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# SITUATED LITERACIES

Reading and writing in context

*Edited by*  
*David Barton, Mary Hamilton*  
*and Roz Ivanič*

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## THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM THIRD-SPACE THEORY

### Borderland Discourse and the in-between literacies of prisons

Anita Wilson

In this chapter I shape the discussion around my belief that within incarcerative environments, theoretical aspects of literacy and prison need to be seen beyond the binary contexts of autonomous singularity or social multiplicities. I propose that acknowledgement of a 'third space' allows fresh and original perspectives to be recognised regarding such an environment, its Discourse and the influences of its literacy-oriented activities, practices and materials.

To effect this acknowledgement requires me to advance three topics for discussion:

- First, to propose that the two notions of *Prison as autonomous entity* and *prisons as social environments* are bound up in the realities of closed institutions and that theoretical issues around both need to be recognised, addressed and included in any discussion on the place of communicative practices within penal establishments.
- Second, to propose that the two notions of *Literacy as autonomous* and *literacies as sociocultural constructs* are similarly bound up in the realities of closed institutions and that both contribute to the generation of communicative practices within penal establishments.
- Third, to draw a theoretical framework around salient aspects of autonomy and social multiplicities within which to make visible a *third space* – a space which supports its own culturally-specific discourse, generated, influenced and sustained by the interrelation of these notions of prison and literacy.

During my discussion, I prioritise prison before literacy. This is a deliberate decision on my part as I feel that the reader's existing knowledge

of the former will be significantly outweighed by knowledge of the latter and my intention is to inform and explore rather than to reiterate existing theory. All illustrations, however, remain literacy-oriented. I intend my understanding of various terms such as 'Prison', 'prisons', 'Literacy', 'literacies', 'autonomous' and 'third space' to unfold during the development of my discussion although the reader could refer now to my final section 'Third-space theory' to pre-empt such clarification.

Before moving to the first topic I provide a short resumé of my research sites and methodologies in order to acquaint the reader with my position and how I see the position of others in my work.

#### Who we are and the spaces we inhabit – a brief summary of my research environments and those who know more about it than I do!

Researching at the conjunction of two institutions – Lancaster University's Linguistics Department and a number of prisons in England and Scotland – has provided me with a unique opportunity to engage with literacy-related issues surrounding means of communication which exist within and between the jails of both England and Scotland. I focus only on male prisoners, adult and young offenders.

My work has developed over a number of years, emerging as an ethnographic study of the various literacies which are contained within the setting of prisons and has been conducted at a pace dictated more frequently by the impositions of incarcerative rather than academic time.

While the site to which I have gained most access is a Young Offenders Institution in the North of England housing young men between the ages of 15 and 21, my collection of data has been gathered by way of general observations, personal interaction and sustained written communication with young and adult prisoners in a number of establishments. During this time I have formed and re-formed my own opinions and these have been engaged with, supplemented, validated, overruled and contested by the contributions of a considerable number of male prisoners nationwide. It is also fair to say that I have had invaluable cooperation from many members of prison staff at all grades whose contributions have been substantial. And while this chapter is primarily concerned with prisoners I include references to non-prisoners where considered relevant. Any quotations I use during the course of these discussions are included with the knowledge and permission of the authors.

I want to begin by proposing that it is of primary importance to accept that both Prison as autonomous entity and prisons as social environments are bound up in the realities of closed institutions.

Prison — \* — prisons

There is no question as to the existence of a perception of Prison – with a capital P – as an autonomous institutional construct. It is manifested judicially by sending people ‘to Prison’ and in mainstream society people often refer to others as being ‘in Prison’ or having a ‘Prison record’.

Prison is organised around an overarching set of Official Rules and has a number of Statutory Instruments in the shape of Command Papers and Standing Orders which are applied universally to all those in ‘Prison’. Such regulation carries an implicit assumption that all establishments and those within them can be incorporated within an abstract and encompassing administration without any regard for difference or differentiation, and used by the Prison system to reduce its population to a dehumanised, discrete and passive unit as a means by which to effect management and control.

