This essay is an illustrated montage of some points of engagement with Philip Scheffner’s 2007 film, *The Halfmoon Files*, about the Halfmoon prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf, Germany. The camp was an important site for anthropometric research and propaganda during World War I. The film is a ghost story and conjures a number of connections to related stories and to questions of racism, imprisonment, and war that my essay offers in response. My title—“I’m already in a sort of tomb”—is taken from Victor Serge’s fictionalized autobiography, *Men in Prison*, whose contemporaneous account of being in prison during World War I serves as a guide along the way.

Although I provide a basic description of the film for those who have not seen it, this essay is not a critical analysis of the film. It originated as a talk I delivered as part of a program of events connected to an exhibition organized by Britta Lange and Philip Scheffner titled “The Making of . . . .” Displayed at Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, in Berlin, from December 15, 2007, through February 17, 2008, the exhibition stunningly disassembled Scheffner’s film. An audio-visual landscape in which sound flowed in and out of rooms and corridors, where film and light
were projected and also arrested, the exhibition recalibrated the centrality of the moving image in cinema by making the movement of sound and the call from afar of voices the more eerily dominant, especially after dusk. The exhibition showcased Scheffner’s work as a sound artist and Lange’s important scholarly research on science in the German World War I prisoner of war camps while the lecture series raised questions about German colonialism and cinema, music and militarism, and the problem of the archive. I believe I was invited as a theorist of haunting, as someone capable of speaking about ghostly matters, and because of my writings on war and imprisonment.

The absence of an analysis of Scheffner’s film could pose a problem since the question arises of the extent to which, without its original context, these words no longer shadow but ghost the film itself. With the occasion missing, a carefully constructed film about captive soldiers haunting the archive of cultural knowledge becomes itself an absent presence. The ghosting of the one made ghostly is a representational problem the film exquisitely avoids: it never for a moment loses sight or sound of those men as it exposes the exclusionary forces that produce their archival disappearance. Because this is one crucial aspect of the film’s greatness, what makes it an exemplary ghost story, it seems wrong somehow then to make of it here a kind of specter of itself. Although, perhaps, surely, it was always that way, and I was spared the trouble of worrying over it by the hospitality of the occasion and by a stubborn attachment to my own rather sentimental motivations. For truthfully, I wanted mostly to thank Philip for making the film, which moved me deeply. Not wanting to embarrass him or me, many things were left unspoken—perhaps, in the end, everything of importance.
The Halfmoon Files: A Synopsis

“What kind of film do you want to shoot?”

“It’s a ghost story.”

—Amit Dasgupta to Philip Scheffner, The Halfmoon Files

Reflecting in part its substantial financial and cultural investments and an attempt to undermine steady British incursions, Germany signed an alliance agreement with the Ottoman Empire in August 1914. That November in Constantinople, a call to jihad was issued against the French, English, and Russian “enemies of Islam” and to the North African, African, and South Asian soldiers of the French and British armies to desert and defect to the German army. As part of this war strategy, Germany maintained special prisoner of war camps for captured colonial soldiers, as they were called, that permitted Muslims to observe religious practices. The first mosque built in Germany, in July 1915, was at one of these prisons, the Halfmoon Camp in Wünsdorf, on the outskirts of Berlin. An official postcard depicting the mosque was commissioned and thousands printed. During this imperialist and unpopular war, there was widespread desertion by soldiers everywhere (including by German soldiers) but little defection to the German army. As Scheffner notes wryly, while the propaganda effort failed, the prisoner of war camps succeeded in capturing the interests of German scientists, cultural anthropologists, and musicologists, as well as the company (Deutsche Kolonial Film) charged with making promotional films for German colonialism targeted at a domestic audience.

The largest and most enduring of the research projects conducted in the camps was by the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission, founded in 1915. With a staff of more than thirty linguists, musicologists, and anthropologists, the commission sought systematically to record the prisoners’ languages and to create out of the two hundred fifty different peoples at the camps what Technical Director Wilhelm Doegen called a “Museum of Voices.” One thousand six hundred fifty shellac recordings were made, a major part of which are housed today in the Berlin Sound Archive, at Humboldt University. This archive and the recordings of the captured soldiers prompted Scheffner’s film.

There were two thousand Indian soldiers at the Halfmoon Camp—mostly Sikhs and also Gurkha, Hindu, and Muslim soldiers—and seven hundred recordings were made there alone. One of these recordings was made on December 11, 1916, at 4 pm by Mall Singh:
There once was a man. He ate two ser of butter and drank two ser of milk in India. He joined the British army. This man went into the European war. Germany captured this man. He wishes to go to India. He wants to go to India. He will get the same food he had in former times. Three long years have passed. Nobody knows when there will be peace. In case this man is forced to stay here for two more years, he will die. If God has mercy, he will make peace soon and this man will go away from here.

The archives at Humboldt contain the original handwritten coding forms with name, date, village and district of birth, place of schooling, knowledge of European music, knowledge of musical instruments, languages spoken, date of recording, and the names of the recording technician and supervisory official. Archive number PK619. Mall Singh. Sikh. Age 24. Village Ranosukhi District Firozpur State Punjab. Landowner. Speaks Punjabi. Doesn’t play a musical instrument. Doesn’t know European music. There are no images in the sound archive, although apparently everyone recorded was also photographed frontally and in profile. “One thousand six hundred fifty faces that have somehow disappeared,” Scheffner says. They re-emerge in other archives detached from their voices; they reappear in the film, looking for their owners. Mall Singh. Wants to go home.

The Halfmoon Files is a search for Mall Singh and other prisoners whose names, faces, and stories have been lost. The Halfmoon Files is a history of the prison camp and the anthropological and biometric research that took place there. Everyone is working together—scientists, camp administration, and filmmakers, the narrator reports, to create the perfect set or
setting for the measurements that will contribute to the racial science that is busily inventing a visual and analytic language for understanding the culturally inferior and the enemy. *The Halfmoon Files* is a story of Wünsdorf today, with its haunted houses, tourism, and redevelopment schemes. The city of Wünsdorf is an archive of military history, used by the military between 1910 and 1994, when it was demilitarized and slated to become a model green city. Germany’s first “city of books,” Wünsdorf houses thirteen antiquarian bookshops that sell, among other titles, books of racist cartoons and scholarship, produced for the war and then for the postwar “Black Shame” campaign against the twenty-five to forty thousand African soldiers of the Allied occupation stationed along the Rhine.6 *The Halfmoon Files* is also the account of Scheffner’s failure to get permission from Indian authorities to film in India and what that failure yielded. *The Halfmoon Files* is all these stories interwoven, held together by the aural and visual notes and the blank spaces that crisscross the narrative strands with pathos and not a little absurdity.

