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Time After Time: Imprisonment, Re-entry and Enduring Temporariness

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Introduction

Perhaps inevitably, given the scale and impact of 'mass incarceration' in the USA, much attention is now being paid to the processes of re-entry and re/integration after imprisonment. For example, Reuben Miller's (2021) important new book, *Halfway Home*, is centrally concerned with the 'afterlife of mass incarceration' (as its subtitle makes clear). Miller chooses the term 'afterlife' to make an explicit connection between the

Fergus McNeill drafted this chapter, before the other named authors read and commented on the draft. More broadly, the learning generated in the Distant Voices project was the product of a much wider collaborative effort that includes our core group and the community of enquiry from which it is drawn. Though the responsibility for this chapter rests with the named authors, we wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the core group and the community of enquiry.

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history and legacy of slavery in the USA and the development of what he calls the 'supervised society'; one in which people of colour continue to be disproportionately trapped in 'carceral citizenship' (Miller & Stuart, 2017). As such, their emancipation—from both slavery and imprisonment—is only ever partial. For people of colour leaving prison, their lives remain confined and constrained in multifarious ways. In making these connections between slavery, imprisonment and supervision, Miller's work clearly fits with the historical strand of 'time and punishment' scholarship discussed in the editors' introduction; Miller connects racialised injustice in the past and in the present of the USA.[1]

Our focus in this paper is somewhat different. The title—'Time After Time'—alludes not to the historical production and reproduction of injustice but rather to the existential challenges associated with *doing* time in the community after *doin*g time in prison. To borrow again from the editors' introduction, drawing on Hassard (1990), our focus is on the 'Kairos' of experienced time, not the 'Chronos' of clock-time. Our central claim is that the temporal rupture that imprisonment causes continues to be felt long after release; in other words, imprisonment has its own 'afterlife', or perhaps its own 'after-shock'.

That said, the interactions between doing time in and after prison are not straightforwardly linear or chronological. For example, how a prisoner imagines present life outside prison and how they anticipate future life after prison will affect how their imprisonment is experienced in the present. So, it is not just the past that shapes the present and the future; the (anticipated) future also shapes the present. Moreover, as we will see below, part of the present work of imprisonment (and of 'rehabilitation') concerns reviewing the past and rewriting the future.

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In the next section, we briefly review the few sources that have examined time and temporalities in re-entry and re/integration to date. We then introduce the contexts and methods of the research project on which we draw here to explore these issues further. In the third section, we discuss one creative process and output of that project, through which two participants initially explored these questions. We then go on to present three sections that identify and analyse different 'travails' of penal time that emerged from our data via collaborative analysis. Importantly, we did not structure our inquiry to explore or test or develop theories or conceptualisations of time and temporalities; rather, time and temporalities emerged inductively as themes as we reviewed and discussed our data together. We then looked to the literature to help us make sense of what we had found. Our main aim here is simply to share and interpret these findings, with a view to encouraging further work in this neglected area; we neither aim nor claim to offer a theory of post-prison temporalities.

We use the term 'travails' in this paper to stress the significant, difficult and active work involved in addressing the temporal challenges that punishment creates. This is not to say that these travails are solely temporal; rather, each of them involves motion through (or stasis in) *both* time *and* space while these fundamental dimensions of human experience are affected by the exercise of penal power. As Robinson (this volume) explores, drawing on Lewis and Wiegert (1981), our lives are 'embedded' within fields or structures; and this embeddedness is both spatial and temporal. State punishment—in the form of imprisonment—rips people from one field and forces their spatial and temporal embeddedness in another; release from prison produces another rupture.

Respectively, the three travails we discuss below include (1) the struggles caused by 'de-synchrony' between time inside and outside of prison and the problems of 're-synchrony' that it creates; (2) the contestation of 'readiness' for progression and release; and (3) the problem of living post-release with the paradox of 'enduring temporariness'. In our conclusion, we argue that tackling these three challenges requires people re-entering society to travel not just through spaces and to places but also through time, both backwards and forwards; and we argue that these journeys are very often difficult and sometimes dangerous.

Doing Time After Time

Given the proliferation of literature about re-entry, it is perhaps surprising that very little attention has been paid to its temporal dimensions. Understandably perhaps, work has tended to focus on how, in what condition and with what support people are released; where and to whom they go; and what kind of reception they receive. In other words, much of the literature focusses on systems and practices of re-entry, on its socio-spatial environments and on its social and relational contexts (e.g., Western, 2018).

That said, there are a few important contributions that have begun to attend to the temporal dimensions of re/integration. Moran (2012), for example, building on the work of Wahidin (2002), analyses how Russian women prisoners' accounts of imprisonment and re/integration reveal that prison time is very often "inscribed' on the body' (Moran, 2012: 564). Though these inscriptions come in diverse forms, some of which are more concealable than others, her analysis suggests that they often present significant re-entry problems for the women, commonly related to risks of stigmatisation. To avoid these risks, many of the women tried to conceal, change, or remedy these inscriptions; for example, by paying for expensive dental work required to address the adverse effects of rudimentary dental care (or lack of care) in Russian prisons. Moran (2012: 579) concludes:

> the inscription of prison time on the body has significance not only during incarceration… but also after release, in that released prisoners feel most keenly the inscription of prison time on their bodies, through their anxieties before release, their adjustment to everyday life on the outside, and critically, the stigma attached to their loss of teeth as a marker of imprisonment. (Moran, 2012: 579)

Other research attests to the associations between imprisonment, morbidity and mortality (e.g., Fazel & Baillargeon, 2012); a theme to which we will return below. Some recent studies have begun to suggest

that people in prison are vulnerable to 'accelerated aging'[1]; the biological clock may tick more swiftly for prisoners than others, shortening their post-prison lives (Wahidin, 2002). But while ageing may be accelerated for prisoners, prison time itself is often experienced as *de*celerated (see also Earle, 2021). As Moran (2012: 570) notes:

> Women interviewed in prison described the concerns they had about life on the outside, mainly expressing these in terms of needing to *'catch up'* with the changes that would have happened while they had been away. *[emphasis added]*

So, prisoners may be ageing (and dying) more swiftly while living more slowly; so much so that adjustment to the pace of life outside becomes a significant concern.

