarded the entrance slammed shut, echoing throughout the unit and yanking a shudder from Mr. Thomas’ body. He worried about what would happen to Mr. Ramirez, but mostly, he felt sad that he no longer had someone with whom to pass the time. This had happened before, though. And it would happen again.

A few hours after the extraction, Mr. Thomas left his cell for his two-hour tier time and stared inside Mr. Ramirez’ cell. Correctional officers opened all the bottom-tier doors with the push of a button, ignoring the possibility that anyone could enter the cell and take the items left inside. Mr. Thomas did just that. He moved quickly, grabbing shampoo, paper, soap, and Cup O’Noodle soups before skulking back to his own cell unnoticed. He looked outside his window and watched a bird fly over three fences and felt his hands start shaking. He took one of the pieces of paper from Mr. Ramirez’ cell and began writing a letter to the man he watched get dragged out of the unit just a few hours earlier. He wrote about how he couldn’t wait to watch Jeopardy with him that night and how he saved some soups for him. The shaking subsided and he grabbed the shampoo and soap as he went to the small shower in the corner of the unit. He used the shampoo on his head, though he had no hair, and washed his body with Mr. Ramirez’ soap. Later, he lay on his cot with the shampoo and soap smell lingering on his skin. He felt comforted by the citrus scents even though he knew they would be obliterated by the cleaning chemicals in the morning. At least the smells would stop the walls from moving and allow his body to rest, even for just one night.

Incarcerated people inside prison cells at the DEF feel the vibrations of doors slamming shut, the wind smashing into their units, the man exercising in the next cell, footsteps stomping along their corridor, and the humming of their own breath and heartbeat, even though they

9 At the DEF, cell extraction is a term used when correctional officers (usually officers trained specifically for this type of force) physically accost an incarcerated person to remove them from their cell. Cell extractions can involve the use of Tasers, pepper sprays, gas bombs, rubber bullets, and officer’s body weight. Once COs violently extract their captive, they place them in Segregation for up to six months. The use of force against incarcerated people has been largely left up to State systems with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Whitley v. Albers (1986) in favor of correctional force as long as it is conducted in “good faith.” Hudson v. McMillian (1992) upheld the right for correctional workers to cause “significant injury” to people’s bodies as long as this violence occurs in good-faith attempts to restore order. For more perspective, read Erica Goode’s (2014) piece about cell extractions in the New York Times.

10 Tier Time is a common term in many Southwestern american prisons. It describes a scheduled time when people are allowed in a “common area.” This area consists of a space approximately 30x20 feet where people can watch a shared television set, use a microwave, play board games, speak with other men and women, and share food. A total of eight people is allowed out on tier time and it is heavily scheduled so that different “tiers” of incarcerated men do not cross paths. Most prison units incarcerate individuals from the same security level but they still keep tiers stratified so as not to have “too much movement.”
remain ‘motionless’ in their cells. These vibrations fuse with captive bodies, generating movements often unnoticed and potentially torturous. Locked inside his small cell and with no way out, Mr. Ramirez felt his walls pulse with every breath and heartbeat until eventually the walls moved towards him, invading the spatial constructions crafted for and by him. The walls grab at bodies desperately trying to escape confinement, but only the incarcerated noticed. Mr. Ramirez, like many of his fellow comrades, kicks at the walls to stop the enclosing concrete and tears at the air to prevent the vibrations in his body. But they do so to survive the violence of supposedly inanimate materials moving in ways that threaten entire cosmologies.

Most DEF captives mark a clear division between animate Subjects and inanimate Objects, placing themselves in the former category and walls, floors, and other everyday materials in the latter. In this, like everyone, incarcerated people are creating and sustaining animacy hierarchies—the individual and collective ranking of noun phrases from most Subject/Animate to Object/Inanimate (Chen 2012; Woolford 1999). As DEF people naturalized their particular animacy hierarchies before their violent displacement and confinement, from their language to their bodily habitus, their Subject and Object designations often stratified in both perception and sensation. However, inanimate objects seemingly come alive in the prison, in some form or fashion, upending many people’s animacy hierarchies. Inanimate materials begin to move in ways that displace captives’ place in the world and disrupt the distinction between their bodies and everything else. As peoples already uprooted from their homes and feeling a loss of bodily autonomy, inanimate materials coming alive pushes them down the animacy hierarchy, as they simultaneously suffer from these unexpected movements. Materials move when they cannot. Eventually, mobile matter animates unsettling mobilities.

