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# **Carceral Geography and the Spatialities of Prison Visiting: Visitation, Recidivism and Hyperincarceration**

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## **Abstract**

Geography, as a disciplinary lens, brings a valuable perspective to the study of the carceral, and carceral geography's concern for the spatial could provide a new explanatory perspective to the consideration of some accepted tenets within criminology, whilst at the same time offering a productive and useful 'grounding' of contemporary geographies of emotion and affect. In the context of hyperincarceration and the carceral continuum of recidivism and repeated re-imprisonment, this paper considers the long-observed relationship between prison visitation and reduced recidivism, posits prison visiting rooms as under-researched carceral spaces, and develops theoretical and methodological innovations which nuance the understanding of prison visiting.

**Keywords:** Carceral geography, prison, visitation, recidivism, hyperincarceration, affect, liminal

## **Carceral Geography and the Spatialities of Prison Visiting: Visitation, Recidivism and Hyperincarceration**

*“Against the backdrop of unfettered markets and enfeebled social-welfare programs, when the penal system has become a major engine of social stratification and cultural division in its own right, the field study of the prison ceases to be the province of the specialist in crime and punishment to become a window into the deepest contradictions and the darkest secrets of our age.” (Wacquant 2002, 389)*

The so-called ‘punitive turn’ has brought new ways of thinking about geography and the state, and has highlighted spaces of incarceration as a new terrain for exploration by geographers. Geographical engagements with incarceration have put these spaces, and experiences within them, firmly on the disciplinary map. This paper argues both that human geography, and specifically the evolving sub-discipline of ‘carceral geography’, have much to offer to the study of incarceration, and that taking the carceral as a locus of research offers useful opportunities both to invigorate ongoing developments within human geography, and to contribute to positive social change.

The paper first synthesizes the research agenda of carceral geography, suggesting that geography, as a disciplinary lens, can add significantly to the contemporary study of the carceral, and in particular to understandings of some of the ‘accepted tenets’ of criminology and prison sociology. Taking one such longstanding ‘tenet’, the observed relationship between prison visitation and reduced recidivism, it posits prison visitation as a vital and political space, and set of social practices. To demonstrate the potential contribution of carceral geography, it then considers the spatialities of prison visiting, and develops an agenda for research which conceptualises prison visiting rooms as liminal carceral spaces, arguing that relationships and experiences which take form within these

transformative spaces could be key to understanding the link between visitation and recidivism, and that a 'grounding' of recent scholarship in emotional and affectual geographies may enhance understandings of these relationships and experiences in the context of growing concern over hyperincarceration and the carceral continuum of recidivism and repeat imprisonment.

### **Carceral Geography**

The term 'carceral geography' (Moran et al 2011) was coined to describe the new and vibrant field of geographical research into practices of incarceration, viewing such carceral spaces broadly as a type of institution (Hopkins 2010) whose distributional geographies, and geographies of internal and external social and spatial relations, could be explored. Such work is often informed by and in dialogue with the work of Goffman (1961) on the 'total institution', of Foucault (1979) on the development of the prison, surveillance, and the regulation of space and docility of bodies, and of Agamben (1998, 2005) on the notion of a space of exception, where sovereign power suspends the law, producing a zone of abandonment. Although the ideas advanced by Goffman, Foucault and Agamben frequently underpin work in carceral geography, other theoretical frames are also deployed, for example de Certeau's concept of tactics (Baer 2005), along with theories of liminality and mobility (Moran et al 2011).

Carceral geography is a new but fast-moving and fast-developing sub-discipline. Although the first paper by a geographer published squarely in this field was probably the work of Teresa Dirsuweit (1999), the enormous potential of spaces of incarceration for geographical enquiry was highlighted by Chris Philo, who turned a book review into an agenda-setting article (Philo 2001) germinating the ideas which have informed the development of this area of research, in terms of a critical engagement with spaces of confinement and a dialogue with the work of Foucault. The early work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1999, 2002) also ignited geographers' interest in prisons as a 'project of state-building' (ibid 2002, 16). Ten years after Philo's paper was published, and with the sub-discipline

proving an increasingly vibrant field of scholarship, this review article provides an overview and synthesis, and suggests some future directions for research.

Although carceral geography is a new field within geographical enquiry, it is of course informed by and in dialogue with longer-standing engagements with the carceral, such as criminology and prison sociology. It may be argued that despite an increasingly embedded concern for space in response to the increased prominence of space and spatiality within social theory and the social sciences more broadly since the mid-late 1980s, these disciplines have tended towards conceptualizations of incarceration as a period of prison *time*, for example through longitudinal studies looking at changes in various phenomena such as imprisonment rates, levels of overcrowding and prisoner welfare (e.g. Jacobs & Helms 1996, Stucky et al 2005), individual prisoners' experiences (e.g. Zamble 1992), and prisoners' adjustment to incarceration (e.g. Warren et al 2004, Thompson & Loper 2005). Imprisonment has been conceptualised as a discrete period of time which is thereby distinguished from the rest of prisoners' lifecourses (e.g. Pettit & Western 2004), with variation in, and effect of, different lengths of prison sentences becoming a focus of research (Aebi & Kuhn 2000), alongside the particular issues associated with the passage of time in terms of the incarceration of people at different stages in the lifecourse, for example younger people (Cesaroni & Peterson-Badali 2005) and older people (Howse 2003, Crawley 2005, Rikard & Rosenberg 2007). Within the prison itself, time and imprisonment are of course integrally linked, as 'time is the basic structuring dimension of prison life' (Sparks et al 1996, 350). Prison scholarship recognizes the experience of time as both personal and variable, exploring inmates' abilities to cope with time, related to their age and their awareness of self-deterioration during sentences (Farber 1944, Cohen & Taylor 1972), within a body of literature which considers time in relation to prisoner vulnerability (Medlicott 1999).