In Durnescu's (2019) recent study of re-entry in Romania, he tracked 58 men released from Jilava prison, just outside Bucharest. The men were interviewed on the day of release, after one week out, after one month out, after three months and after six months. The interviews focussed on daily experiences, obstacles and challenges, opportunities and resources, identity issues and future plans. Durnescu's use of repeated interviews (and other methods) allowed him to chart the temporal ordering of the inter-related and compounding 'pains of release and re-entry' that the men experienced.

In the first month, echoing the worries of the Russian women prisoners discussed above, the men struggled with adapting to their new environments, even where these environments had once been familiar. They faced challenges in adjusting to family life, to the busy-ness of life outside and to the ubiquity of digital technology. At the same time, they struggled to engage with state officials to get identity papers or claim benefits, commonly finding these bureaucratic processes impossibly complex and often futile. Even where formal rights to assistance existed, it was practically impossible to claim or secure that help. Many of the men were also in poor health, some with conditions associated with poor prison food, sanitation, ventilation, health care or regimes.

[1] See: https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/249208/Prisons-and-Health,-19-The-older-prisoner-and-complex-chronic-medical-care.pdf, accessed 8th November 2021.

The older men in the study reported severe social isolation and loneliness. In the second and third months, these problems conspired to plunge many of the men into extreme poverty. Even those who found work typically earned wages that barely supported their basic subsistence needs. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that some of the men struggled to avoid further offending.

After the first three months, the men reported problems of stigmatisation. This could come in the form of pity or in the form of blame but was most often related to problems finding work. The men also related 'pains of instability' and a sense of 'walking on thin ice'. Without work, many found themselves forced to move from place to place, producing a life lived in transit between short stays with different relatives or friends. For some, this was linked to the feeling of being an outcast; a feeling made worse where people had problems securing identity papers and medical care. Durnescu's work begins to reveal how the material, social, spatial and relational dynamics of reintegration are both inter-related and temporally ordered.

Bruce Western's (2018) recent book, *'Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison'*, is based on similar research in Boston, USA. Western and his team of researchers tracked 122 men and women using a variety of methods to collect data about their lives and experiences. There is much in Western's book that resonates with Durnescu's findings. Focussing here on the issue of re-entry processes or 'transitions' (as he calls them), Western (2018) notes that the first few weeks out of prison are typically 'bewildering and awkward' (p. 27); stress, nervousness and loneliness can be experienced as overwhelming. As in Durnescu's study, some people struggle to adapt and readjust to everyday situations like crowds, using public transport or shopping, and many struggle with managing the many appointments they need to keep to secure help and comply with supervision. Thus, even the basic practicalities of 'getting home and getting established' can be very hard to manage. In this crucial first phase, family support can and does help. Conversely, problems with drugs and alcohol tend to make things worse.

Beyond the first few weeks, Western charts the challenges of securing 'community membership', as reflected in establishing a family life, a place

to stay and a means of subsistence (whether through work or public assistance). Re-making a place in a family from which a person has been absent is difficult. Tensions in families can surface or re-surface; former prisoners can feel like a burden, especially when denied the means to contribute materially. In Western's study, older women played key roles in providing support, and such support was also connected with housing stability. Overall, though, half of the participants in Western's study were still in insecure housing (or homeless) six months after release. Almost half had found work within two months of release; but older participants and those with addiction issues were unlikely to find work.

In his conclusion, Western (2018: 185) argues:

> The mission of social integration in the aftermath of crime creates a broad test for criminal justice policy: does it encourage community membership or does it deepen social exclusion? Many staples of American justice fail this test. Fines and fees for cost recovery, pretrial detention for want of bail, criminal record disqualifications for government benefits, revocations of probation and parole for technical violations—all fail the test of social integration.

In other words, these important studies, like many other re-entry studies, suggest that, rather than progressing steadily (and in a linear fashion) towards re/integration, people move from the liminality of imprisonment to the limbo of incarceration's afterlife (Miller, 2021). Indeed, where there is movement, it is as likely to move regressive as progressive (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), meaning that people seem to face what we describe below as the paradox of 'enduring temporariness', with all of the precarity and vulnerability that this condition entails.

In relation to reintegration then, time is not only a key dimension to think about but it is also a sensitising lens to think through.

Distant Voices: Context and Methods

For many decades, both in criminology and in criminal justice, there has been a focus on the 'correction' or individual 'rehabilitation' of prisoners and probationers (Raynor & Robinson, 2009). Some have criticised the concept of rehabilitation as a 'penal imaginary' (Carlen, 2008, 2013)—a convenient fiction and a fig-leaf to cover the embarrassment of punishment's de-habilitating and dis-integrating realities. Others have drawn attention to aspects and models of rehabilitation that extend beyond individual transformation, insisting on a broader conceptualisation that attends to restored legal and political rights and social relations (McNeill, 2012, 2014).

With this wider conceptualisation of rehabilitation and re/integration in mind, the origins of 'Distant Voices: Coming Home' lie in precursor projects which revealed both the importance of *social* re/integration after punishment, and the profound difficulties associated with securing it, particularly within hostile environments (McNeill & Urie, 2020; Urie et al., 2019). The studies discussed in the preceding section attest to the extent and complexity of these difficulties.