Reflecting what incarcerated people notice, Mel Y. Chen (2012) questions how matter that is considered inanimate and immobile animates everyday life when repositioned from different perspectives. Matter deemed inanimate exists within cultural ecologies that display a “fragile division between inanimate and animate – that is beyond human and animal – [and] is relentlessly produced and policed and maps important political consequences of that distinction” (Chen 2012: 2). What people do and do not consider animate stews beneath cultural constructs, only to boil over in unexpected ways. Always bubbling under the surface, animacy hierarchies become troubled when confronted by unexpected power relations that manifest within material

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11 In his work on mobility, vibration, and materiality, David Bissell (2010: 485) asserts that vibrations are not effects of movement, but rather, have the capacity to generate movement that “blur[s] the illusory distinction between different materialities.” Beginning from the framework that vibrations are not simply cause-and-effect formations and attempting not to reinforce static distinctions between bodily materiality and everything else, the author explains that vibrations generate movements that denaturalize body/material divides. Using Deleuze and Guittari’s (1987) idea that all that is left in life, and to study, is movement and vibration, Bissell notes the ways in which vibrating materials fold together, undermining bodies as auto-affective subjects because different materials become transmitters through vibrations, in turn, creating non-dialectical relationships. While he focuses on travel and bodily movements such as jiggles and swaying, Bissell essentially challenges materiality and mobility scholars to conceive of how sensorialities vibrate through different bodies, generating diverse movements and materialities in the process.
life. DEF captives feel inanimate materials moving, often merging with their bodies, in ways that make these substances feel alive and out of their control, as Mr. Ramirez explains:

I not only have to worry about the guys around me and cops [COs], but I also got to worry about making sure that all these things stay put. It makes me crazy because I don’t know why it’s happening, and I can’t make it stop. These things move and come at me and it’s like, you know, this can’t be happening, but it is. It makes you question your sanity. That stuff isn’t alive, but it’s moving. How can that happen?

Living within cells and policed by correctional staff, incarcerated people suffer a cosmological break that threatens their relationships with everything around them. They must deal with the well-documented “social death” of prison life (Davis 2003) while simultaneously suffering from foreign animacies that bring forth bewildering unsettling mobilities.

When inanimate matter moves, it does more than challenge animacy hierarchies; simultaneously, such movement signifies aliveness to many DEF incarcerated people, thereby forcing them to feel movement in unsettling ways. What counts as alive entangles with animacies and materialities to produce unsettling mobilities, which many feel cannot be fully controlled, if at all. For incarcerated people, not-alive materials such as walls and floors exist within animacy hierarchies where humans supposedly reign supreme, even if they are “locked up and locked down.” The division between Life and Nonlife (or alive and not-alive) does not exist within a vacuum, nor can its truth be discovered “out there” in some world (X-Files be damned). Elizabeth A. Povinelli’s (2016: 4) concept of geontopower – “discourses, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife” – makes clear the social work inherent in this divide. It is created and maintained by power relations that mark particular matter as alive Subjects and the rest as not-alive Objects. Many euro-american peoples situate those called Human, itself contested and negotiated, firmly in the alive Subject category and atop the hierarchy (Alaimo 2010; Povinelli 2015; Todd 2016). Eventually, DEF incarcerated people find themselves questioning their dominion over everyday materials when non-life begins to move and disobey the natural order of things.

These unnatural movements mainly manifest in moving walls and painful vibrations that people reckon with daily. Mr. Johnson, an African-American man incarcerated for two years, informed me:

I try to get the walls to stop moving by throwing my hands all around me and kicking my feet away from me. It works sometimes because the more you move the less you feel the tingles or vibrations of the stuff around you. COs think you’re crazy, but the floor feels more stable when the walls stop moving. If the walls begin to move in on you then you know you’re about to crumble...It’s like a gunshot. You hear that and you run and hide. But there’s nowhere to hide here. The walls move and you’re stuck, feeling them come at you. The worst part is
when the walls move with your breath. Every time you breathe, the walls get closer and your chest feels tight. That’s the worst because you can’t tell where the walls end and your body begins.

Mr. Johnson explains that his breath enjoins with his cell walls when he feels the tinges or vibrations of the materials around him. His body melds with the concrete until it is difficult to distinguish between the two. By feeling the walls move when they are not supposed to, his confinement manifests entanglements with materials that constrict his breath and make non-animate materials seem more alive than his own body. Worse, when he breathes, the walls move with his body, encroaching upon him closer with each inhalation. When the mechanized doors open and slam shut or when correctional staff walk along the unit floors, the vibrations of movement enfold many captives in painful grasps hidden from those living outside prison cells.

When people first mentioned inanimate movement to me, I repeatedly asked what it meant when walls moved, because I couldn’t understand what that felt like or even visualize this reality. I did not see moving walls, nor did I feel the movements these individuals lived every day. Mr. Crawford, a euro-american man incarcerated for over two decades and serving a life sentence, explained:

It’s like when you put a marshmallow in a microwave. It puffs up as it’s being heated and fills the space more and more until you worry that it will explode. The walls move like that. They puff out at ya and then slowly go back to normal as you find ways to cope. I don’t worry about it so much anymore because I know how to control it better now. You just start doing something like writing letters to friends and family and it slows down or goes away. I feel for the guys who don’t have that though. They’re the ones you gotta worry about. They’ll break down and then come at ya like a wild animal.