Carceral geography, by contrast, has tended to foreground the experience of carceral *space*, both in terms of the individual's movement into and out of that space and their experience within it, as well

as the physical manifestation of the penal institution in space. If criminology and prison sociology have tended to identify most readily with the temporal in the work of Foucault (1979), considering, for example, control in prison exercised through time-discipline, which limits inmates' abilities to make decisions about their activities, then for carceral geography the spatial has perhaps proved more significant. These contrasting perspectives of space and time themselves open further possibilities for carceral geography, since human geographers such as Thrift (2000), May & Thrift (2001) and Massey (1999, 2005) see space and time as sticky concepts, difficult to disentangle one from another, and giving rise to the discussion of space-time or 'timespace' (Dodgshon 2008, 11). With the interdisciplinary interpretive potential of carceral 'timespace' as yet untapped, the sub-discipline of carceral geography has coalesced around a concern with carceral spatialities.

Philo (2012, 4) described carceral geographies as a sub-strand of 'geographical security studies', drawing attention to consideration of 'the spaces set aside for 'securing' – detaining, locking up / away – problematic populations of one kind or another', but I would argue for a slightly more nuanced interpretation of the work in this emerging field. There are three main areas of interest, which may be broadly conceived as the nature of carceral spaces and experiences within them, the spatial or distributional geographies of carceral systems, and the relationship between the carceral and an increasingly punitive state.

A rich vein of work has emerged around the nature and experience of carceral spaces, in which theorizations of incarceration informed by Foucault are debated and contested. Dirsuweit (1999) examined a prison for women in South Africa, showing that rather than being rendering 'docile', prisoner resistance to omni-disciplinary control was expressed through the reclaiming of culturally-defined prison space. In New Mexico, Sibley and van Hoven also contested this Foucauldian regulation of prison space and the docility of bodies, describing 'spaces... produced and reproduced on a daily basis' (van Hoven & Sibley 2008, 1016), and the agency of inmates making 'their own

spaces, material and imagined' (Sibley & van Hoven 2008, 205). In the UK, Baer (2005) identified the personalization of prison space, suggesting that this spatial modification reflected the construction of the meaning of prison spaces.

'Distributional' geographies of incarceration have often been inspired by concern for the impact of spatial distribution of places of incarceration on the communities which host or surround them, and they frequently consider critiques and reinterpretations of the 'total institution' Goffman (1961). Examples include Mitchelson (2012) on spatial interdependencies between prisons and cities in Georgia, USA, Che (2005) on the location of a prison in Appalachian Pennsylvania, USA; Glasmeier & Farrigan (2007) on impacts of prison development in persistently poor rural places in the US, Engel's (2007) research on prison location in the American MidWest, and Bonds' (2009) questioning of prison siting as a means of encouraging economic development, as well as studies of the effects of 'geographies of punishment' on experiences of incarceration (e.g. Moran et al 2011, Pallot 2007). Much of this work extends critiques of the 'total institution' (Goffman 1961), and suggests that the 'carceral' is something more than merely the spaces in which individuals are confined.

This notion of the 'carceral' as a social construction relevant both within and outside physical spaces of incarceration, informs research into the relationship between the 'carceral' and a punitive state. For example, Allspach (2010), suggests that 'transcarceral' spaces form beyond prison walls and constitute re-confinement, and others see the 'carceral' as embodied through the corporeal inscription of released inmates (Moran forthcoming). At higher level of abstraction from lived spaces of incarceration, Peck (2003) and Peck & Theodore (2009) have discussed the relationship between prisons and the metropolis in the context of hyperincarceration, in the aftermath of what Wacquant (2011, 3) describes as 'a brutal swing from the social to the penal management of poverty' particularly in the United States, with a 'punitive revamping' of public policy tackling urban marginality through punitive containment, and establishing a 'single carceral continuum' between

the ghetto and the prison (Wacquant 2000, 384). This conceptualisation of the prison as a locus on the carceral continuum resonates with the work of Baer & Ravneberg (2008) who problematise the conceptualisation of a binary distinction between 'inside' and 'outside', instead positing prisons as 'heterotopic spaces outside of and different from other spaces, but still inside the general social order' (ibid 2008, 214). The work of social theorists and geographers such as Wacquant (2010a,b&c), Gilmore (2007) and Peck & Theodore (2009), calls for greater attention to the causes of and solutions to hyperincarceration (Wacquant 2010b,74) 'prisonfare' (Wacquant 2010c, 197), and the carceral 'churn' (Peck & Theodore 2009, 251).