Between 2017 and 2021, Distant Voices was a partnership between the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and the West of Scotland, and the arts organisation Vox Liminis,[2] which hosted both the practice and the community through which we learned. In disciplinary terms, the project spanned community development, criminology, music, politics and public policy, deliberately blurring boundaries between creative practice, research, knowledge exchange and public engagement. At the project's inception, we aimed to explore whether and how creative processes might enable a more constructive, affective engagement with questions of crime, punishment and re/integration and might even change the way that people returning from prison are received (cf. McNeill, 2019: 148). With these ends in mind, songwriting and song-sharing seemed a potentially powerful approach for both exploration and action (for more detail, see Crockett Thomas et al., 2020, 2021; Urie et al., 2019).

[2] See: www.voxliminis.co.uk, accessed 25th May 2021.

The project's fieldwork involved 21 two- or three-day workshops which took place between July 2017 and July 2019.[3] Thirteen of these took place in Scottish prisons (one open and three closed institutions which, between them, hold men and women and adults and young people) and eight in community settings in Glasgow and in Inverness. In these workshops (called 'Vox Sessions'), we used collaborative songwriting to support a range of differently situated people (all with experience of the criminal justice system) to creatively explore questions of punishment and reintegration together. In total, we worked with 153 people to produce 150 original songs.

The analysis in this paper includes but extends beyond consideration of specific songs, exploring how questions of time and temporality recurred throughout the project. Hence, we draw on a range of data; not just song recordings, song lyrics and song introductions developed with the co-writers but also interviews with participants and the researchers' ethnographic field-notes. The analysis builds on a systematic open coding of the data undertaken by Phil Crockett Thomas using NVivo software.

Distant Voices was guided by a 'Core Group' of about 16 people with direct experience of the justice system as prisoners and/or supervisees, family members or practitioners, or from related academic, creative and/or community projects. Discussions within the Core Group informed the evolving design and conduct of the research, and our approach to analysis. Within the Core Group, Jo Collinson Scott also drew on her expertise in 'practice-as-research' (Nelson, 2006) to develop a novel approach that we called TREEs: 'Tiny Research Enquiries and Explorations'.[4] TREEs usually involved individual core group members, or pairs of members, in following lines of enquiry that struck them as interesting, often using creative methods. This paper has evolved from one such TREE, which we discuss briefly in the next section.

Ethical approval for the research was sought and obtained both from the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of

[3] For more extensive discussions of these workshop and the project design see (Crockett Thomas et al., 2020; McNeill and Urie, 2020; Urie et al., 2019).

[4] For those interested, Jo intends publishing more about the evolution of this method soon, including on her blog, 'Songwriting as Research': https://songwritingstudies.com/songwriting-as-research/, accessed 12th April 2022.

Glasgow and from the Research Ethics and Access Committee of the Scottish Prison Service.

The Time TREE

The 'Time TREE' involved Fergus McNeill (the project's principal investigator and a criminologist) and Louis Abbott (the project's Creative Lead and a musician and songwriter). It was inspired by a Core Group workshop in August 2018 at which we collaboratively analysed data from a songwriting session that had taken place in HMP Castle Huntly (Scotland's only open prison) six months earlier. The Core Group members noticed that time, timing and temporariness were recurring themes in the data from that session; indeed, these issues recurred in many sessions throughout the project. Informed by this exercise in collaborative analysis of one session, our NVivo coding framework developed to include several time-related codes; 'memory or past', 'change', 'future or carpe diem', 'time pressures' and 'time wasted or suspended'.

These Core Group discussions first prompted the recognition that re/integration after imprisonment is not just about who and where people return to but also about *when*. The separation produced by imprisonment is not only spatial—it is also temporal—and, as we discuss further in the next section, that means that coming home often involves a struggle to re-synchronise with life outside. Initially, Fergus followed up on these ideas by reading some criminological sources related to time and punishment (most of them discussed below); he summarised these papers and added some of his own thoughts to a short paper which he shared with Louis. At the same time, Fergus also produced a piece of creative writing entitled 'Her: Him: Us' in which he tried to explore how time plays differently for families of prisoners, for prisoners and for the rest of 'us', i.e., those who are not directly affected and who may be oblivious to these temporal struggles.

Her: Him: Us

Her:

Baby lights, at first in green staccato beats
They flicker, one, three, two
Then to a rising roar: eight red
The colour that calls me from my bed
How quickly can I warm and mix
His formula, his micro-fix?
Fluffy-slippered and towelling-gowned
I rush to sate his appetite

And you, attuned to different beats
Awake or in carcerated sleep?
The thrum of water in rusty pipes
The buzz of cell-block all-night lights
The cries of first-night prison fears
The long-drops of tie-sundering tears

You're locked inside a different drum
Beaten by its rhythm sticks
You dance their ersatz muzak tune
Learning to twist and turn their tricks

Him:

I stare at dust-specks in the dullest air
Imagining dark-sky constellations
I try to dream a galaxy of suns
To warm these cells and colour greys
But warp is weft, and thrice cleft
I cannot slip the knot of waking
The stillness makes it tighter still
There is no change they'll mark or measure

While you, attuned to different beats
Lie deep or in disrupted sleep
In shampooed scent from fresh-air sheets
Your fuss and fret so quick to reach
The wail of woken infant fears
And dry fresh-fallen baby tears

You're dancing to a different drum
It tells you when and how to move
Lock-stepping to a true-love tune
You've changed, and no-one asked for proof

Us:

For 'us', the time is really flying
Outside the window we see in passing
Reservoirs shining like mercury pools
Then later, cities veined by Christmas lights
We watched the first film, the second and the third
Ate meals, drank drinks, and meals and drinks
But those giant leaps of long-haul travelling
Ended stock-still at the final step: the disembarking

While you, attuned to different beats
Wonder how each other sleep,
With soured breath and flattened hair
We wind and wait and whine and stare
The ones ahead so glacially slow
While we're desperate for our welcome homes

We're trained to dance to different drums
That tell us we have no need to move
Time's labour is lost and, unchanged,
Our standstill is the living proof.