A few incarcerated people used the marshmallow example when I asked them to explain how walls move. What became clear about this type of movement is that measuring tapes don’t matter. I saw people living inside their small cells, an already unimaginable existence to me, but their cells become even smaller as the walls move in, constricting until there was only a few cubic feet of room to breathe, eat, write letters, go to the bathroom, and pray. As the walls puffed like a marshmallow in a microwave, DEF captives felt trapped in smaller and smaller spaces and often couldn’t figure out where the boundaries of their bodies existed.

Many captives attempted to regulate their breathing as a result of the moving walls, and resented staff who generated vibrations unnecessarily. Attempting to survive what many first assume to be a panic attack, they breathe slowly, close their eyes, and remain still. Unfortunately, the walls keep moving, and the floor tosses in waves. This is not a panic attack, as Mr. Sanchez, then incarcerated for four years, explains:

It really feels like you’re on the ocean. The floor is bucking and the walls are closing in. You just lose it, man. You do anything to stop that feeling. You look
out your window, hoping it will stop. But then you see COs and animals moving around and they seem to be moving so fast while you’re stuck in this cell. It’s like time slows down here and the world speeds up. You feel trapped because time ain’t moving and you feel everything else moving around you while you stuck. Your bones feel like jelly when that happens.

Many men viscerally feel walls moving, “jelly bones,” and time slowing down in their bodies. Mr. Johnson explains that walls can move with bodily breath. Mr. Sanchez informs us that bones feel like jelly as the walls close in and the floor moves like waves on an ocean. And time slows down for many of these men. These painful moments feel as if they may never end because time becomes sluggish, slowly crawling along as supposedly inanimate materials move all around them. The vibrations in the walls and floors merge with incarcerated bodies in ways that confuse body and material distinctions, generating unsettling mobilities often unnoticed by those not living in prison.

Most DEF incarcerated people find small ways to survive the visceral onslaught of punishment. Captives squeeze their bodies with their arms when they think no one is paying attention. They sit quietly, trying to ignore everyone and everything around them. They also exercise to keep physically fit, to fight movements that destroy their bodies, but also to feel different bodily movements. But these practices do not always keep walls from moving as they breath. Eventually, most people crumble. Mr. Ramirez tried all of these practices, and many others that I will discuss in chapter five, to no avail. Eventually, he fell to his knees, kicked at the walls, and attacked correctional officers who could not understand what he felt. Mr. Thomas would later tell me that he was pretty sure that the walls kept moving as COs dragged Mr. Ramirez out of the prison unit.

Not all incarcerated people feel the walls move in painful ways. Native Americans never spoke of walls moving or feeling as if their breath moved with concrete structures around them. Diné peoples constitute the clear majority of Indigenous people at the DEF, and reside mostly in Level III and IV security rankings.12 Whereas African-American, Caucasian, and Latinx people kicked and punched at the air in their cells, I never observed Diné peoples doing this. But many felt vibrations in everything around them. Mr. Samson, incarcerated for 12 years explains:

I’ve had a lot of convicts ask me about moving walls, but I don’t know what they mean. The walls have never moved on me, but they vibrate. There’s a hum to this place. It gets louder the longer you’ve been locked up. You don’t just hear it though. It’s not like an annoying sound buzzing in your ear. You feel it in your bones. It’s like everything is vibrating and you can’t make it stop. I don’t think it’s meant to stop. It makes you so angry that sometimes you just rage at

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12 At the DEF, Indigenous peoples make up the second largest majority population after Latinx peoples. Overall in the united states, Indigenous peoples represent approximately 1 percent of all those incarcerated, including jails and prisons (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). In contrast, DEF Indigenous peoples make up approximately 10 percent of the total population, with Diné peoples accounting for almost 7 percent of that total.
people…Other times you just lie in your cell, hoping it will go away. But it never does.

While Diné people did not feel walls moving with their breath, they did feel vibrations in their bones and they could not make it stop. Instead, they attempted to lie in their cells, alone, or attack others in fits of rage. But these actions often made their lives worse, as Mr. Samson continues:

Being alone in your cell doesn’t really solve anything. Sometimes you want to be by yourself because you’re tired of being around the same people every damn day. But eventually that feeling gets worse and you have to find a way to be with people to try to make it better. It’s like you’re stuck in here and you really don’t like anyone, but if you try to go it alone, you break quicker. Sometimes you just have to find someone or something that allows you to do your own time in a way that keeps your body from breaking.

Diné DEF incarcerated people’s bodies break quicker if they can’t find a way to do their “own time,” but living alone in a tiny cell manifests movements that continuously vibrate. Mr. Samson finds himself between concrete rocks and hard choices: hide away as best he can in his cell, contending with vibrations that might throw him into fits of rage, or “be” with people that you dislike or even possibly despise.