Taking an overview of the scholarship produced by geographers concerned with incarceration enables the notion of the 'carceral' to be brought more clearly into view. It also points up some current discourses within human geography with which carceral geography might usefully engage, and some wider social and political issues towards which it must demonstrate its utility and relevance. For example, carceral geography has thus far tended to overlook mobility in the carceral context. Prison seems inherently spatially 'fixed', and prisoners in turn seem immobile by virtue of their imprisonment, despite mobility being a constant practical concern in the management of penal systems. Prisoner transport is identified by criminologists as an issue in relation to overcrowding (Wooldredge 1991), for sexual coercion (Hensley et al 2003) and the transfer of infectious diseases (Levy et al 2003), and the spaces across which penal archipelagos are distributed serve to increase the costs and inconvenience of prison healthcare provision (Stoller 2003). As Martin and Mitchelson (2009, 461) observed, the mobility of both prisoners and guards within and between penal institutions means that 'contemporary practices of imprisonment are characterized by [the] tensions between apparent fixity and forced mobility'. By paying greater attention to the explosion of literature on mobility in contemporary human geography, carceral geography can critique the relationship between mobility, autonomy and freedom suggested by the 'mobilities turn'. As I have argued elsewhere (Moran et al 2011), contemporary spaces of incarceration and carceral practice



offer a perspective on what might be termed 'disciplined' mobility; the geographical notion of the 'carceral' is therefore reflexively and recursively useful not just for studies of incarceration per se, but also for understanding the restriction of autonomy in a much broader sense.

I suggest here that carceral geography has the potential to develop a notion of the 'carceral' which is dynamically open to transdisciplinarity with the cognate disciplines of criminology and prison sociology, which is both informed by and extends theoretical developments in human geography, but which also, and critically, interfaces with contemporary debates, such as those over hyperincarceration, recidivism and the advance of the punitive state. In order to demonstrate the potential of carceral geography to bring a new perspective to 'established' understandings of the carceral, the following section of the paper explores an 'accepted tenet' of criminology – the observed relationship between prison visitation and reduced recidivism. This section of the paper therefore tracks the origins and development of this tenet, providing some contemporary contextualisation for the following discussion of visiting rooms as carceral spaces.

### **Visitation and Recidivism**

The observed relationship between visitation and recidivism has been accepted for almost a century, and this acceptance has shaped the subsequent development of related criminological research. At its heart, however, is a connection which remains underexplored and unexplained, but which could be explored by carceral geography.

Longstanding empirical evidence suggests that prison visiting has a positive influence on inmates; improving their likelihood of successful reintegration on release, and thereby reducing their rates of recidivism. In criminology, the cornerstone work by Holt and Miller (1972) showed, using a series of cross-tabulations following 412 men paroled in California for a year or more, that parole outcomes were much more positive for men who had been visited while in prison. Only 2% of men who had

had three or more different visitors during the year prior to parole were re-imprisoned within a year, compared to 12% of those who had had no contact with friends or family. Only half of those who had no visitors had 'no difficulties' on parole, compared with 70% of those with three or more visitors. Holt and Miller's work followed decades after Ohlin's (1954) and Glaser's (1964) publications of research in 1920s and 1940s Illinois, showing that prisoners who 'maintained an active family interest' were more successful on parole than those who did not. Writing in the 1970s, Homer was at pains to point out the remarkable convergence of studies on parole and prison visiting; "...the consensus of findings should be emphasised. The strong positive relationship between strength of family-social bonds and parole success has held up for more than fifty years, across very diverse offender populations and in different locales. It is doubtful if there is any other research finding in the field of corrections which can come close to this record" (1979, 49).

Lower recidivism rates amongst visited prisoners have since been demonstrated across study populations, time periods, and methodologies, and the most compelling evidence is perhaps that there are no published studies showing a negative influence of visiting on post-release behaviour. Hairston (1991) identified a number of perceived benefits accruing from prison visiting, both in terms of its effectiveness for maintaining personal and parent-child relationships through prison sentences, and for prisoners' mental health, both of which are considered to contribute to the statistical evidence most frequently cited to demonstrate the effect of visiting. However, although the effect is widely observed, the causality is poorly understood; it is presumed that the maintenance of personal relationships and the feeling of connectedness to home and community which may arise through visitation serve to smooth the passage of the released inmate through the process of reintegration after release, but this process has never been fully explored.

Following Holt and Miller (1972), the conclusion that prison inmates visited during imprisonment 'do better' on release remained relatively unchallenged for almost forty years. Coupled with an

increasing awareness of and concern for prisoner rights and welfare, this relationship formed the basis of policy recommendations encouraging increased numbers and frequency of visits, with greater capacity, longer hours, more programmes to encourage visitors, and to mitigate against the factors discouraging visiting, for example the cost of travel (Schafer 1994).