Louis explored the same issues not through words, but via sound. He describes his process and contribution as follows:

> In its early stages the musical ideas I was working on and the text Fergus had written were living separately. We had discussed the ways in which I could manipulate recorded sounds on Pro Tools [music production software] using plugins like 'Time Expansion/Compression'—the ability to stretch or squeeze a soundwave. I experimented with a simple, repeated pattern of notes and played about with them at different tempos, keeping the pitch the same. Doing so reminded me of a piece written for string orchestra (and bell) by Estonian composer, Arvo Part, which is essentially a canon; a cascading melody line starting at different speeds and octaves as it passes through the orchestra. This became the basis for the punchline of the piece (3.45s) with several, differently paced, descending lines played on a synthesiser. I also manipulated some 'field' recordings of household objects and time stretched those; a ticking clock, a burning candle. The piece finishes with the pulsing of an ultrasound recording of a baby's heartbeat.

The combination of Fergus's spoken words and Louis's soundscape can be heard here: https://soundcloud.com/voxliminis/sets/time-after-time/s-OOqKIeAhe73?si=8af57698730e4c5b9c64eba1f8209973&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing. The piece they made together speaks directly to the first of the three travails discussed below. All the songs mentioned below are also available via the same SoundCloud link.

Travails of Synchrony, De-synchrony and Re-synchrony

The Time TREE highlights and creatively explores a relatively commonplace finding of prisons research: for many prisoners, part of the process of adaptation to prison life, and one of the main ways they 'do time', is by focussing on the here and now, on life inside (see O'Donnell, this volume). To be preoccupied with life outside—and to try to sustain an awareness of its routines and rhythms—is likely to be painful. As the words above put it, the prisoner is 'trapped inside a different drum', while his partner is 'attuned to a different beat' (the beat set by their newborn baby). O'Donnell (2014), for example, writes about the 'Sundering of

Ties' (with the outside world) as a means of securing psychological survival:

> Visits can make time harder to serve because they jolt prisoners back to an alternative reality that is often an unhappy reminder of their predicament. They are memento mori. Contacts with the outside world signal that while people that they care about are moving forward in time, the prisoner's development is arrested. (O'Donnell, 2014: 196)

The notion of 'time arrested' features famously in Denise Riley's (2019) poetic essay, 'Time Lived, Without its Flow', in which she reflects on the temporal rupture caused by the sudden death of her adult son:

> But how could such a striking condition ever be voiced? It runs wildly counter to everything that I'd thought we could safely assume about lived time. So this 'arrested time' is also a question about what is describable; about the linguistic limits of what can be conveyed. I'm not keen on conceding to any such limits. Yet it seems that the possibilities for describing, and the kinds of temporality that you inhabit, may be intimately allied. For there do turn out to be 'kinds', in the plural. (Riley, 2019: 14)

While we recognise problems in drawing too close a parallel between these two situations, both involve profound losses, and both can plunge those affected into struggles to adjust and adapt to new, undesired and unexpected temporalities which are experienced as being different from those of the world around them. And perhaps we can hope that the songs discussed below can communicate more about this condition than words alone.

For example, the editors' introduction to this volume mentions O'Donnell's (2014) taxonomy of seven ways that prisoners truncate time; by *rescheduling* it into manageable blocks; by *removing* it through absorption in everyday tasks; by *reducing* their consciousness of it, for example, by sleeping; by *reorienting* themselves to live in the present; by *resisting* the prison system and its temporalities in more or less overt ways; by finding *'raptness'* in the flow of absorbing activities (like art) and by *reinterpreting* the meaning of prison time. As O'Donnell (2014)

notes, not all strategies are available to all prisoners—and prisoners who can manage none of them are often vulnerable to self-harm and suicide. Importantly, Crewe et al. (2017), in exploring the experiences of life sentence prisoners in England, noted that they used different strategies at different stages of their sentences; in the early stages of their sentences, most tried to avoid thinking about time in general (and in particular the time ahead of them), preferring to live in the moment. But amongst those further on in their sentences, responses were more mixed: some accepted the flow of prison time, finding some agency in actively 'swimming with the tide' rather than against it.

In a Vox session at HMP Barlinnie in January 2019, 'Lee'[5] wrote a song called 'Autopilot' in collaboration with musician Jill O'Sullivan. Autopilot vividly illustrates some of these strategies, both lyrically and sonically.

Lee introduces the song as follows:

> My song is more about the state of mind you need to cope with prison life. A way of being, a way of living while being incarcerated. I use autopilot as a coping mechanism, where there is not much thinking needed, our days melt into one, therefore time flies by.

The song opens and closes with the following lines:

> I'm holding on to autopilot, autopilot for tonight.
> Autopilot doesn't choose, autopilot doesn't ask.
> I'm holding on to autopilot, autopilot for tonight.
> Autopilot doesn't choose, autopilot's got it all mapped out.