Mr. Samson’s comment that the vibrations aren’t “meant to stop” provides a distinct perspective about cosmological construction. Many Diné peoples do not adhere to euro-american practices that mark categories, such as animate/inanimate or alive/not-alive, based upon notions of separateness or distinctness, but instead rely upon inclusive groupings (Reichard 1944; see also Epple 1998). Diné DEF people already understand their material worlds as heavily interdependent, and so it should come as no surprise that many Diné individuals do not feel cosmologically upended when ‘objects’ around them interact with their daily lives. Mr. Feshad, a Diné man incarcerated for eight years, reflects:

I hear some of these white people talking ‘bout how the world is upside down and things are coming alive. That’s nonsense. They’re just used to being in control and now they understand they never were. It’s kind of funny until they freak out and ruin it for the rest of us…So many convicts forget how to do their time and then you have to check them before they get you caught up in nonsense.

When I asked him why non-Indigenous people of color experienced some of the same feelings as their white comrades, he told me that too many “Blacks and Mexicans forgot what the world actually was before white people told them what they think it is.” Mr. Feshad echoes Kim Tallbear’s (2015: 234) assertion that, …Indigenous peoples have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives. In addition, for
many indigenous peoples, their nonhuman others may not be understood in even
critical Western frameworks as *living*. “Objects” and “forces” such as stones,
thunder, or stars are known within our ontologies to be sentient and knowing
persons.

From an Indigenous person’s perspective, human and nonhuman relationships and matter itself
intertwine with one another, often in indistinguishable ways to euro-american peoples, and
hierarchical human-animal or human-material object category constructions are avoided, or at
least attempted to be avoided (Tallbear 2015). But Mr. Samson’s comment that vibrations aren’t
“meant to stop” has another meaning. The world he inhabits is heavily interdependent with
relationships many would call nonhuman, but living within a small cell forces him into closer
relationships with these materials than he desires. He, like many of his Indigenous and non-
Indigenous brethren, has been violently displaced from his social and material landscapes, and
placed in new surroundings as a form of punishment. Painful vibrations manifest and continue
unabated for years, torturing bodies often through pulsating bones. The walls may not move in
surprising ways, but everyday materials still generate unsettling mobilities to great anguish.

Many non-incarcerated people assume that walls don’t move, and that people hallucinate
these actions, or suffer some type of psychological disorder due to their imprisonment or an
undiagnosed pre-existing mental condition. Some may even believe that captives lie about these
feelings in search of sympathy that can be utilized for nefarious purposes. Most people I met
refused to speak openly about moving walls and vibrating bones because of fears that no one
would believe them or that they would appear weak. So, most captives only brought up the topic
in the privacy of one-on-one interviews and with the promise that I wouldn’t use their real names
when I write. Importantly, Mr. Thomas’s and Mr. Ramirez’s feelings that the walls move toward
them result not from some type of psychotic break or imaginings, but rather due to the violent
and continuous assault of living in a cell for most of their days, where doors slam, correctional
officers stare, and painful vibrations envelop their bodies. Unsettling mobilities manifest as
consequences of everyday materials – structures that literally confine bodies – seeming to come
alive or incarcerated people being forced into undesired relationships with these same materials.
Most captives believe that walls and floors are not supposed to move and that their bodies should
not enmesh with the materiality of the prison. Breath shouldn’t move with walls.

But still, many people sense not-alive matter coming alive through unsettling movements.
Non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike reside within cells that can spatially constrict at any
moment, as unsettling mobilities penetrate their bodies through breath or vibrations. As physical
movement signifies aliveness for many DEF captives, they must grapple with what their
restricted movement means for their everyday lives. As their breath moves with walls and as
floors toss them around, they face a world in which they are not as alive as the structures that
confine them. Forced to question just how alive they are, DEF captives’ sense of mobility
unsettles as a result of asymmetrical power relations between themselves and everyone and
everything else. As Mr. Ruiz informs us all, “You feel it in your bones, *mijo.*”
The Paper State

In the first narrative, prison administrators classify Mr. Thomas with the help of pre-made paper forms. The State corrections department utilizes classification processes to assess, monitor, and administer custody levels. New arrivals undergo an initial intake where paper and electronic forms document names, basic demographics (race, age, gender, aliases, enemies, SSN) and they are photographed and fingerprinted while staff note tattoos and other identifying marks. Staff take DNA samples and provide each person (whom they designate male) with an inmate number. Each new arrival then undergoes medical and dental screening where State medical staff take temperatures, test blood pressure, and ask each person if they have any preconditions. The Threat Action Unit meets with the new arrival and interrogates them about gang affiliations and drug usage. All data are placed on paper forms that are supposed to be uploaded into a State prison computer system, though this does not always occur. Incarcerated people then sit in their cells, alone, until they can participate in a meeting known as Orientation, where they must sign more paper forms as they meet the unit manager, case worker, and representatives from multiple programming departments. Each person is then given another paper form with their custody score based upon eight factors: history of institutional adjustment/violence, severity of current conviction, escape history, prior felony convictions, severity of prior felony convictions, alcohol/drug abuse, current age, and gang membership/activities past ten years. Points can be deducted over time, but captives often receive more points for minor and major infractions while in State custody. Throughout the entire process, incarcerated people do not get to provide input or explanations for any categories of the premade forms. Instead, they are told what they are, what they did, and, in effect, who they will always be.