Given this consensus of opinion, academic attention subsequently veered away from prisoners' responses to visitation, towards the wider effects of incarceration. The work of Morris (1965) was precursor to an explosion of interest, particularly in the US, broadly in parallel with the growth of mass imprisonment (Garland 2001), in 'secondary' or 'collateral' effects of imprisonment. These range from those impacting directly on prisoners' families and children (Comfort 2002, 2003, 2007 & 2008; Codd 2007 & 2008; Wildeman & Western 2010; Kruttschnitt 2011; Geller et al 2011; Shedd 2011), to community effects on labour market participation, civic engagement, and community health (Lynch & Sabol 2003). Rose and Clear (2003) and Clear (2007) have written about the stigmatisation of communities with high levels of both imprisonment and subsequent re-entry of released prisoners, with parents raising their children in areas with little social control, ambivalent attitudes to law enforcement and public authority, and in which incarceration becomes a way of life (Breen 2010). Wacquant (2010a, 611) argues that prisoners do not, in fact, 're-enter' society after release, instead circulating between the two poles of 'a continuum of forced confinement formed by the prison and... the metropolis'.

Criminologists have recently begun to reconsider the relationship between visitation and recidivism, nuancing its empirical basis, and emphasizing its complexity. Bales & Mears (2008), Berg & Huebner (2011) Derksen et al (2009) and Mears et al (2011) observe a positive effect in their empirical studies in much the same way as did their predecessors, but now draw attention to the effects of visitation of different types and in varying amounts, and on various types of recidivism (Mears et al 2011). They stress the need for further empirical work to develop a more sophisticated understanding of

visitation, to include consideration of visitation patterns across the entire period of incarceration, the effect of visitation by criminal associates, length of visits, and so on (Bales & Mears 2008, 313). These recent studies of visitation and recidivism are quantitative, grappling with databases of visitation and parole outcomes to determine the statistical relationships between one and the other across large populations, and accounting for the various temporal frames of reoffending. While these studies can establish statistically significant relationships which suggest causality between visitation and reduced recidivism, they still cannot probe the experience of visitation itself and explore the reasons *why* such a causal effect may take place. As Bales & Mears (2008) suggest, future studies might use more refined, or different, measures to engage with the effects of specific types of visit (such as by spouses, children, criminal associates), or the nature of visits (consistent or inconsistent during a sentence, characterised by calm and supportive conversations, or by argument and recrimination) in order to better understand the dynamics of visitation. The spaces in which visiting takes place matter too - by considering visiting rooms as carceral spaces, carceral geography can bring a new analytical perspective to the relationship between visitation and recidivism.

### **Visiting Rooms as Carceral Spaces**

In the context of an increasingly penal management of poverty (Wacquant 2011, 3) particularly in the US, a grounded focus on prison visiting drawing on the evolving foci of carceral geography, could offer a means of integrating the study of welfare and criminal justice. Wacquant's thesis is that the penalization of poverty seen in the US in recent decades, (and arguably extending into Western Europe and elsewhere) comprises a 'punitive revamping' of public policy by tackling urban marginality through punitive containment. Hyperincarceration, having in the United States thrown its 'carceral mesh' (Wacquant 2011, 13) around the hyper-ghetto, has established a 'single carceral continuum' between the ghetto and the prison system in a 'self-perpetuating cycle of social and legal marginality with devastating personal and social consequences' (Wacquant 2000, 384). Recidivism is key to the understanding of this carceral continuum, and to the repetitive cycle of

incarceration, reentry, reoffending and re-incarceration which characterises the penalization of poverty. As contemporary criminological research settles on the visit experience itself as central to an understanding of the relationship between visitation and recidivism, scholarship within carceral geography, with its threefold focus on carceral spaces, on the connections between institutions and their surrounding communities, and on the wider context of hyperincarceration, offers a lens through which to usefully explore that experience, and to advance understandings of it. Seeing visiting rooms as a nexus for the integration of these three foci also enables carceral geography to address Wacquant's (2002, 371) appeal for 'intensive, close-up observation of the myriad relations' supported and maintained by penal facilities. Such research in carceral geography would 'investigate the varied linkages between the prison and its surrounding institutions *on the ground, as they actually exist and operate*, rather than from afar and above, from a bird's eye view unsuited to capturing process, nuance, and contradiction' (ibid, 388, emphasis added).

Where carceral geography offers a significant insight is in the consideration of the socio-spatial context of visitation. Very little is known about *what kind* of visit is a 'good' one, and *what circumstances* facilitate 'beneficial' visiting. Questions need to be asked about the spaces in which visitation takes place, and whether and how these matter in determining the nature and effect of the visitation experience. Although Dixey & Woodall's (2011) research in a prison visiting centre in Leeds, UK, suggests that prisoners find the fastened-down tables and chairs incompatible with personal contact, very little research has specifically explored the visiting environment, and its effects on those who experience it, despite the fact that visiting spaces vary enormously. Just as prisons are not uniform spaces; some purpose-built, others converted, built at different times and in different places, to serve the needs of different governance regimes with different sensibilities about the function and intention of incarceration – so facilities for visiting also vary according to local context, level of perceived security risk, category of prisoner, architectural and construction style, resourcing, and so on. As Comfort (2002) shows within one penal institution in California, visiting

spaces and experiences (Table 1) are differentiated by duration, category of prisoner, level of physical contact and location. An increasing level of intimacy and physical contact broadly correspond to increasing spatial privacy and mobility, in turn related to prisoner category, sentence, offence, and proximity to release.