About the film, Nicole Wolf writes: “The colonial plan to produce knowledge by measuring, numbering, categorizing, codifying the exotic is undermined . . . not by means of a counterstatement, but by displaying historicity otherwise.”7 The cinematic language of this historicity is the ghost story as told, which I cannot reproduce for you here. As told, the ghost story sounds as much as it shows: “tones, voices, crackling, and rustling—beside, with, behind, or without an image.”8 As told, the ghost story arrives as history does, all at once or from a distance, always within the skin of an experience that one names one’s life. As told, the ghost story is then and now. As told, the ghost story is sensuous knowledge, holding carefully to the displacement and loss that war and captivity deliver. As told, the ghost story creates space for what is missing. “This space is located,” Scheffner writes, “between sound and image. It’s at the same time an imaginative as well as an analytical space. It’s a space where ghosts appear and move around. It’s a beautiful space.”9

As told, the beautiful ghost story catches my breath and then more calmly invites me to add to its already burdened archive of subjugated knowledge.
“This is a true story”

Sun and moon lighting up the sky, reflected in the river. Life is but a fleeting moment in time. This life is but an illusory dream, hulling like a river. Life is but a fleeting moment in time. Listen, listen, respected Sirs. As far as memory serves me right, let me tell you what the old men narrated. Please forgive me if I make mistakes or forget anything. A very old man told me this tale. He saw it with his own eyes. This is a true story.

—Bhawan Singh, The Halfmoon Files

The scientists are not interested in personal stories. . . . The unforeseen is not desired. It endangers scientific comparability and creates additional work. . . . The scientists are not interested in the personal stories of their object of study, but they depend on the stories that are told to them.

—Philip Scheffner, The Halfmoon Files

We could spend the whole time here between the scientists and the other main storytellers present in the film: with Mall Singh (“There once was a man. . . . This man went into the European war”), with Bhawan Singh (“Listen, listen, respected Sirs. . . . Let me tell you what the old men narrated”), and with Philip Scheffner, who, with the remains of their voices, is searching for Mall Singh and delivers to us the stories that are The Halfmoon Files. We could spend all our time here with the storytellers talking about storytelling. I start here for one reason. Almost everything about the beauty and grace of this film begins with its standpoint, its unwavering, gentle care for
the fate, the destiny, of Mall Singh and the other men. Many other things are discussed and analyzed. Certain mysteries are solved—Kaiser Wilhelm really did see ghosts, for one. Other voices are raised. But the film would not be as it is, would not be able to carry its story so weightlessly, without this singular and abiding attention, like one would pay to a loved one or a dear friend, to looking after and settling lost accounts. Storytellers often lend themselves to the stories of others, but it is rare for the documentarian to work so hard to reverse the normal scientific relationship of exchange, which more commonly exploits a dependence whose existence and cost remain repressed. The scientists are not interested in the personal stories of their object of study, but they depend on the stories that are told to them.

“The stairway of progress”

In 1930, the revolutionary anarchist Victor Serge published Men in Prison, an autobiographical novel (“everything in this book is fictional and everything is true,” he claims [v]) about his first term in prison in France from 1912 until 1917.

We climb a long staircase. We are in one of the medieval towers of the Conciergerie. . . . In earlier times they used to put their victims “to the question” on the rack in the cellars of this very tower. Today they apply Bertillon’s scientific system upstairs. This is the stairway of progress. . . . [It leads to] well-lighted rooms of the anthropometric service.

The clerk, attentive but with perfect professional indifference, measures the prisoner’s skull, foot, hand, forearm; notes the scars and the tiniest marks on his body; examines and records the exact color of his eyes, the folds of his ear, the cut of his lips, the shape of his nose; gently takes his fingerprints. I observe these automatons, noting that they are free men occupied in compiling an exact scientific description of the prisoner: me. They don’t notice me at all. They ignore me. For this man who, with three rapid, deft movements, stretches my forearm out on a kind of short measuring rod, I don’t exist. There is nothing in front of him but a forearm, so many inches long, bearing this or that peculiarity. Two numbers, ciphers to be entered, in the same place, on a file card. Each day, the man enters these numbers several hundred times. He has neither the time nor the inclination to look at faces. . . . After these silent manipulations, the measured subject lands in front of the photographer’s lens. The same indifferent hands raise the subject’s chin, place the back of his skull against a mental stanchion, hang a plate bearing a num-
ber on his chest. A violent flash of light startles him as the camera operator releases the shutter. A gallery of lost souls. There are only two or three varieties of expression: animal passivity, confusion, humiliation—each modified by anger, despair, defiance, or . . . sullenness, depending on the case. Experienced prisoners have explained to me the way to fight the camera, to fool it. (10–11)

Figure 4. Alphonse Bertillon, frontispiece for Identification anthropométrique, 1893

In Serge’s book, war forms a surreal context in which the routine of prison life, with its characteristic combination of bureaucracy and arbitrary
authority, rule-bound procedure and capricious brutality, goes on as if the war wasn’t happening or didn’t matter. Serge writes, “In the Mill, six hundred men continued their senseless round, attesting to the permanence of order. . . . We formed an unbelievable island, cut off from the movement of history” (181). That “as if” is an extremely fragile fiction, of course. The guards are getting more and more nervous, since the “German advance on the Marne has come almost within artillery range of the prison” (xxii). The prisoners, too, are “terrified” of being bombed, the fear spreading “from one man to the next” (178). Although some of them are also excited at the prospect that “the cannon” will destroy the prison and free them (178).

This situation is made even more unbelievable by the fact that the prisoners are strictly forbidden from knowing anything about what’s going on in the outside world. As Serge writes, “We were the only men on earth forbidden to know about the war. . . . No one was to know anything about it” (180). This interdiction is enforced with ridiculous interrogations and serious punishment:

The Warden, angry, was drumming on his desk with nervous fingers:

“You seem well-informed, Rollot. Where do you get your information?”
Silence.
“You better learn to answer when you’re spoken to. Where did you get your information?”
“From the moon, Warden, Sir.”
“Oh, so it’s that way! . . . .The black hole until further notice.” (180)

This interdiction doesn’t stop the men from knowing—Rollot had heard about the bombing of Reims Cathedral and had told Serge and the others. Or from listening for the war in the sounds of “squadrons of airplanes [flying] over the prison on the way to Paris” (181) or in the “rumblings” “drifting” from the nearby town of “La Marseillaise” sung by “delirious crowds,” or in “sudden train whistles” “filled with departing soldiers,” or in the “muffled playing of bands” (175). The prohibition against knowing about the war doesn’t stop the prisoners from constantly discussing it “in whispers” and from getting news “through unknown channels” of “conquered cities, lost and destroyed” (180–81); of battles won, lost, and surrendered; of enlisting friends and comrades; and of “a million corpses piled up in the valley of bones at Verdun” (181). News comes, too, of France having “avidly absorbed the new strength of Canadians, New Zealanders, Hindus, Senegalese, Portuguese” (181), some of whom, like Serge, will find themselves men in prison, perhaps even in Wünsdorf at the Halfmoon Camp.
The prohibition doesn’t stop the prisoners from hopeful dreaming, from taking sides on whether revolution will take the Russian Empire, from finding reasons for living “through the double smokescreen of war and administrative stupidity” (180). The war, too, brings new prisoners, deserters from the French army who describe the horrors of the front, and who find prison—for Serge a symbol of a brutal society—a relief from the war’s scene of death, throwing, Serge admits, the prisoners’ “whole notion of life” “into disorder” (177).