As Mr. Ramirez felt the walls moving towards him, he punched at them to try to keep them away, and ripped his classification papers. When COs observed him, they saw a man moving in threatening ways, ripping State documents, arms thrashing, and tears streaming down his face. Mr. Ramirez felt these movements while workers could not comprehend them. Instead, they did what they had been trained to do. The attacked him and placed him in segregation where the walls would definitely keep moving. Through the door of his segregation cell (Level VI,

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13 A Unit Manager’s position is written in State policy as “A Corrections Administrator who is responsible for the oversight of operations at designated units within a facility. At facilities without a Classification Supervisor, the Unit Managers shall be responsible for the duties of the Classification Supervisor.” This person oversees 96 people in one prison unit. This unit consists of two separate buildings consisting of six chambers where a total of 16 people reside in each chamber. The chambers have two separate tiers of 8 people each. Unit Managers also supervise all classification processes if there is no Classification Officer.

14 DEF custody scores “constitute the assigned custody level unless an override has been requested in accordance with provisions contained” in the Classification Assessment document (DEF State Handbook). Once the initial score has been calculated, classification officers, unit managers, case workers, and programming coordinators are supposed to review incarcerated people’s paper files and digitize records every three months to ensure proper security protocols are followed. In practice, reviews often take place weeks and sometimes months after the required timeline. Documentation required for custody scoring includes official criminal justice documents, disciplinary reports (if they exist), and paperwork for all classification categories and policies (see the explanation in text). Incarcerated people can be reclassified to a lower security level every six months, though they can be placed in higher security living at any time.
where he must remain in a single-person cell 23 hours a day and placed in a cage outside for the remaining hour), I asked him why he ripped the classification papers. He advised that the papers always made him feel more stifled and that he hated keeping them in his cell. “It’s like they have this power to confine me and make other things move in ways that I can’t handle. COs also use those forms to put me in higher security living. I hate those fucking things.” In ripping his classification paper forms, Mr. Ramirez also attempted to destroy what he felt contributed to his confinement. The papers did not just represent his confinement; they made him feel confined and when he destroyed them, he felt the walls briefly stop moving, or slow down, as he regained control over his breath.

Watching these actions from outside the cells, I wondered why paper was one of the first things they grabbed when in the throes of moving walls and floors. Why paper? And what did it mean to destroy it? I observed 26 other individuals ripping and crumping these items as their breath heaved and their bodies convulsed in sweaty, uncontrollable jerks. Some men screamed guttural cries as they frantically tore at the papers, while others quietly and methodically ripped small strips until all that remained was a shredded mess. Eventually, most people sought comfort by covering their bodies with their thin, blue blankets, laying on their cots with paper strewn around their cell.

I originally believed that destroying and crumping paper served as a means to deal with correctional life. A tic. I stood outside cell doors watching men shred papers for more than 20 minutes before they seemed to calm down. Thinking of a made-for-TV mini-series I saw as a teenager (“The Langoliers”) where a character would tear paper into smaller and smaller pieces when in fits of anxiety, I mentioned to Mr. Sanchez that I understood why so many people participated in these actions. He laughed at me, explaining that I didn’t really know anything and that I should pay attention to which papers the men destroyed.

Yeah, they’re not ripping papers because of some panic attack. They’re trying to calm down from all the vibrations coming at ‘em. I don’t have to worry about it so much anymore because I don’t keep those things around me. I’ve been here a while now so people know what I’m in for. They don’t have to worry about me.

Mr. Sanchez was referring to the fact that he was not a Sex Offender – an adult man convicted of molesting or raping a child (a point I’ll come back to in a later chapter). Prison administrators utilize classification papers to place incarcerated people at what they consider the proper security level. The papers provide point values for arbitrary categories created through practices that produce individual and collective legibilities. As the narrative opening this chapter explains, State officials move people through classification processes with little to no input from them. The men and women who enter the prison system must sign dozens of forms15 that work to remove context from their lives.