Table 1 Visiting Regimes at San Quentin, California

<b>Type of Visit</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Space</b>
'Phone' visits.	1 hour.	None.	In booths, separated by plexi-glass.
'Cage' visits for prisoners on Death Row.	2 hours.	Two embraces – one at greeting and one at farewell.	Restricted to a surveilled 'cage'.
'Mainline and H Unit' 'contact visits'.	Up to 7 hours.	An embrace and kiss at the beginning and end of the visit, plus holding hands throughout.	Large cafeteria-style room.
'Ranch' minimum security area.	Up to 7 hours.	As for Mainline and H Unit 'contact visits', but less closely surveilled.	Unlocked lodge with adjacent lawned space and barbecue area.
'Family Visits' for 'Ranch' or 'Mainline and H Unit' prisoners not convicted of domestic violence or sexual offences, and who have a release date.	Up to 43 hours.	Unrestricted.	Bungalows within a patrolled compound.

Source: from Comfort (2003, 475-477)

Accounts of visiting spaces using direct observation, or qualitative or ethnographic methodologies, depict the physical environment in extremely negative terms. Facilities for visitors waiting for meetings at San Quentin were characterised by 'contemptuous neglect' (Comfort 2003, 83); a space of 'secondary prisonization' for those visiting the incarcerated. Wacquant (2002, 376-377) described visiting spaces at Los Angeles County jail as '...a world unto itself, with its own rules and atmosphere', a 'dimly lit area cluttered with pier-like stalls lined up with phone booths partitioned by an inch-thick, unbreakable glass pane' and 'a metal cage with thick bars to which are attached chains, padlocks and manacles'. Circumstances of visitation vary according to the level of threat posed by the prisoner to penal security considerations and public protection measures; both violent threat and subtly transgressive behaviours such as the passing of contraband items like narcotics and mobile telephones. Carceral geography is well-placed to advance scholarship into visitation and

its relationship to recidivism, by taking this spatial context specifically into account, and by exploring the experience of these different visiting spaces.

### **Theorising Visiting Space**

Different kinds of visiting space matter very much to those experiencing them, but precious little is known about *how*. By deploying a critical constructionist view of space, carceral geography can address this knowledge gap.

Despite a guarded acceptance that the design of prison spaces to enable actual or perceived constant surveillance has a direct effect on prisoner behaviour and control (Foucault 1979, Alford 2000), the lack of literature on the built environment of prisons was until recently (Jewkes & Johnston 2007, Fiddler 2010) one of the most widely cited gaps in penal research (Marshall 2000, Fairweather & McConville 2000). As Hubbard (2001, 51) notes, space 'is not just a passive backdrop to human behaviour and social action, but is constantly produced and remade within complex relations of culture, power and difference'. Space is recognised by geographers as more than the surface where social practices take place (Gregory and Urry 1985, Lefebvre 1991, Massey 1994); rather it is produced by social practices – and is a social category in itself (Koskela 1999). Space is simultaneously the medium and the outcome of these practices (Soja 1985), constructed not only out of political or macro-economic practices, but out of the multiplicity of everyday social relations across all spatial scales, and contributed to by feelings and emotions. As Adey (2008, 440) argues, 'specific spatial structures... can work to organise affect to have certain effects upon motion and emotion'. Designers of spaces have a conscious eye for 'seductive spatiality' (Rose et al 2010, 347) or 'ambient power' (Allen 2006, 445) in which they seek to direct or shape human behaviour within these spaces by incorporating management of affect into the process of design (Allen 2006, Adey 2008, Thrift 2004, Coaffee et al 2009). Geographers understand that space matters, and that it can

affect the ways people act within it, but this perspective has yet to be applied to any great extent to prisons, or to prison visiting spaces.

Drawing together the reinvigorated drive within criminology to determine the relationship between visitation and recidivism, in the context of concerns over hyperincarceration and carceral 'churn', and in response to Wacquant's (2002, 389) call for transdisciplinary qualitative research that gets 'into and out of the belly of the beast', carceral geography provides an insightful explanatory perspective on prison visiting spaces, as the nexus between the 'inside' of forced confinement and the 'outside' of 'workfare' and the metropolis (Wacquant 2010b&c). In the following sections of the paper, I outline how carceral geography, via a critical constructionist view of space, provides an entry point into the 'beast'; first through a theorisation of visiting rooms as liminal carceral spaces (Moran 2011), and second through a consideration of emotional and effectual geographies.