The war brackets everything that happens in Men in Prison, including its last scene when Serge is finally released from prison.

My blue tweed suit feels strangely light. With unexpected ease I rediscover pockets and the stance of a free man, hands in pockets. . . . I am dressed again. . . . These brown castoffs at my feet belong to Number 6731. . . . Dawn is breaking. . . . I feel free, sure of myself. . . . The keys turn. . . . A gray form stands out there against the now bluish darkness ahead of me. . . . very tall and very strange, like a barbarian in his shadow-colored overcoat, leather-belted, crisscrossed by the straps of the heavy musette bags hanging at his hips. The soldier’s bony face, his piercing eyes, . . . surges up before me for an instant under the dented helmet which bears, gray against gray, an incendiary grenade. . . . The first man I meet at the threshold of the world is a man of the trenches. (250–51)

Like the machines that produce them, the prisoner and the soldier are never far apart. When Serge was released after five years in prison, he was expelled from France and went to Barcelona, where he participated in the syndicalist insurrection in June 1917. He wanted to go to Russia to join the revolution but found himself again imprisoned, this time as a Bolshevik, in a French prisoner of war camp. Ironically, his first contact with Bolshevism was in that prison. He was eventually traded as part of an exchange and made his way to Petrograd in 1919. The two world wars form the bookends of Serge’s life as a revolutionary and of his extraordinary and powerful writings, with their intense combination of “prophetic vision” and “reportage.” Running through them is “the social view of the totality of a world organized for the purpose of repression and finding its ultimate expression (and the source of its own negation) in the brutality of prison and war.” After ten years of various types of captivity and many file card numbers assigned to him, the stakes of that repression were clear to Serge: “The regulations could be summed up in three peremptory words: Living is forbidden! But is it possible to forbid living men to live? With all the weight of
its mighty edifices . . . the . . . prison affirms that it is possible" (53). It was against this possibility that Serge struggled his whole life. In *Men in Prison*, long sections of which read as if it were written in a prison today, what looms large is the defeated state of the struggle in 1914, war displacing the movements he had been part of, war pitting a vast array of poor and working men against each other. The mark of prison. The mark of war. He can’t get away from it.

**Mismeasurement**

Represented in our prisoner camps are a sheer vast magnitude of the most different races. . . . A visit to some of these camps is as rewarding for a practitioner as a trip around the world.

—Felix von Luschan, director of the Museum of Anthropology Berlin, 1917, from *The Halfmoon Files*

By 1912, when Serge was convicted of being an accomplice to armed robbery in the popular trial of anarchist Jules Bonnot and his companions, criminal anthropology was sufficiently established to make anthropometric processing routine in French and U.S. prisons, so much so that experienced prisoners had already developed transferable techniques for resisting it. In the late 1880s, many U.S. prisons instituted Alphonse Bertillon’s system of identification, which included recording precise measurements of an individual’s height, weight, and body dimensions accompanied by frontal and profile photographs and which promised to “preserve a sufficient record of a personality to be able to identify . . . at some future time . . . proof of identity.” In 1896, New York, home to two of the most important of the new model penitentiaries, Auburn and Sing Sing, required that all persons sentenced to prison for more than thirty days be measured and photographed according to this system and “the records carefully maintained and catalogued.”

By the late nineteenth century, scientific theories of race and human type and their attendant methodologies of measurement and classification had become the primary academic and intellectual framework for investigations into poverty, the so-called lower classes, crime, madness, and social disorder. The concept of evolution had profoundly transformed Western thought, giving biological and racial natures to a vast array of human behaviors. In the United States, some of the “leading eugenics adherents and experimenters” seeking to “improve the human race” and “eliminate
'poor’ and ‘inferior’ tendencies” “through controlled breeding” were “prison research directors, physicians, psychologists and wardens.” Extending Franz Gall’s phrenology to the search for the predictable signs of criminality, anthropologists such as George Combe and Paul Broca and physicians such as Cesare Lombroso measured the skulls of executed criminals, attesting to their distinctive shape and features, while modern scientifically inclined prison wardens, such as at Philadelphia’s Eastern Penitentiary, began routinely to collect and publish phrenological data. Noteworthy was the phrenologically inclined reform warden of Sing Sing’s women’s prison, Eliza Farnham, who published a new edition of Marmaduke Sampson’s *Rationale of Crime and Its Appropriate Treatment, Being a Treatise on Criminal Jurisprudence Considered in Relation to Cerebral Organization* in 1846 with an introduction she contributed and with a set of prisoner portraits she commissioned from Mathew Brady. At Joliet Prison, Ohio State Penitentiary, Indiana Reformatory, Blackwell’s Island Workhouse and Penitentiary, and San Quentin, to name a few, the laboratory study of living prisoners was supported by the prisons themselves, worked into their daily operating procedures and reported on in great detail to eager popular and specialist audiences. Such study was also energetically pursued by doctors, sociologists, and civil servants, the case of Arthur MacDonald, a specialist in “pauperism and crime” at the U.S. Bureau of Education, being especially noteworthy.

It’s worth mentioning that my rather brief and simple account addresses neither the details, the distinctions, nor the relations among Bertillon, Francis Galton, and Lombroso (to whom I will turn in a moment),
all key figures in the development of criminal anthropology. These are brilliantly treated by Allan Sekula in “The Body and the Archive.” In an attempt to understand photography as a modern capitalist system of representation, Sekula was the first to excavate the double logic of the photographic archive in which “every proper [bourgeois] portrait has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the files of the police.”¹⁷ As subject, the police/prison photographic archive and its architects produce complex relations of culture and social regulation, “political issues” still relevant today that Sekula’s erudite treatment of these figures critically accesses.¹⁸ What’s equally striking is that from the point of view of the prisoner, these analytic distinctions and theoretical differences mattered little. The outcome was the same: mismeasurement. They don’t notice me at all. They ignore me. . . . I don’t exist. There is nothing in front of him but a forearm, so many inches long. . . . Two numbers . . . on a file card. What Serge’s account makes vivid is that the police headquarters and the prison were open laboratories for scientists and bureaucrats to test their theories and systematically to advance their own interests (in the case of Bertillon keeping control of the Paris Prefecture of Police that by 1893 he’s running). What all this scientific and organizational activity meant for the prisoners was that their technologies of resistance to the “anthropometric service”—whether that service was congealed in the camera or the file cabinet or the measuring rod—had to remain agile and alert.