15 Besides Classification forms, incarcerated people must sign paperwork acknowledging they understand the DEF disciplinary system, the chain of command, and their responsibilities to keep their cells ordered according to correctional standards, as well as acknowledging the receipt of prison materials – such as clothing, hygiene products, and personal pictures and letters. These forms are then placed in a paper file, and sometimes digitized or noted in a
Susan A. Phillips (2012: 47) examines how State practices, specifically Los Angeles Police Department paperwork, create narratives of precision that “censors parts of a story, strategically remove individuals from certain social contexts, emphasize those same individuals within other contexts, and subsequently manufacture key images that justify the shape of police action.” Individuals on the punishing end of police force often contradict these narratives as partial and ignorant of all social context. And yet, the forms create legible people who exist in temporal stasis. The created individual becomes no more than their crime – itself an abstraction – which makes them legible to State systems. As James Scott (1998) makes clear, legibility is a multi-faceted process crafted for maintaining State authority. Narratives created by paper exude power frequently ignored during everyday activities. Namely, paper practices often manifest atomistic peoples and meanings that can be subjected to ‘rational’ measures including punishment.

At the DEF, prison paper practices shape social order through pre-made forms constituting what Matthew S. Hull (2012) has termed a “regime of paper documents.” Tending toward the semiotic, Hull demonstrates that government planners in urban Pakistan produce order through graphic artifacts – paper files, lists, maps – that mediate social and material relationships. These material techniques of control, shaped by high-modernist State systems (see Given 2004; Scott 1998), reconstitute social space as they simultaneously generate new meanings. But as regimes of paper travel in intended and unintended ways, people and paper produce new effects that often undermine rational State policies. In the DEF context, premade forms that construct narratives of precision circulate daily, and classification papers create carbon copies of people who do not exist. DEF captives view these materials as violence because they “lock them up and lock them down.” These papers literally control movement in ways that reverberate throughout correctional everyday living.

Correctional systems deem classification processes of the utmost importance to maintain order within prison compounds. The DEF home state created an entire policy workbook just for classification purposes where the Classification and Risk Assessment document uses some version of the words classify/classification 449 times in 125 pages. There are classification processes for intake, daily events, evaluation periods, and instructions for workers. Incarcerated people understand the focus on classification all too well because they live the consequences of bureaucratic policies even as correctional staff implement them unevenly. State workers place marked classification papers in labeled files and computer programs and provide a copy to each captive. Most workers ask incarcerated people if they want a copy before they give them one, due to budgetary constraints, and most ask for the papers even though they cause harm. Mr. Johnson explains:

We all know that it costs them money to give us them papers, so we make them give it to us. It’s one of the few things we can demand. They give us shitty food and medical [care] because they cheaping out on us. I hate those papers and

State corrections database system, which then follow them to every prison they will then inhabit. These documents also become parole files if a person is released with a required parole sentence.
destroy them the moment I get back to my cell. But I make them give it to me just the same.

As people already suffering without basic necessities, or at least being provided some necessities at bare minimum expense, they demand classification papers in response to having so many other material items taken away or restricted. Unfortunately, State papers cause incarcerated people to endure invisible pain as a direct result of these materials.

Captives at the Desert Echo Facility understand these materials as the State itself. As Mr. Thomas’ narrative can attest, correctional workers do not need incarcerated people’s input about their life, who they feel they are, their criminal activities, or their personal thoughts and emotions. Instead, workers fill out forms that classify DEF men and women based upon State-approved categories. One man likened this process to being on a job interview and having the interviewer tell you who you are and how qualified you seem to be. These papers produce specific versions of peoples, so that they can be categorized and regulated according to security levels deemed important within State corrections systems. Intelligently, people feel the paper to be the State itself, because the paper exudes power over their very existence. Further problems develop once the paper begins to vibrate, shaking DEF captives to their bones.

As classification papers violently vibrate in DEF people’s hands, they frantically rip and crumple them as fast as possible. They also feel the paper moving in their cells and often hear a hum coming from the areas where they placed them. Like moving walls and tossing floors, people feel these movements viscerally, to the point that everything else in their worlds disappears until they can cease these actions. Mr. Ramirez, seeing my confusion, implored:

You have to understand that I know this sounds crazy. But these papers vibrate. It’s like having a hundred cell phones going off at the same time and you can’t turn them off. They move and make this noise. It’s this low hum that gets louder the longer it goes…And when you pick up those papers it hurts a little bit. It’s not like someone stabbing you or nothing, but it feels like when your hands go too numb and it hurts to the point that you worry that something went wrong with your hand. The only way to make it stop is to rip those fucking things up. You have to get rid of them.

Mr. Thomas added to this exchange a few days later, saying:

Your mind gets cloudy and you can’t focus on anything until you find the problem…The papers hurt your bones. It’s like your bones vibrate with the paper. I don’t know how else to describe it, and you probably won’t believe me anyway, but I feel it happening. It hurts. Tearing up those papers makes your body feel better. You can breathe easier, at least until it starts all over again.
These men understand that to ‘outsiders’ – those who have not lived through their type of imprisonment – vibrating paper makes no sense. But they live with these feelings every day, and their torture continues with little attention directed their way.