### **Prison Visiting Rooms as Liminal Spaces**

A significant contribution of carceral geography is in advancing the understanding of the spatiality of prison visiting. Criminologists and prison sociologists recognise the liminality of visiting space; Comfort (2003, 80) described a 'border region of the prison where outsiders first enter the institution and come under its gaze', theorising this space as one in which visitors became subject to 'secondary prisonization' as a collateral effect of incarceration, 'a liminal space, at the boundary between "outside" and "inside," where visitors convert from legally free people into imprisoned bodies for the duration of their stay in the facility' (ibid 2003, 86). Codd (2007, 257) similarly described 'liminal space' in which prisoner families 'are not entirely prisoners; however, they are within the prison establishment and thus defined as not entirely free either'. The spaces in which prisoners and their visitors meet are 'liminal'; spaces of betweenness and indistinction (Moran 2011), and by drawing on a geographical engagement with liminality, carceral geography can enhance understandings of the experience of visiting space.



Van Gennep's (1960) concept of liminality described transition from adolescence to adulthood, with the liminal a space in which social rules are suspended because the subject no longer belongs to their old world, or to their new one. Turner (1969, 81) extended Van Gennep, developing liminality as 'necessarily ambiguous, since this condition... elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locates states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial.' Within human geography, liminality has been invoked in a variety of contexts; hotels as liminal sites of transition and transgression (Pritchard and Morgan 2006), the liminal act of breastfeeding demarcating specific spaces (Mahon-Daly and Andrews 2002), the street as a liminal space for prostitutes in Brazil (de Meis 2002), cyberspace as a performative liminal space for new and expectant mothers (Madge and O'Connor 2005) and Gaza as a liminal territory (Bhungalia 2010). In each case, the notion of betweenness is highlighted and problematised, and the transformative nature of liminality employed to frame experiences of individuals engaging with or creating these spaces.

Prison visiting spaces represent a liminal indistinction between inside and outside, in which both the physical space and the experience of it are reflexively interrelated. However, these spaces differ, as do experiences within them. The actual spaces of visiting are intensely significant both for the nature of contact and intimacy which can take place, and for the ways in which the spaces themselves are socially constructed and reconstructed by those who occupy them.

For example, women participating in 'family visits' in the bungalows within a patrolled compound in San Quentin, California (see Table 1), rarely described feelings of confinement or captivity. Although they may initially have felt 'locked in', at the same time they described a 'home visit', with barbecuing, and playing with children as characteristic of a pseudo-domestic space neither 'inside'

nor 'out', but displaying elements of both simultaneously. Women actively participated in the creation of this pseudo-domestic space, bringing food, belongings and personal traditions into the penitentiary and 'thereby attempting to domesticate or resocialise the carceral setting by making it more like the familial world', through the 'fabrication of a romanticized "home"' which for some 'surpasses that which exists away from the prison walls' (Comfort 2008, 122,)<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, visitors entering the cafeteria-style room where visitors sit at tables opposite prisoners, were made to feel 'as if they're incarcerated too' (Comfort 2008, 63)

Liminality is not just 'betweenness', however; both in its original conceptualisation by Van Gennep and Turner, and in its subsequent deployment within human geography, there is a strong sense of the liminal as transformative. Shields (2003, 12-13) draws attention to the transformation of social status allowed by liminal spaces, where 'initiates' are 'betwixt and between' life stages and where liminal spaces are bound up with ideas of becoming, privileging the role of liminality as a 'rite of passage' between one world and another, and in particular Van Gennep's (1960) description of the three stages of passage; separation, segregation or the 'pre-liminal'; transition, suspension, or the 'liminal', and reintegration, aggregation, or the 'post-liminal'. In the post-liminal, individuals reintegrate into their 'new' life, adopting a new social status and re-entering society in accordance with this new status.

This linear progression of transformation through distinct stages has been contested, for example by disability scholars such as Phillips (1990), and Willett and Deegan (2001) who argued that the permanently disabled may experience a state of permanent liminality where disabling societies obstruct their passage to social reincorporation. In the specific context of prison visiting spaces, I have argued elsewhere (Moran, 2011) that for Russian women prisoners, the liminal space of the prison visiting room is experienced not once, as a stage in a linear transformation, but repeatedly, with the liminal coming to constitute a temporary, transient transformation followed not by a post-

liminal reintegration into a different social status, but by a return to the state experienced before pre-liminal detachment. Comfort (2008, 27) similarly described visitors' admittance to the prison as 'hovering between their outside lives and the inner world of the institution..., repeating the process each time they move through the intermediary space'. In this sense, the liminal is a temporarily transitive space, entered and left by both visitors and prisoners who, rather than achieving some new post-liminal status, instead return to their pre-liminal context. However, repeated experience of prison visiting has a subtle, cumulatively transformative effect. For Comfort, in California visitors are 'changed' by their experiences, in that 'recurrent exposure to this ordeal will itself become a transformative course' (ibid 2008, 28). Prisoners also change; women may coax their [incarcerated] partners into 'being a "docile body"... who will "do his time" calmly and without incident and thereby minimise his risk of falling victim to violence or incurring disciplinary penalties that extend his time behind bars' (Comfort 2008, 186-187). I have argued elsewhere that for Russian prisoners, although there is no immediate progression from the visiting suite to another life status, there is a cumulative effect, through which visits remind prisoners of what life on the outside is like, and motivate them to complete their sentences successfully in order to be able to return to it (Moran 2011). The space of the prison visiting room therefore operates as a location of partial and repetitive threshold-crossing, where transformation is both temporary and fleeting; but also subtle, cumulative and sometimes counter-intuitive.