In these words, and in his introduction to the song, Lee is clearly conscious of his temporal adaptation to prison life and of its rewards; 'time flies by'. But within the metaphor of the autopilot lies an apparent

[5] During Vox sessions, we discussed with participants how they wished to be credited as co-writers, and how they wished to be referred to in research outputs, thus seeking informed consent as to how to balance the desire to assert authorship of the songs against risks of exposure (and labelling). We try to revisit this question, wherever possible, where songs are being shared in public, if we identify any significant risks for co-writers. Some choose to use versions of their own names; some choose to use pseudonyms. Here, we prefer not to identify which choices the co-writers made.

contradiction: Lee surrenders control (or perhaps autonomy) in order to affect and accelerate time's passing. He actively and strategically chooses passivity.

Both the lyric and the hypnotic, trippy quality of the music perhaps suggest the altered consciousness that O'Donnell (2014) identifies with *reduction* as a means of truncating prison time. But the chorus of the song changes tone, darkening sonically. Lyrically, it seems to express more active *resistance*:

> I am more than a number
> I am more than a prisoner
> I am more than a judgment in a court room saga
> I am more than a prisoner
> I am more than you'll ever know
> I am more than you'll ever know.

The song's short verses allude to the past, the present and the future:

> Oh to have belief, to live beyond your grief
> This is my reality, oh to find the good
> To find the good in me. You're a distant memory

> Oh to have normality, what do you believe?
> The doors in here are closed, but I am still alive
> I am still alive. I can breathe. I have adapted.

These lyrics assert both a future-oriented desire for belief (and a life beyond grief) and a more present-focussed confidence in the protagonist's resilience, even in the face of prison time. They seem to somehow blend adaptation and resistance. They may even hint at an attempted *reinterpretation* of prison time.

Interestingly, the song's structure involves an intro and an outro that repeat the autopilot refrain above. Thus, the *resistance* and *reinterpretation* suggested by the verses and chorus are wrapped up in the *removal* (that is, into the trance state of being on autopilot) with which the song begins and ends. Taken together, the song vividly illustrates how different ways of truncating time can co-exist in complex inter-relationships.

Lee's song is not without concern for life outside the prison, but it is very much focussed on life inside. While this may not necessarily entail the 'sundering of ties' that O'Donnell (2014) discusses, it might imply that the travails of managing prison time—synchronising with its routines and rhythms—mean disconnecting from or de-synchronising with life outside.

Deacon's (2019) research on how young people in Scotland experience the imprisonment of a family member uses the concept of 'de-synchrony' to elaborate how time is (made) different for people in prison and for their families. Deacon adopts this concept from a paper focussed on the experiences of seafarers and their families (Thomas & Bailey, 2009). In their conclusion, the authors note:

> While stress and difficulties due to separation can be understood as, in part, due to lack of physical co-presence, the experiences of temporal discontinuity and the effects of living within complex and non-synchronous temporal frames should not be underestimated. Seafarers became essentially 'out of time' with their families, temporarily stepping out of the linear trajectory of home life. (Thomas & Bailey, 2009: 625–626)

As Deacon (2019) argues de-synchrony is likely to be even greater for those affected by imprisonment; and this is not just a matter of the duration of separation. For example, noticing how young people's lives are characterised by the immediate feedback loop of digital communications (whether via texts, or social media, or 'on demand' entertainment), she identifies how sharply this contrasts with the decidedly analogue schedule of receiving phone calls from prison, or of making visits to prison. Whereas digital connection might mediate the problem of de-synchrony for people who are separated from families by work, prisoners are also routinely excluded from digital life (including digital family life). The notion of de-synchrony recalls Lewis and Wiegert's (1981) insight that temporal 'embeddedness' requires 'synchronicity'; to function well within important social relations (like those of family and

friendship networks) requires temporal coordination. Yet as 'Her-Him-Us' describes, being embedded in different temporal orders confounds this possibility.

If imprisonment produces de-synchrony then re-entry requires re-synchrony. In two recent articles, we have explored how songs and songwriting afford opportunities to explore and address prison-generated problems (Crockett Thomas et al., 2020, 2021). Particularly for people nearing the end of their sentences, the challenges of 're-synchrony' can loom large. We have already noted in our discussion of Moran's (2012) study above that prisoners nearing and after release feel the pressure to 'catch up' with life outside. Earle (2021: 45) has recently articulated this challenge, setting it within the context of fast-flowing, contemporary, digital capitalism:

> The subtle habituations of prison life ambushed me on release from my short sentence. Even after just three months, I found myself literally thrown off balance by the scale and speed of things in motion, particularly cars, and buses even more so, but even people. Everything seemed to move so fast. Roads were a hazard, if only for a day or so. It was an unexpectedly physical reaction, and one most of the convict criminologists I have met recognise… If the continuing acceleration of life is a constitutive feature of our era what new torpors will torment the prisoner as "the rhythm of your inner life slows down" (Serge, 1977, p. 62). And what consequences follow from the rising disparities between still life inside and fast life outside?

We also noted, following Durnescu (2019) and Western (2018), the difficulties of adjusting to life outside and of re-connecting with loved ones and family life. 'Am I Dreaming?', written by 'Eddie' in collaboration with musician Chris Duncan at HMP Castle Huntly in August 2017, explores these issues. At the time of writing the song, Eddie was coming to the end of a long sentence. The open prison conditions allowed home visits as part of his preparation for release. In conversation, Eddie elaborated:

> The song title is 'Am I Dreaming?' and it's about, probably about being in the jail so long and the trials I've went through and what I've put my

> wife through, and at times *I thought we'd been apart for so long that it'd be hard getting back to normal again.* At times, my wife did say, "listen, I cannae' put up with this anymore, you've been away for so long" but then, recently we've had a talk and we said we could have a good go at this. That's kinda' what the song's about, about me getting another chance, kinda' *turning back the clock to the old days* and it's, it's in the lyrics and it does seem like a bit of a dream, that we're having a chance to do things again. *[emphasis added]*

As befits the song's title, the sound is dreamy and wistful. Chris's vocal in the verses is soothing; Eddie's vocal in the chorus is more urgent—pleading almost:

> Can we go back to the old days? Kicking snow up in the park
> Chasing down the moonbeams, find shelter after dark
> Can we go back to the old days? Find shelter in the dark
> Ooh, ooh, am I dreaming?