Government statistics support this traditional view within publications such as the *Report on the Work of the Prison Service* (Home Office 1991) or surveys such as *The Second Prison Survey* (Scottish Prison Occasional Papers Report No. 10/1994, Wosnick, Gemmell and Machin 1994) and *Literacy Behind Prison Walls* (National Center for Education Statistics USA, Haigler *et al.* 1994). Individuals are subsumed within these publications, emerging only as numbers or comparative charts. Throughout this discussion then, I use the term ‘Prison’ with a capital P in an overarching collective sense in order to distinguish it from any reference I make to individual prison establishments.

Many Prison literacy-related activities and practices consolidate the autonomous view. The system imposes numerous forms of dehumanising controls over all who live and work within it. It imposes uniform labelling by age such as ‘Juvenile’ or ‘Young Offender’, it reduces status to ‘remanded’, ‘sentenced’ or ‘convicted’ and prisoners are categorised by security levels A, B, C or D using abstract codes and numbers. Those who exercise control are equally depersonalised, reduced to titles such as ‘Governor 1’ or ‘Principal Officer’ while staff are reduced by replaceability or substitution in their day to day work to an arbitrary manifestation of what Bourdieu (1991) refers to as ‘rites of institution’ and ‘symbolic ritual’.

For example, in the standard reception procedure imposed for receiving prisoners into the jail, each prisoner is required to sign away his personal belongings, his own clothes, and any sense of social identity, exchanging his name for an impersonal number and living space. Staff are similarly reduced to the repetitive completion of standardised forms and identified only by role in an operation where they may be impersonally interchanged or replaced without any threat to the power of the process. Such procedures are deeply embedded within a model of Prison as autonomous and resonate with Goffman’s (1961) and Wallace’s (1971) criteria for totality and institutionalism.

However, it is my experience and the views of many prisoners that while those of us with knowledge of ‘inside’ have an awareness of the existence of

Prison, the environment in which prisoners and staff find themselves is not only one of symbolism and asocial autonomy. We are all only too aware of the existence of the relevant structures of imposition and power, but also note the heterogeneousness of the prison estate and the multiplicity of social (and anti-social!) interactions both within and between the plurality of establishments.

I am supported in my view that prisons – in the plural – need to be viewed through a lens of social diversities as well as that of institutional determinism as illustrated by the written correspondence between myself and two prisoners – one from Scotland and one from the South of England, quoted below;

*‘All prisons ARE different, very much so. Even though a jail may be the same category as another, none are alike. Contemporary theory seems to lump us all together within the institution of “prison,” – whose contemporary theory ????!...’*

(personal correspondence Keith. 24/1/97)

*‘Close study would indicate that inmates at Perth prison would reflect local attitudes and values different in distinct ways from inmates in an Edinburgh or a Glasgow prison just as citizens of those cities have their differences.’*

(personal correspondence A.T. November 1996)

These opinions support my proposal that prisons are organic and social environments.

Prison itself challenges the notion of perceived stasis and occasionally imposes its own statutory changes. During my study, for example, modifications to official rules have been imposed in English jails regarding the volumetric control of prisoners’ property. This ruling has influenced – among other things – the number of books a prisoner may hold in possession. Increased governmental emphasis on drug awareness and matters of security has also generated revised staff practices regarding incoming mail, and the detection of ‘acid tabs’ on stamps or on envelope glue is now curtailing the availability of stamps and stationery. But such changes still remain within the traditional construction of Prison as they are universally imposed and implemented regardless of any disparity between establishments.

It would be misrepresentational however, to suggest that any prison is an environment which is only either institutionally or socially constructed. Those operating within the prisons are aware of both the outside worlds they have left behind and the perceived threat of Prisonisation which the system tries to impose.