Intrinsic Inferiority

In most cases crime can be shown to run in the blood.
—Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Crime and Automatism”

There have been many arguments throughout history justifying existing or new hierarchies of people as proper and inevitable. Biological justification was a relative newcomer. But it arrived with the authority of Western science as the unquestioned standard of Western civilized knowledge and with the burden of imposing intrinsic inferiority on despised groups that precluded redemption by conversion or assimilation. Prescientific Western theorizing tended to attribute the hierarchy of peoples mistakenly believed to have been discovered rather than invented to God’s will or to the superiority of military might. But in both situations, the inferior could be redeemed either by religious conversion or, in the case of the war captive, by assimilation to the conquering tribe, empire, or group.

As Stephen J. Gould points out in The Mismeasure of Man, his well-
known study of the role of the biological sciences in the making of racial knowledge, scientific racial knowledge is both fraudulent and racist. The biological determinism on which it rests suffers from a set of “deep and insidious” epistemological errors, including reductionism (or the explanation of complex and often random phenomena by “deterministic behavior of the smallest constituent parts”); reification (or the conversion of abstract concepts or relations, such as intelligence, into fixable, quantifiable forms or things); dichotomization (or the division of continuous reality into binaries); and hierarchy (or the ordering of things by ranking them in a linear series of value). We know that these are not merely philosophical errors but are also sociopolitical modalities of knowing by which certain truths are established and empowered and others marginalized and subjugated. Until the 1960s, science produced much of the official knowledge of race and also provided justification for the propriety of racial rankings that were widely shared and promulgated by others. Today both natural and social scientists understand more accurately that races are artifactual constructs, categories of social knowledge that nonetheless have factual weight in the lives of individuals and groups. And yet, in increasingly sophisticated varieties, racial determinism continues to be used as a social weapon of validation and denigration. As Gould points out, the repetition of major episodes in the resurgence of racial science “correlate[s] with episodes of political retrenchment” by the state, with social unrest, or when the seizure of power by the powerless threatens ruling elites and their proxies. It’s worth noting that the three focal periods of Gould’s study—1870 to 1920, the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the late 1980s to mid-1990s—are also
notable in the U.S. history of mass imprisonment as a modality of social control and socioeconomic governance.

For our purposes here, what’s crucial about the biological determinism at the heart of racial science is its fungibility or generality. Biological determinism is a general theoretical proposition: the groups to whom it is and historically has been applied may be races, as we understand that term today, classes, sexes, ethnicities, or certain groups of people—prisoners, the poor, radicals, heretics, “our” enemies. As Gould insightfully writes, “Particular bearers of current disparagement act as surrogates for all others subject to similar prejudice at different times and places. In this sense, calls for solidarity among demeaned groups should not be dismissed as mere political rhetoric, but rather applauded as proper reactions to common reasons for mistreatment.”

Lombroso’s theory of the criminal man was probably the most influential doctrine to emerge from the anthropometric tradition and significantly directed the development of criminal anthropology and its impact on the prisoner. In the United States, extensive classification experiments testing Lombrosian theories were conducted in prison, under the assumption that this was where criminals or “criminaloids” were most concentrated and conveniently located. Lombroso’s basic claim, discovered in the course of trying to identify the anatomical differences between the criminal and the insane and based on thousands of measurements of convicts living and dead, was that criminality was innate. Where Oliver Wendell Holmes had claimed in “Crime and Automatism” that in most cases “crime can be shown to run in the blood,” Lombroso was more certain that in all cases it did for, in effect, the criminal qua prisoner displayed nothing more and nothing less than his nature. Lombroso’s criminal type was the prototypical, natural-born criminal.

Lombroso’s criminal anthropology rests on three core presumptions that summarize its racialism. First, like most Western forms of racism, Lombroso’s theory of the born criminal relied on a fundamental but spurious distinction between those people deemed civilized and those deemed savage. There were precursors to the division of peoples into savage and civilized in the prototype of the barbarian, the foreigner, and the infidel, particularly as these terms developed during the Roman and Ottoman empires. But, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the English elite first imposed the idea of a less-than-human savage on the unmanageable Irish, who were viewed as lazy, filthy, superstitious, and given to stealing, amorality, and crime, barbarous traits that constituted the
antithesis of civilized man bound by law and explained the need for English dominance.\textsuperscript{28} These same characteristics were used to classify Africans and later African Americans as savages during the following three centuries. The critical difference between earlier and nineteenth-century ideas of savagery was the latter’s scientific justification.

Thus, when Lombroso thought he found apish atavism in criminals—individuals who were arrested in their evolutionary development and were more properly classified as primitive—he drew on a long-established Western division between savage and civilized peoples. Racial classification always combines division (or difference) and hierarchical ordering, and Lombroso’s thinking was consistent in its supremacist logic. He suspects that there is a criminal type or a criminal man, and the heads speak to him of this truth, but insufficiently. He seeks other proof. Where, he asks, do we find evidence of criminality as typical or characteristic behavior? The answer, given to him by his study of the research of his ethnological colleagues Josiah Nott, George Gliddon, Louis Agassiz, and Samuel Morton, was among “primitive” peoples: among Africans, particularly the Dinka of the Upper Nile; Native Americans; and the Romany (or gypsies).\textsuperscript{29} This makes sense to Lombroso, for in tying criminality to savagery he is able to racialize criminality (to give it a racial nature) in specific and comprehensible geopolitical (colonialist) terms and also to give the criminal his or her proper place as a lower or inferior order of species. An aberration in the civilized world, the criminal primitive could only be an evolutionary throwback, a kind of feral child. Needless to say, the association between criminality and savagery has long outlasted Lombroso’s rather clumsy proofs.

The second core assumption of Lombroso’s criminal anthropology was his unshakable belief that a member of the criminal race could be identified by certain visual signs or stigmata. Once Galton began photographing the facial features of known criminals, Lombroso followed, adapting photographic composites into his work. Members of the criminal race had thicker skulls and simpler cranial structures, longer arms, receding foreheads, asymmetrical faces, scant beards, woolly hair, swollen lips, twisted noses, “precocious wrinkles,” darker skin, inverted sex organs, and so on.\textsuperscript{30} Lombroso was particularly obsessed with prostitutes, whom he considered the template for all primitive women, and he studied their feet with fetishistic interest. The visual stigmata giving the telltale signs of the criminal man or woman were not only physiognomic, but social or cultural traits also constituted a visual stigmata of sorts. \textit{L’uomo delinquente} spoke his own language incomprehensible to others, gestured excessively with his hands,
and showed a marked lack of sensitivity to pain, a characteristic seemingly common to hard laborers and slaves as well. Tattooing, of which Lombroso made a special study, was particularly noteworthy for combining insensitivity to pain and childish attachment to adornment.

While the whole notion of the visual stigmata of the criminal may seem silly today, it is not. This particular branch of criminal anthropology, which barely differs from its late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century versions in its racial profiling, is influential in gang policing, with its vast and Kafkaesque photographic and informational archives, and it underwrites all current and planned security and surveillance systems, from routine DNA identification to eye scans, which promise predictive pre-emption of dangerousness. Seemingly easy identification of people’s race—the experience of knowing it without doubt or effort or even knowledge of knowing it—is central to racism and to the means by which groups of people can be classified, surveyed, and disciplined. The criminal needs his or her stigmata too, and Lombroso was one of the first to provide it.