Multiple people complained that correctional workers needlessly bother them with mailed paperwork, unprompted visits, unrequested physical and psychological examinations, and required programming such as education and addiction services. Unprompted visits entail materials bumping and sliding into and across each other, generating vibrations throughout the prison unit. Incarcerated people sign dozens of forms each week (commissary, sick calls, debit memos, classifications, etc.) and different paper forms contribute to vibrations and moving walls. Administrative classification forms create the worst vibrations. When a person receives these papers, their breath quickens, making the walls move faster and inward. Many times, their anger and panic rises not only as a result of potential correctional ramifications for write-ups, but also because their body feels worse as a result of unsettling mobilities. They cannot control how their body reacts, and often worry that they are alone in these feelings, though they also know that this cannot possibly be true. Correctional paper practices manufacture collective individuals who then agonize over the possibility that they feel their worlds in less Human ways. Their movements are only their own in the sense that they have been made to feel them, because they have no control over when correctional papers can pop up, and incarcerated people never truly know when staff will write them up for an infraction. Worse, not all staff follow the same protocols, making it extremely difficult for anyone to know which rules are rigid and which only exist ‘on paper.’ Mr. Ares, an Afro-Brazilian man incarcerated at a Level III unit for nine years explains:

These officers [COs] can write us up for any reason. You [referring to the researcher] can write me up for any reason, or get someone to do it. I know this one dude who got wrote up for jerking it in his cell. They called it self-abuse. Man, everyone does that shit. All that was, was an excuse to write up a convict they don’t like. But they don’t understand what those write-ups do. That paper adds to your points and everything, but it also makes you feel like shit. Almost like that paper has the power to lock you up longer.

These papers do not just represent the State or punishing movements. To DEF captives, these papers are the State and they are movement. Their muscles contract, their breath labors, and their bones ache. They cannot control these feelings just as they cannot control the materials and the State around them.

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16 While there are written DEF policies for mundane tasks, such as food schedules, tier time, and fraternizing between incarcerated people and staff, most correctional staff circumvent or bend rules when dealing with everyday problems. For example, some COs provide extra hygiene products (such as toilet paper, shampoo, and razors) to captives even though there is a specified limit for each item. Many COs explained that they bend some rules because it is easier than arguing with people about the “little things.” Unfortunately, COs do not bend the same rules or bend them in the same ways, making it extremely difficult for DEF captives to negotiate correctional boundaries. This often leads to increased tension when write-ups for “little things” seem to come out of nowhere from an incarcerated person’s perspective.
Papers do not come to life in the same manner as walls and floors, but they do violently vibrate until destroyed. As a result, many perceive of them as objects that can purposefully cause harm. These materials, like the State, purposefully cause pain until captives reach a breaking point. They scream and tear apart the papers hoping to end the vibrations and slow the ache in their bones. As Mr. Samson explains:

I rip the shit out of that paper to make the vibrating stop. Those things have to be destroyed for me to get any calm in my life. Sometimes you do need to keep ripping them up until there’s just tiny pieces left. It makes me feel better to know that I can stop them from piling up in my cell...It’s strange though because there’s all this movement around me and I’m just stuck in this cell...Even when you destroy the papers, everything else vibrates anyway. It’s not as bad as them papers though.

When Mr. Samson says that it makes him feel better to stop “them” from piling up in his cell, he is not just referring to “inanimate” papers or worrying about clutter. “Them” refers to the State and all the people who lock him up without a worry for how much pain it causes him. For many incarcerated people, destroying State papers is an act of destroying the State itself.

But, for Mr. Samson, the State is not a monolithic entity that functions with one purpose: I think about all these people working to harm me. There’s corrections, of course, but there’s also paper pushers and bureaucrats who kind of do what they want a lot of the time. I expect the worst from them because they get paid for this. What really gets me going is how all those people “out there” [outside the prison compound] know we are locked up and they are totally fine with it...There’s an evilness to that. But they just go about their day as if everything is normal.

Without reading, but taking a page from, Akhil Gupta (2012), Mr. Samson argues that States are made up of people who don’t work with the same intentions, though intentions don’t matter if the outcomes create pain and suffering for people such as himself. He also shrewdly observes how people who do not live on a prison compound ignore the evils being done in their name and with their complicity.17 He despises State workers, but judges everyday citizens more harshly because they don’t even lock him up for the money. From his perspective, as wrapped in capitalistic frameworks as it is, State workers are just doing their job because the larger public

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17 Hannah Arendt’s classic text *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) focuses on the contradiction between Adolf Eichmann’s monstrous acts, and his “average” appearance and banal bureaucratic language. After recounting his trial where Eichmann was charged with Crimes Against Humanity for his genocidal actions during World War II, she declares that despite his supposed “normalness,” he lacked any moral responsibility, allowing him to justify atrocities in which he initiated and participated and to boast about horrific events that never occurred. Arendt was particularly interested in his lack of empathy and remorse for the hundreds of thousands of people he sent to death. Mr. Samson claim that there is an evilness about non-incarcerated people going about their day as if there is something completely “normal” about millions suffering incarceration is reminiscent of Arendt’s claims. For Mr. Samson, the banality of evil continues around him unabated as non-incarcerated people exhibit empty emotional landscapes.
demands it. For Mr. Samson and most of his brethren, the State is everyone who is not or has never been forced to live in a prison.