Rather than forget the former or be drawn into the latter, acquired knowledge of both allows prisoners the opportunity to create a ‘third

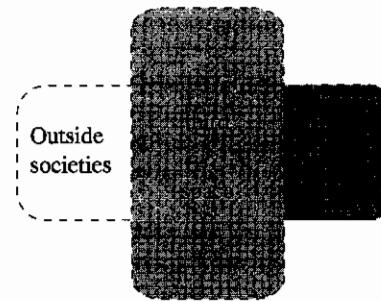
space' in which to live their everyday lives in the prisons. This notion of a 'third space' I have expanded from Bhaba's work (1994), the nature of which will become apparent as my discussion progresses and which I introduce by a literacy-focused example observed at one Young Offender establishment:

During one of my visits a prisoner was returning to the jail having been to court. He is an experienced car thief, had been remanded for further reports and on leaving the court en route for the prison had been told by the police that his trainers were to be 'held for forensic investigation'. This meant that on his return to the jail he would be required to wear prison issue shoes until such time as his trainers were returned to him. Prison shoes are notoriously 'uncool', no-one wants to wear them and as this young man has an image to retain, he stated that as an act of rebellion, he would rather wear nothing on his feet rather than be seen in them. Not to wear shoes however, he knew would place him in contravention of Prison Rules. Officers on duty insisted that he take a pair, allowed him to choose whether he would prefer brown or grey and proceeded informally to customise them for him with a felt-tip pen in order to transform them into 'Adidas prison trainers' by drawing 3 stripes down the outside edge. The defacement of prison property however, as they knew, is also in contravention of the Prison Rules. The young man still protested. He was not going to wear them – especially if they were Adidas – if he had to wear them at all he wanted them changing to 'Nikes'!

Such an event cannot be read either from a purely inside-institutional nor outside-social perspective. Institutionally, the symbolic actors all display knowledge of Prison Rules – such as the regulations governing footwear and the defacement or destruction of prison property – but the 'rule-keepers' knowingly take on the role of 'rule-breakers', changing themselves and the rules to the social practices associated with trainers. Socially, the cultural rules of 'training shoe literacy' and 'getting a new pair of shoes' are also known to all parties but the events, in being reappropriated, are drawn into an alien environment where they should not apply.

I want to propose that all those involved are engaged in a literacy-related activity, with a culturally-appropriate Discourse, situated in a culturally-approved space, which embodies but transcends the practices and ideologies from which it is formed. I feel that it is within such a third space that the majority of those within the prisons live out their day to day realities.

I develop these notions throughout the discussion and intend the diagram below to visually clarify the issue to date.



My second proposal is that the constructions of Literacy as autonomous and literacies as sociocultural constructs are both of relevance and that each contributes to the generation of communicative practices within penal establishments.

### Literacy — \* — literacies

Street (1984, 1993), describing an autonomous model of literacy, suggests that proponents of such a view see Literacy as 'a single thing with a big L and a single Y' (1993, p. 81) seeking to make written language superior to spoken and linking Literacy to cognitive development and social change. In line with the theme of this volume, I want to expand the model of 'autonomous Literacy' to include its distanciation from the social, its perception of itself as a discrete unit and – with specific reference to prisons – its subsequent use as a means of impositional control.

This model of 'autonomous Literacy' has much in common with the model of 'autonomous Prison' which I created above. Like Prison, the autonomous view of Literacy is situated in institutional ideology and in its traditionally educational manifestation has statutory rules regarding standards, assessment and evaluative criteria. It assumes, like Prison, that it can be imposed and that it exists in a vacuum detached from social interaction, removed from social or cultural difference.

Street observes that 'the ways in which literacy skills are assessed have been largely in line with this (autonomous) model' and the assessment of Prison Literacy often makes links between perceived lack of educational achievement, truancy and exclusion, retaining the notion that low levels of education, low levels of Literacy and low levels of morality are intrinsically interconnected. This is reflected in studies such as that undertaken by Hagell and Newburn (1994) which attempted to link negative educational careers to persistent young offenders. Studies such the UNESCO Institute for Education Report of 1992 or the American survey of 1994 by Haigler *et al.* reduce prisoners to statistics and use autonomous Literacy to sustain the

belief that prisoners' abilities are significantly below those of the 'free' community – a belief I have already argued against in other work (Wilson 1996).

Singular Literacy is manifested at individual establishments in the wording of officially administered documentation, the standardised testing of all incoming prisoners and the statistical recording of prisoners' abilities, suggesting that autonomous Literacy is linked to and given significant credence by the institution of Prison.