The third and perhaps most general feature of Lombrosian criminal anthropology is its treatment of criminality as part of the criminal’s very being, as a mark of his or her ontological status. Today, we would call this essentialism, the claim that groups of people possess as their essence certain characteristics that make them what they are. To treat some practices or qualities as constitutive conditions of a group’s being is certainly a form of reductionism, and it is also an injurious constraint on people’s capacity to self-determine, to decide who they are and what they want to be, whether as individuals or collectivities. In my view, it’s a form of racism when these ontologies are hierarchically ordered or when, as cultures of difference, they are fatally combined with technologies of power. The prisoner assumed the status of a distinct species, whose ontology—what he was, what he is, what he could be—was reduced to his essential criminality, all inside him as his basic nature. Lombroso was extremely influential in defining the criminal as a dangerous person who was born that way: a throwback to the savage apish past in our midst, a kind of ghost of our ascent into civilization.

The lower species being of the criminal qua prisoner permits treating him or her without the same moral or ethical considerations given to putative equals. However crooked the anthropometric “stair of progress,” the prison was never only a laboratory for the study of the origin of the prisoner, the etiology of criminality, or a convenient location to create an archive of the world’s languages and music repertoires. Scientists also used the prison as an unregulated laboratory for the testing of drugs and medi-
cal procedures, for the development of birth control and sterilization procedures, for general methods of meeting eugenic goals including castration, and for research on commercial products, such as perfume. Prisons provided a captive and free population of subjects for study, and they provided a population of individuals about whom little care was given, for these were a species of people whose diminished freedom and availability for use were already given by their criminal nature. As Allen Hornblum shows in his harrowing book Acres of Skin about the use of prisoners for medical research and experimentation at Philadelphia’s Holmesburg Prison and throughout the United States in the post–World War II period, for two decades after the establishment of the Nuremberg Code, medical research programs, including commercial pharmaceutical research, in prisons actually expanded rather than declined.31

“A man in prison. An inmate”

I had crossed the invisible boundary. I was no longer a man, but a man in prison. An inmate. . . . I’m already in some sort of tomb. I can do nothing. I am nothing.
—Victor Serge, Men in Prison

Contrary to popular opinion, imprisonment is not primarily designed to prevent crime or to protect us from society’s greatest dangers or even to punish wrongdoers justly. Imprisonment historically serves two major ordering functions—to manage socioeconomic crises and to manage political dissent—and ideologies of racism have played a crucial role in informing and justifying how these crises are resolved or managed.32 In 1880 as our criminal anthropologists are busy at work against a backdrop of labor struggles, significant external and internal migration, nativistic hysteria, white riots, and the epidemic lynching of African Americans, 26.4 percent of the U.S. general population was foreign born or African American, while 50.4 percent of its relatively small prison population was from these two groups, the Irish the largest of the foreign born, replaced with Germans by 1917.33 Today, there are more than two million people in U.S. prisons, more than 60 percent of them are racial and ethnic minorities, primarily African Americans and Latinos; in some states the proportion is even higher.34 When we link imprisonment and race this way, we’re primarily explaining who is likely to become a criminal and thus a prisoner, and why and how these individuals, their families, and their communities are both organized into prison and abandoned by it as well.
It is my view that racism not only explains who is most likely to become a prisoner but also what the prisoner becomes. I had crossed the invisible boundary. I was no longer a man, but a man in prison. An inmate. Racism is not merely external to imprisonment and prisoners are never only racial subjects, in the sense in which we commonly use race. As I've been suggesting, one of the major contributions of nineteenth-century criminal anthropology was to treat the criminal as a distinct and inferior race—the criminal and thus also the prisoner, since in almost all penal systems of which I'm aware, save one very important one, it is impossible to become a prisoner without first becoming or being made into a criminal. Formal arrest, trial, and conviction may be lacking, but imprisonment without accusation and attribution of criminality rarely, if ever, exist. Even in countries, unlike the United States, that recognize the category of a political prisoner (and this is a fraught category in the best of cases), the political prisoner, too, has been accused or convicted of criminal acts, usually treason. This is the nature of or the revenge of the rule of law.

My point is that imprisonment itself is a medium of racialized statecraft and prisoners are usually, and definitely in the U.S., considered in law and in social practice an inferior race in and of themselves. The artifactual carving up of human differences into distinct groups whose worth is ranked hierarchically, the assignment of innate and ontological characteristics to these groups, the othering, denigration, stigmatization and the “vulnerability to premature death” that accompanies such a ranking—in short the state-sponsored “coupling of difference and power”—this regime of fate has been applied to the prisoner as a class. The two fatal couplings of power and difference are themselves intertwined in especially destruc-
tive ways for people of color. This is particularly the case for African Americans because of the legacy of chattel slavery and the fact that attempts to be something else than a slave as that was defined legally and socially—such as running away or reading and writing—were capital crimes. Thereby making the very act of being yourself—a somebody not contained by the law’s ontology—a sign of one’s essential criminal nature. As the history of prisoner resistance shows, when the prisoner refuses to conform to the expectations of what a member of such a race should be, they too become even more intensely criminalized. The haunt of slavery is rank in U.S. prisons. Today it is illegal to try to be something other than a criminal if you are a prisoner, and the escalating number of disobedient prisoners in solitary lockdown, long terms distended even further, is bitter proof. *I had crossed the invisible boundary. I was no longer a man, but a man in prison.*

**The Accidental Enemy**

There once was a man… He joined the British army. This man went into the European war. Germany captured this man. He wishes to go to India…. Three long years have passed. Nobody knows when there will be peace. In case this man is forced to stay here for two more years, he will die.

—Mall Singh, *The Halfmoon Files*

Every Sikh is given a number…. Mall Singh has number 75.

—Philip Scheffner, *The Halfmoon Files*

There is one type of prisoner who is not a legally designated criminal, indeed, whose very identity as prisoner depends on the absence of any taint of criminality. And that is the prisoner of war. In the crossover between *The Halfmoon Files* and the development of criminal anthropology, the distinction between the subject of the prison (the criminal) and the object of war (the enemy) gets muddled and complicated. It is arguably the case that one major trend in the history of both ordinary and political prisoners across the West is the attempt to criminalize the enemy, to turn those who threaten or who might threaten the terms of order and profitability into outlaws and outcasts, delegitimizing their ideas and banishing them in the same operation. The social and legal nomination of criminality has a long and stubborn history, and the poor, the foreign, and the rebellious have borne the brunt of it. In the United States, the history of the construction of the criminal and the production of what’s increasingly now a permanent captive population are inseparable from a long series of wars and their
looming enemies: Indian wars, civil wars, anticommunist Cold Wars, wars on crime, wars on drugs, wars on terror.