Again, the song contains contradictions. Unless time itself can be turned around, there is, of course, no way of literally going back. The second verse explains:

> You see the years are passing fast now, and I want our love to last
> So let's look to the future, forget about the past
> So let's lay down in the garden, with the sunshine on our face
> Just thinking about the old times, and those happy, happy days
> Ooh, ooh, am I dreaming?

By appealing to their shared past, Eddie is invoking happy memories of a time when his life and his wife's life were in synch. Laying down in the garden with the sunshine on their faces is a vivid metaphor of this temporal, spatial and relational synchrony, and embeddedness. At the same time, he suggests that they both 'forget about the past', referring presumably not to their happy memories but to his mistakes and to the lost years in prison.

Importantly, the song's title, which also features as a refrain at the end of each verse and chorus, is a question: Am I dreaming? As well as invoking the liminality of dreaming—where the past and the future

coalesce and collide, perhaps the title hints at Eddie's understandable uncertainty about whether re-synchrony and reconnection could be made a reality. Such doubts make sense, given how long Eddie's and his wife's lives had been de-synchronised and disconnected and given how many relationships fail to survive long-term separation.

Travails of Readiness

The second set of travails occasioned by doing prison time concern questions of identity change, personal transformation, rehabilitation and redemption. More specifically, they relate to the contestation of 'readiness', and to the struggle over the timing of progression and release. This is a struggle between 'narrative time', which informs how a person experiences and estimates their transformation in an existential sense, and 'system time', which reflects the prison and parole authorities' assessment of that transformation. In a sense, returning to Hassard's (1990) distinction, this is a struggle between Kairos and Chronos; the person *experiences* change and *feels* ready; but it is the system that *determines* the chronology of progression.

The close links between time and change have been recognised for millennia: Aristotle claimed that time is the measure (or the number) of change; we are only aware of time passing because we can observe changes around us, for example, in the sun's position in the sky or the place of the hands on the watch-face or the growth of a child. As Moran (2012) notes (following Wahidin, 2002), this also relates to how time is written in and on our bodies, for example, via greying hair, wrinkles, scars and stretch marks. The converse is also often true: The *absence* of visible or measurable change creates the impression that time is *not* passing, or that it is passing very slowly. We need only think of queues and waiting rooms to recognise this.

In 'Her: Him: Us', the prisoner's partner recognises that he has to 'dance their ersatz muzak tune, learning to twist and turn their tricks'. In other words, he must perform a discernible change for the prison authorities; and they determine the beat or tempo to which he must perform. By contrast, he describes her as 'lock-stepping to a true-love

tune, you've changed, and no-one asked for proof'. Unlike the vagaries of his 'correction', her embodied transformation into being a mother is un-questioned and undeniable. The last few lines turn Aristotle's observation about time and change on the distracted, self-obsessed 'us', enduring long-haul flying:

> We're trained to dance to different drums
> That tell us we have no need to move
> Time's labour is lost and, unchanged,
> Our standstill is the living proof.

Here, the accusation is that 'time's labour' (i.e., the work of transformation that people in prison may do) is lost because *we* are unchanged; 'we' are duped into the mistaken belief that only 'they' ('offenders', 'criminals', 'others') need to change; society itself needs no transformation.

In respect of the systemic insistence on prisoner transformation, Crewe (2011) has written about the 'tightness' of contemporary penal regimes; his use of this term refers to the tension and anxiety created by conditions of uncertainty that promote compliance, discipline and self-regulation. Tightness has an important temporal dimension, in that it is closely associated with indeterminate aspects of sentences—where discretionary judgements about progress influence whether a prisoner is deemed 'ready' to move into the next phase of their sentence and when or if (in the case of life sentence prisoners) they will be released on licence. Warr's (2019: 20) study of life sentence prisoners similarly reveals how their 'narrative labour … coalesces around the performance of a flagellant self' (Warr, 2019: 30), demonstrating contrition, amenability to 'correction' and sincere hopes for redemption and reintegration. The temporal indeterminacy rests in the fact that how long they will serve depends on whether and to what extent they are seen as having changed.

In a recent paper (Crockett Thomas et al., 2021), we show how some Distant Voices songwriting and songs seem to afford opportunities to address narrative problems caused by punishment, including those associated with the contestation of change. Songs with 'resolved plots', for example, narrate the transformation of a discredited and stigmatised identity. But we also note that, sometimes,

> they do so in ways which may entail a degree of co-optation into certain forms of 'judged selfhood'. This becomes obvious if we accept that such songs insist upon a *new* judgment; i.e., that the protagonist is redeemed and should be restored. (Crockett Thomas et al., 2021: 7–8)

Our analysis in that paper of 'Steven' and Kris Drever's song 'The Man I Used to Be' illustrates this argument.[6] Crucially, for present purposes, Steven was serving a determinate sentence and was within a week or so of release from prison. In his case, having received a sentence of less than 4 years meant that the authorities held no supervisory power over him post-release (see McIvor et al., 2018). Yet his desire, in writing the song, to both mark and measure the change in himself was obvious. But notably, his intended audience was not the prison authorities; rather he was writing for himself (since he wanted the song to sustain his motivation) and his family. As he put it:

> For me I can do this song, and the people who know me—when they listen to it—they'll understand a little bit about where I am in my life right now and that I have faced a lot of problems, and that I've been strong, I've just never known how to express that… I don't think that I can be anybody different unless I understand the man I used to be, and that's where the title came from, 'The Man I Used to Be', not 'The Man I Am Now' because that man will always develop but, the man I used to be, I'll never go back there.