To present the counter-claim that there are many literacies would be to state the obvious in a chapter relating to the theme of 'Expanding the New Literacy Studies' and Street's counter-proposal of an 'ideological' model has led the way not only to acknowledge the diversity of literacies in their social settings but to draw attention to the significance of attendant issues of power, authority and social differentiation. Progressive empirical work undertaken by Heath (1983) and continued in contemporary studies cited by Barton and Ivanič (1991) and Street (1993) has forced a recognition of the multiplicity of literacies which both constitute and are constituted by the social settings in which they exist. Such projects and the events and practices embedded within them have drawn attention to ideologically-oriented environments and sociocultural implications and I continue to draw on the social relevances of the New Literacy Studies at many levels of my work.

I have noted elsewhere the multiplicity of writing which is undertaken by prisoners (RaPAL Bulletin, Wilson 1993) and my ongoing research shows the considerable variety and patterns of literacies which exist in the prison environment – literacies which include the textual and the visual and which I head up under interrelated titles such as 'emotional literacies', 'symbolic literacies' and 'subversive literacies'. These are intentionally abstract as more concrete terms carry with them conventional meanings and interpretations which within the environment I am trying to describe – where young men are allowed to wear Nike prison shoes – are being constantly redefined.

Official Prison Literacy for example – by which I mean the vast quantity of standardised and universally administered documentation – remains within Street's (1993) notion of 'dominant' autonomy only while it remains within its approved parameters. An official standardised canteen form given out to every prisoner at a set time on a given day, supplied for ordering items from the Prison shop, escapes from its concept as an 'imposed' or 'constrained' activity (Barton and Ivanič 1991) when it becomes transformed into a shopping list embedded within the social practices of its recipients. This is particularly apparent when it is humorously reappropriated (as I have seen) to include a request for machine guns, grappling hooks, large-breasted women or substantial quantities of illicit substances! Once acted upon or interacted with, such forms become reappropriated

into the realms of subversive, vernacular, symbolic or other patterns of literacies.

In addition to being reappropriated, I have also noted that literacies themselves influence the cultural mores of the environment in which they are embedded. The extract below is an example of the cultural hybridity of outside and inside activities and practices which are involved when writing a letter in prison:

*'last week I wrote a letter for an illiterate guy to his Mum and I said 'say this and that' but he knew what he wanted to say and would not let me rephrase anything, so I wrote it as he spoke it . . . he wanted to pay me some roll-up tobacco or Rizla or chocolate but I told him to get me an envelope and a carrier bag (as both would not cost him anything – the envelope being prison issue and the bag to put my sewing in).'*

(personal correspondence with Ronnie)

The space in which this interaction takes place allows for the outside practices of letter-writing and sewing to be combined with the inside realities of institutional currency and cultural identity in a specific way. The activity of 'sewing' for example, along with other conventionally female-gendered outside activities such as writing poetry, listening to 'sentimental' music and the buying and sending of 'emotional' greeting cards and letters are accorded cultural credibility within this predominantly male-orientated third-space environment to the extent that not to engage in them might be seen as a marginal position.

While I agree with Street's defence that the 'ideological model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the autonomous model' (1993, p. 9) I feel that not only has the model and existence of a Discourse of autonomous Literacy often been overlooked in studies which have been concerned with the social nature of vernacular literacies but that to reduce the discussion of communicative practice to an either/or detracts from the very real possibility – at least within the prison environment – that people not only have an awareness of Prison and prisons but, as the examples above have shown, choose to reappropriate both Prison Literacy and outside literacies as a means by which to determine the culturally-specific space and features of their everyday lives.

I would like to offer a further instance of a specific event in order to illustrate the interplay between the two models, reproducing both the scenario and the letter in which it was embedded. I quote from my ongoing journal.