If, on the one hand, we have the continuous criminalization of the internal enemy, the history of the category of the prisoner of war moves in the other direction, over time establishing that the prisoner of war, though a prisoner, is not a criminal and in principle not even an enemy. In the early history of warfare, there was no recognition of a status of prisoner of war, for the defeated enemy, considered the property of the victor, was either killed or enslaved or, when circumstances permitted, ransomed. Mercenaries, if they were lucky, simply changed employers. In 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia first established that prisoners taken during war should be released and sent home when the war was over, but it was not effectively enforced until after World War II and the cumulative crises of the two wars and their millions of prisoners of war. The host of civil and legal rights we presume applicable to prisoners of war were established by the two Hague and then the two Geneva conventions (1929 and 1949).

Francis Lieber prepared the first substantial body of regulations covering the treatment of prisoners of war for President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 at the close of the Civil War when thousands of war captives were held by the remains of the Union and Confederate armies. The core of these regulations was instructions on how to ensure that the prisoner of war, though “subject to confinement,” would not be subject to any other “intentional suffering or indignity.” Lieber’s regulations were influential in pro-
moting the humanitarian treatment of the prisoner of war and in clearly distin-
guishing between the legitimate “innocent” soldier and the illegitimate one; by the latter Lieber meant those in rebellion or revolt against states, state-sponsored armies, and property owners. But Jean-Jacques Rousseau formulated their conceptual or philosophical foundation, notably in the section of The Social Contract arguing against slavery in general and against Hugo Grotius’s argument for the right of war captives to be enslaved.

Rousseau writes: “The aim of war is the destruction of the enemy’s state, in which one has the right to kill the defenders of the state, whom he encounters with arms in their hands; but as soon as they lay down their arms and surrender, they cease to be enemies; they become men and one has no longer the right to take their lives.” The soldier, Rousseau notes, does not fight for himself; he has neither the power nor the right to raise an army, and if he does, then he is not a soldier but a rebel or an insurgent, a criminal in Lieber’s terms. The soldier is a lowly servant of the state, of its ambitions, its authority, and its monopoly over the use of force. More to the point for Rousseau, war is a relation between states in which individual combatants are only casually and “accidentally” enemies: “Individuals are enemies accidentally, not as men, nor even as citizens, but as soldiers.” The enemy soldier, then, is an accidental enemy, a temporary situational condition not even created by him—a temporary condition of forced conscription in which he rarely profits and in which the state has only a limited property interest despite its monopoly over the use of force. The moment the soldier lays down his arms or has them taken from him, Rousseau concludes, he ceases to be a soldier, an enemy, and becomes again “merely” a man. For Rousseau, the war captive has not only the right not to be enslaved contra Grotius. Once he lays down his arms, he is neither soldier nor enemy and is thus entitled to something more than a negative or even positive right: he’s entitled to the restoration of fellowship conferred by the lifting of enemy status.

Between Rousseau’s moral philosophical assertions and Lieber’s regulatory codes, we see the outlines of the three basic principles that run through the entire history of the development of the idea of the protected prisoner of war. The first principle grants certain rights to an individual made prisoner of war, either by capture or surrender. These rights entitle him to receive humane and considerate treatment by his captors; robbery and pillage, brutality, and torture are forbidden. The second principle establishes that the prisoner is a prisoner of the state, not the personal possession of the one who captures him. The captive may be forced to give
his name, date of birth, rank and service number, and to be numbered in turn. But ransoming, at first a substitute for death for those with money or wealth and then a means of exchange for parties with prisoners to barter, is prohibited. The prisoner is not property; he or she is not for sale. The third principle attests that the prisoner of war, unless charged specifically with a war crime and provided that he is neither spy nor mutineer, is not a criminal and may not be punished as if he were one.

This is absolutely crucial. There are no extant laws of war that treat war in and of itself as a crime. The question of what constitutes a legitimate act of war—when is war a war and not something else, like a revolution, uprising, armed struggle, mutiny, murder, crime, act of terrorism—is the main problematic that has dominated the history of the rules governing warfare. And this main problematic has been overwhelmingly characterized by an unrelenting effort to delegitimize and criminalize political opposition and social revolt from below, which was already clearly established in Lieber. Although Geneva has expanded the definition of war beyond situations in which recognized states make formal declarations of war or commit unequivocal acts of hostility and territorial aggression, the protections Geneva offers are activated only in a legally recognized state of war. Where war is recognized in international law, it is not a crime, and the captives of such wars are not criminals. This is one reason, in a nutshell, Virginia Woolf famously wrote that if you want to know how to prevent war you need to oppose the tendency toward war, the war for the preparation of war. Thus it’s equally important to recall that Geneva and the international laws governing warfare never were designed to abolish war and its means of preparation or to make war a crime in itself or to treat peace as something more than the absence of war narrowly construed. Its purpose has been to regulate the prosecution of war in the interests of established states and in the hopes of minimizing its most obviously destructive elements. In this limited context, war is not in and of itself a crime, and in principle the prisoner of war is not an “ordinary” or even an extraordinary criminal. He is an “accidental enemy”—an innocent man or woman, a fellow, a temporary captive, waiting to go home.

The vast detail of Geneva’s rules and regulations is concerned with who exactly is entitled to claim prisoner of war status, who, in effect, is entitled not simply to various rights but to the restoration of fellowship that the lifting of enemy status confers. The history of who has been excluded from this protection (spies, pirates, certain rebels, mercenaries, and children) and why haunts warfare today and directly impacts the invention of
the alien enemy combatant. There is not space here to discuss the U.S. government’s efforts to create for the global war on terror a class of prisoners of war who are not prisoners of war, but these men in prison today hover ominously around the World War I Muslim and colonial soldiers in *The Halfmoon Files*, further fraying the edges of the distinction between enemy and criminal, extending that double racialization imposed on non-white prisoners.

“In case this man is forced to stay here for two more years, he will die”

The thin and unstable difference between the enemy and the criminal is an old one, nowhere more evident than in the very notion of treason itself. Orlando Patterson described the slippage this way: “The one fell because he was the enemy, the other became the enemy because he had fallen.” This is Patterson’s summary description of the means by which the slave is rendered socially dead, the means by which the situational, contingent conditions of capture and bondage—however much foretold, however much a continuation of former miseries—lose their accidental quality and are rendered naturally given, sensible, an expectation arising from the person themselves in their being. Patterson argued that across the range of different systems by which people have been enslaved and indentured, the principal common feature is the rendering of the slave as socially dead. By *fallen*, then, Patterson means having lost the right to belong. The living dead person exists in a liminal social state, lacking public worth, social standing, and honor; fallen outside the bounds of social recognition and acceptance; and at the same time, a degraded and dangerous entity, made all the more unsettling by the society’s utter dependence on him or her. Upon application, social death is always permanent in the sense that it is a condition or a taint that appears to always have belonged to the captive or the slave, his essential mark, the means by which he is recognizable. “The captive,” Patterson writes, “always appears as marked by an original indelible defect which weighs endlessly upon his destiny.” And in this way the taint of social death is a potent legitimizing and racializing tool for the capture or imprisonment of people who otherwise might be your neighbors, fellow citizens/residents, friendly or even utterly strange strangers. Patterson rightly calls social death an “idiom of power,” and he strikingly describes how a society’s outsiders (foreigners, infidels, prisoners of war) and its insiders (dissenters, criminals, deviants, the destitute) could be conceived as people who did not and could never belong.
I’m already in a sort of tomb. The one fell because he was the enemy, the other became the enemy because he had fallen. The differences between the one and the other are real but thin and shifting and are like that menacing tape in The Halfmoon Files that snaps specterlike between the wind and the empty road trapping people who get caught unawares in it. We know little about the prisoners of war at the Halfmoon Camp, but we know they were captives, accidental enemies far from homes already occupied by the European imperial powers. And as Gomes Azurara, the fifteenth-century Portuguese imperial historian, librarian, and keeper of the archives, noted on witnessing one of the first cargoes of slaves held at the Lisbon port: their most visible “shared feature, he wrote, was their grievously wept desire to go home.”