For other participants, including lifers like 'Dale', who had spent several decades in prison, the feeling of being trapped in a struggle with prison and parole authorities over the recognition (or not) of change and the associated judgement of readiness was acute:

> In here at times I've felt as if, if you'll pardon the expression, banging my head against a brick wall… with some of the people in here, because they've got their own preconceived ideas of who I am. I'm trying to prove to these people that's not who I am. *I'm a different person now.* I might

[6] The track can be listened to via this link: https://www.voxliminis.co.uk/media/the-man-i-used-to-be/, accessed 12th April 2022.

> have been that [several decades] ago it's true, but that's not me now. It's trying to convey this to them in a way they'll understand. But that's just me, it's how I feel at times. *[emphasis added]*

For many then, imprisonment generates the question: 'How much prison time is enough?' The answer is contested, not just because of debates about retribution and proportionality but also because of the vagaries of, on one side, demonstrating, and, on the other side, validating transformation or 'rehabilitation'. The prisoner is caught in an Aristotelian double-bind; they must show a marked and measurable change, but they must do so in an institutional environment where, for many of them, time has also been slowed down. The interruption and deceleration of life's temporal order in prison mean that change is both harder to see and harder to make visible.

Travails of 'Enduring Temporariness'

The final set of travails that we discuss is associated with the various forms of temporariness that imprisonment creates or exacerbates. We noted at the end of this paper's first section that many studies suggest that re/integration after punishment is rarely achieved. As we put it above, people move from the liminality of imprisonment to the limbo of incarceration's afterlife (Miller, 2021), where they face the paradox of 'enduring temporariness', and the precarity and vulnerability that this condition entails.

Similarly, in the field of migration studies, it has been argued that, to stand a chance of securing integration and belonging, asylum seekers need not just legal citizenship but also safety and security, linguistic and cultural competence and a range of social connections (Ager & Strang, 2004, 2008). Yet, research suggests that they are often denied these foundational legal and civic resources for integration, and access to its 'means and markers'; employment, education, health care and housing. As a result, even for those who avoid long and indefinite detention under immigration law, they remain in civic, temporal and social limbo, until

and unless they can secure 'settled status' (see, e.g., Bhatia & Canning, 2020).

Most people returning from imprisonment already have formal, legal citizenship, but they have been spatially and temporally estranged and excluded through the penal system. Of course, the irony of the 're'-words that proliferate in criminal justice (rehabilitation, reintegration, resettlement, even re-entry) is that they assume a return to a prior state of wellbeing that, for many, never existed (Carlen, 2008; McNeill, 2017; Urie et al., 2019). For most, imprisonment is not their first or primary experience of estrangement, exclusion and disenfranchisement; rather, it acts to exacerbate prior social disintegration.

In these processes too, there are important relationships between time, space and social relations. Some of these were vividly illustrated in a conversation between Fergus and John, a member of our Core Group who was released from a long prison sentence a couple of years before the project began. As part of another TREE, Fergus and John had begun comparing what 'home' had meant to each of them at different times in their lives:

> A long car journey allowed John and me to spend an hour or two [in discussion]. From comparing our experiences of home, we came to realise that to be *settled* (at home), John needed to feel in *control*, or controlled. Either way, life had to be in control in some senses. In places, at times, and with people or routines that he felt he could not or cannot *trust*, it was or is impossible to feel settled. Consequently, in foster care, on remand, in open prison and on licence, he couldn't and can't really ever be or feel at home. The lack of control and trust, the uncertainty, made or makes it impossible to settle. But in his own place in Glasgow (pre-prison...) and in HMP Shotts [where he was held for several years], he could feel at home and settled. In both of those places, he was also able to make friends. (Field-notes, December 2018, *emphasis in original*).

The word 'settle' is interesting in this context—not least because of the criminal justice use of term 'resettlement' (i.e., after prison) in the UK. In common use, 'settle' has multiple meanings—we settle disputes, we settle debts, we settle down, we settle into things, we settle for less. Combining these uses perhaps, the term settlement implies resolution,

calmness, security, stability and accepting our situation. Yet, as John's experience illustrates, the care system and the justice system tend to deny people the sense of control and the trusting relationships on which feeling and being settled depends. Instead, these systems are characterised by instability and uncertainty—and by what we have termed 'enduring temporariness'.

One especially vivid depiction of the effects of temporariness can be found in a song about home leave from open prison, written by 'Homesick Reg' in collaboration with session-facilitator and musician Lisa Howe in February 2018. The song is entitled 'Two Days'. Reg says of the song:

> Title speaks for the song but it's the worry and buzz ae getting oot efter three and a hauf years. But it's only two days staged leave so you've got a million things you need tae get done but not enough time.