*'8th August 1995 – down [the punishment block] after adjudications [disciplinary proceedings] as the Governor is doing his rounds a piece of paper is squeezed through the gap in the door of one cell (Mr B\*\*\*\*\*s).*

*It is intended for the Governor (Dear Sir) but it is intercepted by an officer who reads it, shakes his head and is about to screw it up and put it in the waste bin. I ask him if it is alright to look at it... It is a letter to the Governor and one of the saddest things I have read. This is a boy with a lot on his mind - he spends large amounts of his time copying the words of songs from his Walkman onto pieces of paper - he addresses his letters to his father as Sir X \*\*\*\* ... on a housing estate in X\*\*\*\*\* - the psychiatrist says that he is perfectly healthy mentally - I don't think so'.*

The letter is as follows:

Dear Sir

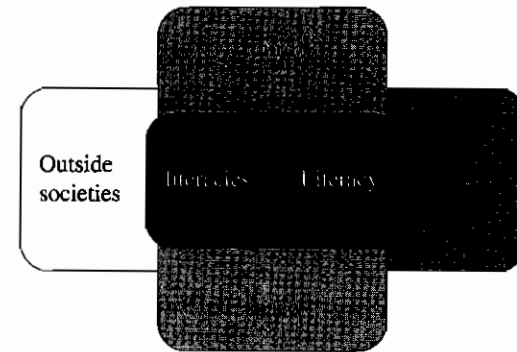
*I am a Tran SUESSIE like Dressing up  
in Women Clothes See you soon you big sexy jar  
So much Love  
to ALL the World  
I'm a Tran SUESSIE  
Queen v Lee Show the world  
Show the Judge this bag is  
A Transie Van*

Just as to merely acknowledge and separate out Prison from prisons is an inconclusive endeavour, so the division into Literacy and literacies would fail to recognise the culturally legitimate 'space' which allows this interaction to take place.

There is no question that the writer of this letter draws on his knowledge of both the Discourse of Prison and the Discourse of outside societies or that he has an understanding of the place of both Literacy and literacies to inform the Discoursal environment he is positioned within. His is a 'third-space' world where the outside social event of posting a letter is combined with the inside institutional restrictions of communication; where he knows he must address the 'symbolic other' in the conventionally accepted letter-writing manner of 'Dear Sir' but may challenge symbolic authority by the informal and unconventional content of his correspondence; where the austerity of solitary confinement in Prison can still support a literate and creative form of social communication.

In my work then, I feel that it is the use of various literacies within this world which are as important as any division over the meaning or the dichotomy of terms. I have found that by looking at such use or uses raises an awareness of the crucial part that literacies play in the creation of a culturally-validated third space and the generation of the Discourse it requires.

The visual representation below illustrates my suggestion:



Thus far, I have discussed and ultimately linked Prison/s and Literacy/ies in order to acknowledge a third space - a space where representatives of the Prison system vandalise government property for the benefit of prisoners over whom they are instructed to retain institutional control; where seemingly autonomous Literacy and social literacies can be successfully reappropriated by a psychiatrically disturbed youth in solitary confinement; and within which an adult male can credibly exchange his educational expertise for an envelope and a bag for his embroidery!

However, such events and practices are not pre-existent, but are continuously created, learned and validated only within the third space of the prison environment. Neither do they exist in a vacuum and there are implicit codes of behaviour and rules of engagement which go to make up what I propose as the Discourse of this specific environment in which they exist. Just as I have proposed that the acknowledgement of a third space bridges the gap between Outside and Prison and that the Literacy and literacies within it exist between social and institutional worlds so I suggest that its culturally-specific Discourse bridges both outside and inside worlds.

The addition of this Discoursal element completes my model - as illustrated on p. 64.

However, while it has been thoroughly introduced by real world events and original data, it requires theoretical underpinning and a refinement of the terms in order to both confirm its validity and to facilitate its future



expansion into other domains of literacy studies. The final section seeks to address specific issues of theoretical definition and as my title suggests 'there is no escape from third-space theory'!

### Third-space Theory — \* — Theoretical Issues

My model has progressively built upon issues of environment, literacies and the Discourse of prisons and its generation has required me to draw on theories from a number of sources. The concluding illustration below shows my refined terms and I use this final section to explain how these terms came about.