There once was a man. . . . This man went into the European war. Germany captured this man. He wishes to go to India. . . . In case this man is forced to stay here for two more years, he will die.

Static in the Sound Archive

I can hear him even though he died in 1931. Ever since Edison’s invention, the dead can speak.
—Philip Scheffner, The Halfmoon Files

You soon learn to tell time by the sound of the prison.
—Victor Serge, Men in Prison

Ever since Thomas Edison, condemned prisoners could be electrocuted to death. The first electric chair was built by Harold Brown, then secretly employed by Thomas Edison and introduced at New York’s Auburn Prison
in 1890, replacing hanging as the principal form of capital punishment. Although Edison claimed to oppose capital punishment, his desire to crush his competitor George Westinghouse was stronger. The War of the Currents, as it was known, was aggressively prosecuted by Edison, who ran a smear campaign against Westinghouse and his AC current, including setting up a 1,000-volt Westinghouse AC generator in New Jersey and publicly executing a dozen animals, the better to discredit it, which garnered considerable press coverage and led to the new term *electrocution* to describe death by electricity. A skilled political operator, Edison not only lobbied the New York legislature to select AC for use in electrocution but managed to get Fred Peterson, a doctor whom Edison hired to build an AC chair, appointed to the committee, which unsurprisingly selected the AC voltage electric chair. Despite the fact that for years people referred to the process of being electrocuted as being “Westinghoused,” Westinghouse did not support capital punishment, refused to sell his generators to prison authorities, and funded the legal appeals of the first prisoners sentenced to death by electricity. In the end, Edison lost the War of the Currents, but the battle confirmed his great talent for maximizing profits and monopolizing intellectual property.\(^4^5\) After its effective use in World War I, in the 1920s many U.S. states shifted to execution by lethal gas. Known in Germany by its commercial name Zyklon B, cyanide was soon to be used in Adolf Hitler’s gas chambers, “rein[ing] the technique that had been invented in US prisons.”\(^4^5\)

Another important invention occasioned by Edison’s encouragement of electricity’s role in the service of order was electroconsulsive therapy, applied mercilessly to treat men who had been traumatized in World War I.
“Painful electrical treatment,” as Sigmund Freud called it, was used not only in military hospitals but in the trenches at the front as triage, as an emergency procedure to restore the broken soldier to efficient use. Accompanied by cruel and harsh exhortations to return to honor, nation, and manhood, it was administered for the set of symptoms known as shell shock by psychiatrists such as Lewis Yealland, who believed shell shock nothing more than a euphemism for the despicable condition of male hysteria. Electric shock was also imposed as punishment for and in the service of eliminating resistance to the war, for literally remaking dissenters, rebels, and deserters into normalized, anaesthetized men of the trenches.46

Individual soldiers and soldiers’ councils routinely resisted electroshock, and the various postwar court cases involving soldiers and doctors in Germany and France provide evidence of it.47 In one of the most celebrated inquiries, the Austrian War Ministry launched an investigation into whether army doctors tortured war “neurotics.” Freud testified in the case brought against Viennese professor of psychiatry Julius Wagner-Jauregg, and although he found “conclusive evidence of the final break-down of the electrical treatment of the war neuroses,” Freud nonetheless provided a perfect justification for its use. Freud writes:

It was easy to infer that the immediate cause of all war neuroses was an unconscious inclination in the soldier to withdraw from the demands, dangerous or outrageous to his feelings, made upon him by active service. Fear of losing his own life, opposition to the command to kill other people, rebellion against the ruthless suppression of his own personality by his superiors—these were the most important affective sources on which the inclination to escape from war was nourished. A soldier in whom these affective motives were very powerful and clearly conscious would, if he was a healthy man, have been obliged to desert or pretend to be ill.48

Freud does not push the point that desertion and refusal to fight are normal responses to war. This may be in part because of the number of physicians and military officers who thought most traumatized soldiers were “malingersers” and for whom electric shock was less treatment than discipline and punishment, of which Freud did not approve. There are very few “malingersers,” Freud asserts; illness is the “flight” route from the war. Neurosis—illness—was Freud’s only possible framework for understanding what war is, what it does to soldiers, and what their resistance to it means. For him, illness is what justifies and legitimates the work of a physician, even if this work is to provide the “means” to “compel” the soldier back to “health,”
back “into fitness for active service,” even if this compulsion will make him “ill” again since in being sent back to the fighting, he would “repeat the business afresh.” Freud struggled in his testimony to exonerate his friend, Wagner-Jauregg: If “this painful form of treatment . . . was used in the Vienna Clinics, I am personally convinced that it was never intensified to a cruel pitch by the initiative of Professor Wagner-Jauregg. I cannot vouch for other physicians whom I did not know.” And to relieve his colleague of responsibility for his actions: “The physician himself was under military command and had its own personal dangers to face—loss of seniority . . . —if he allowed himself to be led by considerations other than those prescribed for him.” Those considerations never included the men of the trenches. The scientists are not interested in the personal stories of their object of study, but they depend on the stories that are told to them. Freud’s short written and cold submission to the ministry ends dreadfully, wrongly thus: “With the end of the war the war neurotics, too, disappeared—a final but impressive proof of the psychical causation of their illness.”

A gray form stands out there against the now bluish darkness ahead of me . . . very tall and very strange, like a barbarian in his shadow-colored overcoat. . . . The soldier’s bony face, his piercing eyes, . . . surges up before me for an instant under the dented helmet which bears, gray against gray, an incendiary grenade. . . . The first man I meet at the threshold of the [free] world is a man of the trenches.

“What is a ghost?”

What is a ghost? How does he live? How many types of ghosts exist? How does he become a ghost? This is what I will tell you. Lots of ghosts take the form of an old tattered rag lying in the street. It just lies in the street most of the time and people walking by get trapped in it. The ghost is constantly moving about. . . . He can go everywhere.