Such a conceptualisation of the prison visiting room, understood by carceral geography as a liminal transformative space, could be key to understanding the observed positive effects of visitation on reoffending after release. A shift from considering the prison visit as an event, in terms of its frequency, duration, and repetition, towards a more grounded, spatialised understanding of visiting as a liminal space of transformation, illuminates the causal effect of visiting on recidivism, by providing the framework for a more nuanced understanding of visitation as it actually exists and operates.

## **Emotion and Affect in Carceral Space**

The experience of visiting spaces is varied, complex and socially constructed, and there is much more to be learned about the ways in which the socio-spatial context of visiting affects the kind of transformative role these spaces can play. Research in carceral geography *within* visiting spaces could fruitfully consider the opportunities offered by contemporary understandings of emotion and affect within human geography.

Human geography has over the past ten years seen a growing body of work in emotional and affectual geographies (e.g. Anderson & Smith 2001, McCormack 2003, Thrift 2004, Bondi 2005, Pile 2010). Emotion and affect have percolated into geographies of 'big things' (Rose et al 2010 after Jacobs 2006) such as airports, tower blocks, office blocks, shopping malls, libraries and ships. Some explore "feelings" in terms of the emotions expressed by human subjects, while others work with a version of affect that creates bodily behaviour and sensory perception with little or no mediation by subjective processes' (ibid 339). In their own work, Rose et al argue that both approaches are 'flawed in their uninterest in the human', and propose instead that more attention be paid 'to (at least) three aspects of human feeling: the feel *of* buildings, feeling *in* buildings, and feelings *about* buildings' (ibid, 334, original emphasis). Prisons are also 'big things', and carceral geography is well placed to attend to their emotional or affective geographies, and to those of visiting spaces.

Considering an engagement for carceral geography with the relationship between visitation and recidivism, emotion and affect offer a useful theoretical and methodological lens through which to access the transformative nature of the liminal carceral spaces of visitation, shedding light both on how prisoners, visitors and prison personnel experience the feel *of* them, their feelings *in* them, and feelings *about* them, and also, critically, on the ways in which prisoners and visitors engage *with*

*each other* in these spaces, in relation to the importance of affectivity in spatial experience (McCormack 2008, Merriman 2010).

Utilising methodologies deployed within emotional and affectual geographies of 'big things' could address the limitations of qualitative research in the carceral setting. Prison research always involves complex ethical issues (e.g King and Wincup 2007), methodological challenges, and particularly unequal power relations between interviewer and respondent. In addition, prisoners tend to wear a 'mask', to conceal their 'true selves' in the intense atmosphere of the prison (Liebling 2004, 306&353). In the visiting room, Muedeking (1992, 227) has suggested that prisoners construct temporally-situated identities to convey self-autonomy and freedom from constraints; sometimes tolerated up to a point by prison personnel because of their perceived beneficial effect, and considered part of the rehabilitation process. These 'authentic/inauthentic identities', Muedeking (1992, 227) highlight the instability of prisoner behaviour in the visiting context. Taking all of this together, methodologies resonant with emotional and affectual geographies, which, as Rose et al (2010) have convincingly demonstrated can be used in unison to further illuminate peoples' experiential worlds and to consider this experience reflexively, could be particularly useful, in combination with qualitative and ethnographic techniques.

Rose et al (2010) employed close observation before as well as during 'walking and talking' with respondents in an urban setting, and using photo diaries/photo interviews, to access 'atmospheres, emotions, reflections and beliefs as well as intellects, rationales and ideologies' (Anderson 2004, 260), followed up with reflective analysis of the experience for both researcher and respondent. These combined methodologies conveyed the ways in which different kinds of 'feelings' collaborated to constitute the space in question, and gave an insight not only into the strong feeling of being 'inside' it but also into a 'range of multiple and overlapping spatial and temporal dimensions of the feelings that happen' when individuals are there (Rose et al 2010, 341). By focusing on feelings *of, in*

and *about a place*, they were able to think about human entrainment in spatial settings in a richer and more complex sense, and their work provides an example of ‘grounding’ affect, in a usable and transferable set of methodologies with which carceral geography could explore engagement with visiting space.