#### The 'third-space' Prison Community

The notion of the third space as a site in which to locate prison literacies, I have appropriated from work by Bhaba (1994) wherein he draws attention to the need to reconsider the perceived homogeneous nature of cultural identity, proposing that the recognition of a third space provides 'the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference' (p. 38). Although grounded in broader issues around migration, national identity and disenfranchisement I have found Bhaba's work to have considerable resonance with my perception of prisoners who I see often as being divested of their preferred identities, finding themselves in a cultural vacuum and yet seeking to retain a sense of personhood. I take his notion forward by acknowledging it and placing it within the specific domain of prison life.

I see my third space as a place which supports a variety of social networks because I have come to understand that such is the perception retained by

those who live in it and because I have observed that the majority of its practices – particularly those relating to literacies – are of an interactive nature. I also see it as a place which provides an opportunity for those who operate within it to form groups distinctive and culturally-specific enough for them to be identified as communities. Discussion between prisoners and myself requires me to make plain however that my perception of community has little in common with any traditional sociological reading of homogeneity or egalitarianism (challenged successfully by Cohen 1985 and discussed in depth in Wilson 1999) but one that allows prison community membership to be retained on a stronger or weaker basis. This broad framework thus dispenses with traditional divisions between remanded and sentenced prisoners and allows for the inclusion of both prisoners and non-prisoners.

This 'mish-mash' community I have named as 'mushfake' – a term described by Mack (1989) as used by American prisoners to describe items they have fashioned from whatever is available to them such as hats made out of underwear or artefacts made from spent matchsticks. I abstract this singularly appropriate term to describe the 'mushfake' prison community which I see as constructed from whatever particular outside and inside practices are available.

This 'mushfake prison community' can operate on two levels – the local and the global. My informants have suggested that all prisons are different and the mushfake community of any one prison is manifested according to the specific ethos of that particular establishment. As one of my illustrations showed, the currency for writing a letter was an envelope and a carrier bag to put sewing in, although it might have been roll-up tobacco, Rizlas and some chocolate. Likewise, from my observations, the storage of personal letters can vary between a cardboard box, a filing system, a drawer or a plastic bag. However, I would contend that some exchange rate for letter-writing or the storage of personal letters is present in all jails and that there is sufficient cultural assonance between establishments to apply the concept of 'Prison Community' as an encompassing term.

To acknowledge its presence at both levels allows each prison community's 'real-time' manifestation but also acknowledges what Cohen (1985) refers to as its universal 'symbolic' qualities.

Literacies and the degree to which they are embedded in shared practices further convince me of the validity of an overarching term. In the personalisation of 'private' space, for example, I have found that while the choice of books and posters may vary between staff observation posts and prisoners' cells, the use of literacy-orientated material artefacts to turn an impersonal environment into one which has salience for the occupants is common to all members of the Prison Community.

Taking a broad reading, this Prison Community and its patterns can be seen to extend beyond the confines of any establishment, hence my intentional visual 'overlaps' on the visual representation.



To clarify, I therefore use the term 'prison community' in lower case when referring to a particular establishment and Prison Community using capitalisation when referring to the general concept. I am, therefore, taking the term beyond Clemmer's seminal work *The Prison Community* (1940) which, although an ethnographic study of impressive quality, was confined to the observations of a single establishment.

### Borderland Discourse, meta-knowledge and the identity kit

I reappropriate Gee's theory of 'borderland Discourse' (1990) for the 'third-space' Prison Community because I feel it to have particular relevance to the environment of my study. His description of 'borderland' as a place between home and school used by children marginalised by mainstream ideologies is akin to the liminal space described by Bhaba and the third space which I have identified as relevant to prisons.

His term 'Discourse' – not 'discourse' with a small 'd' as a general term describing some form of interaction – he describes as:

a sort of 'identity kit' which comes with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise.  
(Gee 1990, p. 142)

I apply this term to the communicative force which drives the Prison Community and informs the literacies of prisons within it.