Sonically and lyrically, 'Two Days' communicates the very opposite of being settled; it sounds excited, apprehensive, urgent, ragged, frenzied and chaotic. Nonetheless, its chorus conveys not just the urgency of packing things into a couple of days' leave, but also the need to slow down—to settle. Tellingly, it also compares the experience of home leave to time travel, placing Reg, like Marty McFly (the protagonist of the 'Back to the Future' movies), in the right place (his 'hometown') but at the wrong time:

> Two days I've got to go, time to get things done
> When will this all be gone and turned back into fun?
> I need to try and get all slowed down
> Time travelling, Marty McFly, now I'm back in my hometown

While Reg's depiction of home leave is light-hearted, the fact that this sense of temporariness (and of de-synchrony) endures for many post-release can have serious and tragic consequences. Having previously taken part in Vox Sessions in prison, 'Adam' took part in a community-based Vox session in December 2018, not long after his liberation. He wrote a song called 'Never Change this Man' with musician Claire

McKay. The song is in the style of Johnny Cash, with a catchy rhythm, and was sung by Adam with a compelling blues voice.

'Never Change this Man' is about a famous actor who happened to be the father of Adam's friend. He came to mind as Adam thought about the session's theme—rebellion—so he decided to pay the actor a tribute. The lyrics feature some classic tropes of that kind of portrait. The song structure mirrors a life-story, from the golden years to later decay:

> Once I was a Rockstar, I lived in perfect mess
> I always had the women, cause I always looked my best
> Smoked as I was rollin, the bourbon burnt my chest
> If Springsteen was the Boss, you know I taught the best.

The chorus celebrates the ageing rock-star's enduring commitment to being a rebel:

> I don't give a damn, I am the way I am
> Walked these streets for many years
> You will never change this man

But as the song unfolds, there is a sense that time is catching up with him:

> This old dog has had his day, stiff fingers make it hard to play
> As my health begins to let me down, I sing the words but make no sound
> *Looking in the mirror, I don't recognize the face*
> *As the world keeps moving, I can't seem to keep my place. [emphasis added]*

Although at first sight, the song doesn't seem to speak directly to Adam's own experience as a person recently released from prison, those lyrics echo some of the temporal challenges of re-entry discussed above. In conversation, Adam made the connection himself:

> …a lot of people come out, like myself, and I was happy for the first couple of days, like oh… result, I'm out, great, I'll go and see everybody, and after a couple of days I was lost. It was like everybody has moved on with their life, they've got families and stuff and I just felt I was in

> a stagnant position of just my life hasn't changed, I've not progressed as a person, everybody I know is different because obviously they've done different things, so I found that very hard and I'm still adjusting.

Adam knew first-hand the pain that de-synchrony causes, and he struggled with the enduring temporariness that his imprisonment had created or exacerbated. After the December 2018 session, he kept in touch, occasionally attending our regular Tuesday night meetings (Unbound) and joining us for a residential creative writing workshop in August 2019. However, a few months later, in March 2020, Adam died by suicide. We don't know to what extent the forms of temporal suffering we have articulated in this paper contributed to his death. But we do know that rates of suicide in prison and after prison far exceed those in the general population (Armstrong & McGhee, 2019). For some, the temporal, spatial and relational disruption that punishment creates is simply not endurable.

Conclusion: Reintegration as Time Travel

In this chapter, we set out to explore time *after* time, or more specifically, to examine some of the temporal dynamics of imprisonment and reintegration. Through an examination of those few studies that have attended to the temporalities of re-entry and reintegration, we argued that many people released from prison move from the limbo of imprisonment to the 'enduring temporariness' of unfinished and incomplete reintegration. Then, by drawing on our own research processes and findings, we illustrated and explored three kinds of 'travails' of penal time; three forms of temporal work that imprisonment generates for its subjects.

The first travail concerns how getting 'in synch' with prison time, both to manage it and to survive it, produces the problem of de-synchrony with life outside. In consequence, people in re-entry processes need to find ways to secure re-synchrony; to 'catch up' not just with people, but also with the pace of life outside. The second travail relates to the notion of 'readiness' for progression, release and reintegration. These require both narrative and performative work to persuade prison and

parole authorities (and sometimes others) that sufficient change has been marked and measured; that 'enough' time has passed, even when prison has slowed time down. The third travail centres on enduring temporariness, which we contrasted with the condition of being 'settled'. We noted that many people who have been processed through care and justice (and immigration) systems are denied both the forms of control over their own lives and the trusting relationships on which being and feeling 'settled' depends. As we illustrated, for some people, living under these conditions may prove unbearable.

Our elaboration of these travails of penal time suggests that we might do well to think of re-entry and reintegration not just as a journey from one place to another, and from one set of social relations to another, but also from one time zone to another: and even *through* time itself—back to the past, through disrupted and multiple presents, to a range of possible futures, and back. If long-haul travelling (as depicted in 'Her: Him: Us') teaches us that crossing time zones can be seriously discomfiting, then science fiction teaches us that time travel is often very dangerous. All the more reason, we would argue, for not imposing the temporal, spatial and relational disruptions of imprisonment in the first place and for working to end the injustice of the 'enduring temporariness' that it entails: time after time after time after time.

Note

1. In different parts of the world, different words are used to describe leaving prison and returning to life outside. To us at least, the North American term 're-entry' implies a focus on the immediate processes and challenges associated with exiting prison and entering a society from which one has been excluded. The European term 'resettlement' (discussed later in this chapter) perhaps suggests a slighted longer time horizon, looking beyond what we might term the arrival phase. The term 're/integration', which was the main focus of the project discussed in this chapter, encompasses an even broader and deeper set of concerns, referring to the social and personal *processes* associated with finding and securing a place within 'free' society. It can also refer to the *outcome* of these processes, i.e., to the achievement of a state of acceptance, connection and belonging

[see Rubio Arnal in *Post-prison re/integration? A Glasgow case study* (PhD thesis), University of Glasgow, 2021]. The forward slash in 're/integration' signals recognition of the fact that many of those seeking integration after punishment may never have been integrated in the first place [Urie et al. in *Journal of Extreme Anthropology* 2019:2535–3241, 2019].

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