The ways in which prisoners and visitors engage *with each other* in visiting spaces are also important in terms of understanding the dynamics of these exchanges in this specific spatial context, and carceral geography can draw here upon Kotarba’s (1979) study of the expression of intimacy between inmates and their visitors, demonstrating both the challenges of accessing these experiences methodologically, and the utility of body language or kinesics in understanding the affective experience of the visit. Noting prisoners’ and visitors’ understandable objections to direct questioning about their private conversations, and that overt eavesdropping changed conversations entirely, he developed methodologies resonant with those of Rose et al (2010). By unobtrusively observing prison visits of the ‘phone booth’ type, and by following up these observations with interviews utilising ethnographic eliciting procedures to ‘assist respondents in conceptualising and verbalising the deep feelings they experienced during visiting’ (Kotarba 1992, 83-84), a nuanced picture was developed of the intimacy shared by prisoners and visitors during these brief, physically separate, encounters. ‘Intimate visitors’, such as wives, fiancées or girlfriends of male prisoners, created privacy and intimacy, sitting close to the plexi-glass pane, using direct eye contact, and tracing designs with their fingertips on the glass as surrogate touches. When speaking intimately about sex, body language changed to ‘(consciously and unconsciously) ...symbolically convey feelings of affection and commitment to reaffirm the relationship... [and to] take on the added dimension of indicating the physical and emotional excitation produced by talk of sexual fantasy’ (Kotarba 1979, 92-93). Put another way, observable kinesics not only served as paralingual adjuncts to the spoken word, but also demonstrated the effects of the conversation on the ‘*embodied selves*’ (ibid, 93 emphasis in original) of the prisoners and visitors. Calling this process ‘public personalisation’,

Kotarba (1979, 101) argued that the prison visit, through its verbal and non-verbal elements, 'can transcend the impersonal constraints of the setting and actually elicit profound emotional responses, including embodied sexual feelings'. The reality constructed through intimate conversation is an 'affective' reality, and one which is directly influenced by the 'seductive spatiality' (Rose et al 2010, 347) of concern to carceral geography.

## **Conclusion**

Carceral geography brings a valuable spatial perspective to the study of incarceration, and this concern for the spatial provides a new explanatory perspective to some accepted tenets within criminology, such as the long-observed but largely unexplained relationship between prison visitation and recidivism. Looking at this issue through a carceral geography 'lens' suggests that the prison visiting room is a critical mediating factor in this relationship, and that the underexplored socio-spatial context of visitation merits further investigation. The focus on prison visiting rooms as liminal carceral spaces spans the three themes currently emergent within carceral geography, insofar as it attends to particular carceral spaces and locales, with a specific focus on the interpenetration of the 'inside' and 'outside', in the context of hyperincarceration. It also opens a space for consideration of the 'carceral' as dynamically open to transdisciplinarity with the cognate disciplines of criminology and prison sociology. Whilst carceral geography offers much to this interdisciplinary dialogue, it also invigorates ongoing developments within human geography, and can contribute to positive societal change.

Philo (2012, 4) sees the prime rationale of carceral spaces as keeping inmates *in* rather than keeping unwanted others *out*; and argues that as such, 'their spatiality is the reverse of most other 'spaces of security''. Prisons may *function* as spaces which keep inmates *in*, and which do so repeatedly, in the current context of high levels of recidivism and reincarceration. However, they are also *intended* to function to keep former inmates *out*, by rehabilitating prisoners and deterring future offences, and

their failure to do so is indicative both of the ineffective nature of prison as a deterrent *per se*, and of the limited understanding of the dynamics of reoffending. In the aftermath of the 2011 UK riots, Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke described the rioters as a “feral underclass, cut off from the mainstream”, blaming the “broken penal system – one whose record in preventing reoffending has been straightforwardly dreadful”<sup>ii</sup>. In the UK 40% of prisoners reoffend within twelve months of release, and in the US, California’s 67.5% three-year recidivism rates have been described as “the complete failure of our prison system in achieving deterrence, rehabilitation, or both”<sup>iii</sup>. If methodologies deploying notions of emotion and affect can identify something of the positive effect of prison visiting in reducing recidivism, then such an insight could be utilised in designing visiting spaces which are more efficient in delivering this positive outcome, or, more accurately, in encouraging the kind of visit which facilitates this ‘beneficial’ result.

In so doing, carceral geography could address critics of affectual geography, who argue that studies of affect might usefully be more closely wedded to topics of relevance, and that geographers of affect should ‘seek out projects and avenues that offer grounds for critical and political thought at the same time that they open the door for participation in efforts to make positive social and political change’ (Woodward & Lea 2010, 170). Suggesting that geographies of affect appear somewhat detached and ungrounded, they argue that ‘affect studies *must* learn to prioritize and critically engage with the countless relations of exploitation and difference that variously and violently scar contemporary life’ rather than to ‘merely ‘apply’ affect to such issues – *using* sites of oppression to exemplify a concept or prove a theoretical point’ (ibid, original emphases). Understanding the affective dimension of human experience in carceral space could not only exemplify a concept, but participate in efforts to make positive social and political change.



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<sup>i</sup> Comfort's (2008) work goes on to describe the ways in which for some women visitors, the performance of a domestic life with their partner within the penitentiary walls was more satisfying than their 'real' relationship with him on the 'outside'. Some women come to view their penitentiary encounters 'as opportunities to engage in fantasized, rather than realistic, family relations ("like a cozy little home that I *should* have") (ibid, 123)

<sup>ii</sup> The Guardian, 5.9.2011

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.correctionsone.com/re-entry-and-recidivism/articles/2865158-California-DOC-report-looks-at-recidivism-rates/> published 4.11.2010, accessed 11.8.2011