



Book Review

Tea Fredriksson (2023) *Haunting Prison: Exploring the Prison as an Abject and Uncanny Institution*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing

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Prison tells stories. Not just of incarceration and punishment, but of belonging and otherness, deviance and normalcy, horror and haunting. Taking a psychoanalytical perspective, Tea Fredriksson's *Haunting Prison: Exploring the Prison as an Abject and Uncanny Institution* analyses how prison is narrativized in 10 Western, commercially published prison autobiographies, revealing how prison is perpetuated as (an) imagined reality. By contemplating prisons as *story* rather than *stone*, Fredriksson reconfigures what prison is and does in Western society, revealing how prison may function as a prism of fear and unease to white heteropatriarchy.

Part of the Emerald Studies in Culture, Criminal Justice and the Arts, *Haunting Prison* examines how the abject and the uncanny found in prison narratives speak to larger societal anxieties about selfhood, life, and death. As such, the book considers different haunting aspects of prison, beginning with a reconfiguration of the prison as abject (m)other, probing the incorporating, dissolving, and devouring aspects of prison, and likening it to a monstrous womb. By assimilating subjects in carceral space, dissolving individuals' identities as well as their bodies, prison operates as a monstrous-uterine space that not only enforces immersion with the space itself, but also with other inmates. By reconceptualizing prison as an embodied threat of monstrous-feminine punishment—as a loss of selfhood through the devourment by the monstrous womb—Fredriksson demonstrates how these narratives reveal social anxieties relating to prison and imprisonment that speak to heteropatriarchal and white supremacist understandings and values.

After pondering the prison as an abject body in itself, Fredriksson turns to how prison *creates* abject bodies. Fredriksson illuminates how the authors of these autobiographical narratives 'other' their fellow inmates by using animal analogies and dehumanizing attributes—monsters with abject traits. The effect is a form of resistance against the assimilation of prison, which functions to (re)construct boundaries and (re)establish borders. This othering also results in narratives of racialized otherness, unstable genders, and 'improper' or norm-breaking sexualities that reconceptualizes humanity as white, middle class and heterosexual (Halberstam 1995). Fredriksson connects the monstrous-feminine aspects of carceral monster-making (discussed in the beginning of the book) to the abortive rather than nurturing or rehabilitative features of prisons, where othered subjects are (r)ejected back into the world, worse than when they entered. As such, the chapter called 'Subjective Abjection' highlights the ways in which prisons, and narrativizations about prisons, serve as race-making institutions (Wacquant 2002),



as well as institutions ‘doing’ gender, age, and sexuality, and how the reinforcement of such stereotypes can be considered a form of violence.

The chapter ‘The Haunting Prison’, extends the discussion of the lingering properties of prisons’ monster-making by exploring the haunting aspects of prisons. Drawing on Janicker’s (2015:122) definition of ‘haunted space’, Fredriksson demonstrates how prisons can be haunted—strange and seeping into spaces and people outside of itself. Not only are imprisoned people haunted by previous as well as future violence, but the prison, itself, haunts the incarcerated by conflating social and physical death as well as death and freedom, thereby configuring death both as part of and as an escape from imprisonment. As such, prisons are both haunted and *haunting*, unsettling the boundaries between life and death, incarceration and freedom, lingering in time and space, refusing to stay in place and impossible to leave behind. This uncanny *porousness* of prison challenges the idea of prison as a space completely severed from the ordinary, strengthening the argument of prisons as ‘total institutions’ (Farrington 1992; Goffman 1961), and underscoring the temporal disconnectedness of imprisonment.

Fredriksson examines the temporal disjointedness inherent to prisons in the chapter, ‘A Prison Chronotype’, where, drawing on Bakhtin (1981/2014), she develops a chronotope specific to prison. This prison chronotope is shaped by uncertainty and contradiction, constituting sticky, viscous time in twisting, labyrinthine space, defined by repetitive, looping and stagnating experiences. Here, Fredriksson captures *how* stories and narratives about prisons not only come alive, but how such narrativization provide affective and critical engagement. The defining features of the prison chronotype also reveal prison as claustrophobic, and characterized by decline, disintegration, and dissolution, further underlining the abject and uncanny aspects of prison presented in previous chapters and adding to our understanding of how prisons are narrativized and storied.

By drawing on existing criminological scholarship on prisons, including that of cultural, narrative, gothic and ghost criminologies, Fredriksson demonstrates the centrality of abjection and uncanniness to how prisons are storied, and how we understand this socio-cultural narrativization. Through horror iconography, autobiographical prison novels construct prison as insatiable and devouring, a monstrous womb which threatens to incorporate and assimilate its inmates, annihilating boundaries of identity as well as body. As a monstrous-feminine threat to white-supremacist heteropatriarchal values, prison is reconfigured as a monstrous, uterine space that aborts people’s futures, assimilating them into the abject other. Prison is an insatiable threat continuously making new monsters, and its narrativization as such is symptomatic of wider social anxieties of non-belonging, demonstrating a fear of being incorporated into the undesirable, rather than simply being excluded from the mainstream.

Fredriksson’s analysis demonstrates the inherent duality of prison as both abject and uncanny—as a space which both attempts to (re)draw boundaries while at the same time dissolving them, (r)ecting the abject while simultaneously returning it, being both haunted and haunting. Although these findings add nuance and complexity to the scholarship on prisons and imprisonment, they also evoke larger critical questions about the effects of cultural texts on public imaginaries, and the possible implications of such effects. By examining commercialized ‘true’ stories in relation to prison and imprisonment, Fredriksson highlights the tension between fact and fiction, underlining how the purported truthfulness of these narratives is ultimately irrelevant. As the real and reel shape and influence each other, and as narrativizations of prisons in contemporary drama now represent the interface between the public and prison (Fiddler 2007), examining these imagined prison realities becomes as important as exploring ‘real’ experiences of prison life for understanding the position and meaning of prisons in contemporary society.

Haunting Prison provides important, critical insights for our understanding of prison and imprisonment that not only question and critique the supposed rehabilitative goals of prisons, but also these institutions’ usefulness in modern society. With her creative and playful use of text structure, Fredriksson subverts rigid academic expectations and allows for an intertextual relationship with her findings in a way that is both inspiring and thought-provoking. While the book is rather narrow in scope, focusing only on Western, predominantly white commercialized autobiographies, one of the greatest challenges the book grapples with is to not reinforce the very white-supremacist, heteropatriarchal narrativizations it is trying to critique. In an attempt to avoid such harms, Fredriksson focuses on the positioning of monstrosity rather than the monstrous acts described. Following Brown’s (2022) argument that the white-supremacist foundations of criminal justice have become normalized and invisible, while risking the reproduction of the status quo, it is still important to explore and highlight such white-supremacist foundations of criminal policies if we ever hope to exorcise these ghosts haunting our understanding of carceral justice.

Overall, the book provides useful theoretical insights and methodological tools for advancing our understanding of prisons as well as incarceration. In so doing, *Haunting Prison* demonstrates that the stories of prison are at least as important as its stones.

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