Gee also suggests that the ability to acquire knowledge of any new Discourse is assisted by having a 'meta-knowledge' of existing Discourses which can

lead to the ability to manipulate, to analyse, to resist while advancing.  
(Gee 1992, p. 117)

This is particularly salient to the way in which prisoners read the Prison Discourse they are being forced to address in the light of the Discourses of the outside societies they have left. Choosing to remain 'maladapted' to Prison Discourse allows prisoners to create an 'identity kit' by which to negotiate their entry into the borderland Discourse of the Prison Community.

Drawing on aspects of contemporary outside worlds provides the means by which to sustain the 'mush-fake' nature of the Prison Community and its Discourse, illustrated by my example of the scenario with the customising of trainers. At the time of the incident, credibility in the outside world was no longer to be achieved wearing Adidas trainers. This change of cultural

marker explained why my informant was so adamant that his Prison shoes be customised to Nikes in order to bring him into the borderland Discourse of his prison community as a street-wise non-Prisoned individual.

### In-between literacies

The final issue, one which I have intentionally placed at the centre of this model, concerns the various literacies which both influence and are influenced by borderland Discourse and the Prison Community. Just as Bhaba recognises elements of an in-between cultural space and Gee identifies events in the in-between of Discoursal space, I place literacies as central to the maintenance of a space which exists between outside and inside worlds.

However, just as borderland Discourse involves culturally-specific thoughts, acts, opinions, events and practices, so in-between literacies embedded within it retain a culturally-specific understanding that expands beyond the mere acts of reading and writing. Taking the illustration of the hand-written letter on p. 62 as an example, elements of visuality become relevant wherein the physical appearance and visibility of the literacy artefact play a significant part in the credence of the activity. The form, content and production of the artefact itself play a significant role in its interpretation by its various audiences.

As further proof, newspapers are 'swung' between cell windows by means of unravelled blankets, not only to share the activity of newspaper reading but to use the artefact as a means of ballast in order to effect a line of communication between prisoners' cells. Letters and cards used to personalise Prison cells are promoted almost to the level of visual icon. Books become a vehicle not only for reading in order to pass the time but as a means of passing information to other prisoners by writing messages and graffiti poems on the inside covers and blank pages.

It is significant to note however, that Prison Rules forbid articles to be 'swung' from cell to cell, but this does not deter prisoners from breaking the Rules in order to read the newspapers or to retain lines of communication. Prison wages are such that a prisoner makes a conscious financial sacrifice if he wishes to buy stamps and writing paper in order to ensure he has a collection of letters and cards with which to personalise his space. Prison punishments are such that time can be added on to a custodial sentence if a prisoner is found guilty of defacing Prison property and yet prisoners continue to make marks of personal social identity through graffiti statements and poems written on Prison books. Such practices are so commonplace that it would seem that considerable assessment is made by those entering the jails when choosing between joining the 'borderland' Discourse of Prison as Community or the 'dominant' Discourse of the Prison as Institution.



These literacy-related activities and practices become a central part of the 'identity kit' which prisoners choose to adopt in order to retain aspects of their outside lives rather than become absorbed into the institutional ideology of Prison.

### Conclusions and thoughts for expansion

I have noted – and feel strongly – that my observations may provide valuable insight into the reassessment of time spent in jail and it is because of my protracted involvement with some prisons and many prisoners that I have become aware of one of the most salient findings of my work to date. I have found that the longer a man remains in Prison the stronger he seeks to retain his ties with his outside worlds. The more competent he becomes at engaging with rules of borderland Discourse the more he draws on his distant knowledge of outside societies. A man serving a long sentence keeps pets, he cooks, he grows plants, he writes longer letters, he reads more books, he enrolls at University or college, he takes up painting, calligraphy, writing books or poetry.

He writes and tells me that the fight against Prisonisation is subtle and complex:

*'it is a silent battle, not with a recognisable enemy, but with our minds. To win we have to pamper our minds, cater for them, bribe them, keep them occupied or lose them. If we lose our minds, we lose ourselves and the battle. It is a battle I will not lose'*

(personal correspondence 29/4/94)

My work acknowledges that the literacies of the Prison Community are not merely linguistic constructions embedded within theoretical frameworks, they are fundamental to the maintenance of an environmental and Discoursal space which might be the difference between keeping or losing your mind.

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