—Bhawan Singh, The Halfmoon Files

One of the difficulties for storytellers once ghosts are admitted is that, as Bhawan Singh says, they are everywhere and are constantly moving about. And so I end before we have even really got to the war itself, its senseless slaughter, its 56 percent casualty rate, its imperialist ambitions, its patriotic propagandizing, its yellow-faced factory girls, the widespread resistance and opposition it occasioned. Mall Singh was not alone in wanting to go home. I end before we have dealt with the extraordinary calling up of the ghost army of the dead to abolish war by Abel Gance in J’accuse!, or with the complicated
story that links the Kiehl sailors’ mutiny to the German army’s incitement to Muslim soldiers to defect and to the Baghdad railway scheme, or with the Algerian riflemen of the 10th company of the 8th Battalion of the French army who were shot en masse when they refused an order to attack in Flanders in 1914, or with Karl Liebneckt (thrice a prisoner of war) and Rosa Luxemburg, whose deaths and whose respective analyses of militarism and imperialism are frighteningly prescient and relevant still today, or with the sweeping arc of arrest and expulsion of early-twentieth-century anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Beckman (another prison writer), along with the Industrial Workers of the World’s Bill Haywood, for conspiracy to oppose the war, or to the liens and blowback of the spoils of World War I’s Middle Eastern front, including nothing less than the creation of the modern country of Iraq and the occupation war that destroys it today, scattering its haunting remains across the mismeasured and mismade borders of countries and bad history.

“There . . . are crossroads where ghostly signals flash from the traffic, and inconceivable analogies and connections between events are the order of the day.” These crossroads are where we sometimes encounter those animated signs Walter Benjamin thought yielded a profane illumination of our condition and the traces, however faint, of it being otherwise. The historicity that is the ghost story is given here in the historical material of the connections and disconnections across time that order what’s present and absent, then and now. The ghost story always drags its haunted and haunting remains with it: the violence, denial, and loss that made it and the longing, whether of the ghost or the ghost storytellers, for some other kind of
contact, some other kind of traffic. Sometimes this desire is fulfilled; sometimes it is not.

What is a ghost? How does he live? How many types of ghosts exist? How does he become a ghost? This is what I will tell you. These are complex questions not easily answerable. One thing I can say is that the ghosts themselves will not help you find the answers unless you show respect for their fate, their destiny. For as much as the storyteller might have an interest in or even a need for the ghost story, the ghost always has his or her own designs, a strategy toward us. These designs are part of the traffic, part of the historical materiality of the story. But they appear in their own guises. In *The Halfmoon Files* these designs can be seen in the beautiful rustling trees that sway with time itself. In *The Halfmoon Files* these designs can be heard in certain voices. They can be heard in the pathos of Mall Singh’s recitation, his desire a stumbling repetition: *He wishes to go to India. He wants to go to India*. They can be heard in Bhawan Singh’s griot-craft struggling with the new technology, breathless rushing intonation into chanting. They can be heard in the stray fugitive messages, all staccato. They can be heard in my favorite theft of the power of the scientist’s phonograph, in that mad laughter after Chote Singh exclaims: “The German King is looking well after me. HA HA HA!” I end with that laughter because it seems to me to break the scientific relation of exchange that brings to us the voices in the first place, thus to fruitfully endanger scientific comparability, even if also creating a certain amount of additional work, like the film itself. This laughter registers an ontological and political challenge to the reductionism of rank-ordered species. This laughter boldly invites us into a better relationship to the destiny of the world’s peoples than the regime of fate and fatality installed and enforced by racism and war. This laughter is like a breath of fresh air. A ghost is like air. The ghost is constantly moving about. He can go everywhere.

Notes

Thanks to Philip Scheffner for providing the film stills.

1 Historical and other information about the film can be found at www.halfmoonfiles.de/index.php?id=3&lang=en-us (accessed June 11, 2010).


“I’m already in a sort of tomb.”


Otto Stiehl, the commanding officer at the Halfmoon Camp and an amateur photographer, made at least one hundred photographs of the prisoners at the camp; the glass plates for these photographs were later found in the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin. In 1916, he published a selection of these portraits in a book, *Our Enemy Prisoners of War*, forty thousand copies of which were widely circulated in Europe and the United States. Otto Stiehl, *Unsere Feinde: 96 Charakterköpfe aus Deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern* (*Our Enemy Prisoners of War: 96 Character Heads from Germany*) (Stuttgart: Hoffman, 1916). In a later work by Egon Freiherr von Eckstedt, the names accompanying each portrait were removed and numbers assigned. Egon Freiherr von Eckstedt, *Racial Elements of the Sikhs* (diss., Goethe University Frankfurt, 1920).


Richard Greeman, introduction to *Men in Prison*, xxiv.


See James Gilbert, “Anthropometrics in the U.S. Bureau of Education: The Case of Arthur MacDonald’s ‘Laboratory,’” *History of Education Quarterly* 17.2 (Summer 1977): 169–95. MacDonald was hired by Commissioner of Education William T. Harris to research how education could prevent “pauperism and crime,” but he set up a laboratory for anthropometric research. He was fired when he was exposed lobbying U.S. Congress for his own laboratory to study “abnormality and criminality” that would report directly to the U.S. Interior Department (ibid., 169).


Ibid., 62.


Between 1870 and 1920, African Americans became, for the first time, the predominant prison population, following the Black Codes and the rise of convict leasing. The attempt to use imprisonment to achieve the ends of a recently outlawed plantation slave system was a defining moment of U.S. imprisonment and its centrality in the lives of African Americans. The law and order campaigns of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the quelling of the prison rebellions set the terms for the normalization of imprisonment as a crisis management tool that was secured with the big prison boom that began in the 1980s with Ronald Reagan’s war on drugs and continues today.


Louis Agassiz, a paleontologist by training, ended his career at Harvard University with a reputation as an anti-Darwinian polygenist. Daguerreotypes of slaves he took were found at Harvard’s Peabody Museum in the mid-1970s, bringing him to much wider scholarly attention than he might have retained. In the 1820s and 1830s, Samuel Morton, a Philadelphia physician, measured human skulls to confirm racial differences, ranking intellectual capacity based on brain size, and assigning first place to Europeans, the English in particular. Josiah Clark Nott popularized this racial schemata in his second book with George Robins Gliddon, *Types of Mankind, or Ethnological Researches* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1854). Both Nott and Gliddon were heavily influenced by Morton, whose guidance led Gliddon, an Egyptologist, to insist that Egyptians were not Africans but Caucasians. Morton and Nott were active in pro-slavery expansionist politics. In “The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered,” an address delivered before the literary societies of Western Reserve College at commencement July 12, 1854, Frederick Douglass critiqued this science as propaganda. Frederick Douglass, *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2006).


“I’m already in a sort of tomb.”

33 Christianson, *With Liberty for Some*, 190.


35 “State sanctioned” “fatal couplings of power and difference” that lead some groups of people to become “vulnerable” to “premature death” is Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of *racism*. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 28.


39 Ibid.


41 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 44.

42 Ibid., 38.


Freud, “Memorandum.”

Ibid.