In sum, because DEF captives understand classification papers as the State itself, paper takes on new meanings and feelings for them. These materials do not just signify or represent a State, but rather, they are the very people, with all their intentions, that make up the State itself. In destroying their classification papers – the very materials that turn captives from embodied beings to paper peoples – they tear apart the those who do violence to them. It quiets their breath and the ache in their bones. This act of destruction is a power move in that men and women demand to create their own identities and desire to take some control over their lives. Where narratives of precision generate decontextualized images and life histories utilizing paper, incarcerated people upend these narratives by destroying the very materials and people that perpetuate violence against them. Unfortunately, destroying classification papers might make materials stop vibrating, but their bodies already feel their worlds anew.

**Mobility Matters**

Mr. Thomas felt the sunlight burn the back of his neck as he kneeled to pick up a few pieces of trash the correctional officer had purposefully thrown to the ground. He didn’t get angry about the CO’s actions because it gave him something to do. Working on his sanitation detail allowed him to be outside more than other men and he was not going to allow one CO’s actions to bother him. He continued to sweep dirt off the walkways and into the small, rectangle openings cut into the concrete. He smiled as he completed this task and felt a sense of accomplishment waft over him. As he looked up towards the cloudless sky, squinting in the brightness of the sun, he heard a commotion coming from his unit door. As the wind smashed into fences creating loud jangly noises, he turned to see CO Hernandez holding something small in his hand and looking distraught. He moved closer until the CO looked up with a glare that made it perfectly clear to the captive that he should not come any closer. But from this distance Mr. Thomas could see the CO was holding a baby bird that had probably fallen out of a nest just above the unit entrance. Clearly upset about the bird’s inevitable death, CO Hernandez looked softly at the creature, while Mr. Thomas tried to keep rage bursting from his body.

DEF captives at the Desert Echo Facility asked that I pay attention to how “they lock us up and lock us down” to understand exactly what their incarceration entails. As exhibited in the introduction and with examples in this chapter, the DEF architecturally marks physical movement as a central means of control – most people live inside individual cells and everyday relations and materials, from concrete to paper, restrict their physical movement as a form of punishment. But Mr. Ruiz pointed out that locking people down in these ways and with these materials is not just about controlling movement or restricting access to relations of all kinds. Mobility at the DEF entails amplifying particular relationships that often challenge cosmological preconceptions in detrimental ways to those already most vulnerable in the facility. These men and women ask us to pay attention because they believe no one looks their way or tries to understand what they endure. Correctional workers do not feel incarcerated peoples’ worlds, and
non-imprisoned individuals cannot possibly imagine what incarceration feels like in this context. To pay attention is not an angry demand, though their anger is understandable, but rather a plea for understanding and empathy.

With all the scholarly imaginings of everything suddenly being queerly alive (Munoz 2015), anthropologists must grapple with what counts as alive and how this feels in different contexts. For DEF captives, destabilizing cosmologies is not as romantic as many academics wish it to be. In fact, it can be violently disrupting for their relationships and their bodies. While correctional workers unevenly implement penal policies and practices that center on controlling and restricting physical movement, they do so in ways that amplify undesirable unsettling mobilities to torturous effects. For many incarcerated people, walls moving signifies aliveness at the exact moments their physical movement becomes constrained and constricted. When movement signifies aliveness, it may be understandable why some people feel as if they are being pushed down an animacy hierarchy while questioning what their worlds mean and their place within them. In an idyllic world, captives situate atop a natural order where alive Subjects like themselves are mobile, while all other Objects remain immobile, or have their movements controlled. For these men and women, mobility matters more than ever.

This chapter opened with Mr. Thomas feeling a bird hop around metal fences just outside his window. His walls began to move and his forehead produced sweat as time slowed. But he managed these feelings by writing letters and attempting to maintain a world that had been radically altered from his previous one, demonstrating that DEF captives do not just exist as tortured bodies or people incapable of refashioning mobility. They create new practices and feelings that generate novel relationships, an idea that I turn to in chapter five. But incarcerated people are not alone on the prison compound. Correctional staff work long hours and live amongst the captives for a large portion of their days. These workers directly control incarcerated peoples’ movements even as this work damages their own bodies and relationships. More troubling for Mr. Thomas, a dying bird caused a CO a moment of sympathy not usually offered to someone like himself. If mobility matters, we must now look to the labor involved in constantly managing mobility and the consequences for doing so.