

Dissecting the cell: Embodied and everyday spaces of incarceration

Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight

It is all too easy now to underestimate cells. We have known about them for such large fractions of our lives that, for the most part, we cease being aware of how remarkable they really are. (Alberts et al. 1994: xxxiii)

The remarkable cells that Bruce Alberts and his colleagues were considering as ‘underestimated’ were biological cells: the critical components, building blocks and hinge-points around which life itself is determined. As Alberts et al (1994) explain, cells are the basis of all living things. These are ‘small membrane-bound compartments filled with a concentrated aqueous solution of chemicals’ that we must study ‘to learn ... how they are made from molecules and ... how they cooperate to make an organism as complex as a human being’ (Alberts et al. 1994: 3). By examining any plant or animal structure microscopically, we will see that it consists ‘of more or less distinct units – cells – which ... in large numbers make up the structure or organ’ (Mackean and Jones 1975: 6). Already, we can begin to see *conceptual* similarities to a prison – an ‘organism’ comprised of multiple rooms that are, largely, the same in each given prison establishment. These rooms, which are most commonly known as prison ‘cells’ typically represent the space around which life in prison is located, arranged and orchestrated both in terms of physical logistics and punitive philosophy. It is important that the prison cell is not considered as directly comparable – intellectually or actually – to the biological cell. Unlike its biological counterpart, the prison cell is not a natural occurrence. The use of cellular confinement is a *socio-political and economic construction* that, throughout the history of imprisonment, has been instrumental in

shaping the organisation of carceral space as one of reform, separation, deterrence and isolation from the world outside of prison.

The very naming of the prison “cell” is taken-for-granted in most literature that focuses upon this particular carceral space. Although practitioners and scholars researching and working in some contemporary prison spaces – particularly those in the more-exceptional penal landscape of Nordic countries or establishments that incarcerate children – revere the term ‘room’ as a way to demonstrate progressive action in certain institutions, ‘cell’ is the most commonplace of terminologies. Yet, unlike the notion of the ‘carceral’, which finds its Latin roots linked directly to incarceration, the etymology of cell does not find such a history secured in punitive philosophy. Drawing from its French roots, a cell is described as a chamber or storeroom. On the one hand, given such a definition, it is possible to see how the word ‘cell’ has come to be used for the naming of the room in which prisoners are detained. On the other hand, the biological cell, discovered by Robert Hooke in 1665, also found suitable this term, deriving from the Latin word for “small room”. In adopting the word ‘cell’, the biological cell, then, became known as the container for human life.

<Insert Figure 1.1: A simple animal cell about here. Produced by author *about here*>

Typically, the cells of any biological organ ‘are usually specially developed in their size, shape and chemistry to carry out one particular function there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a typical cell’ (Mackean and Jones 1975: 7). Yet, all animal cells have three certain features in common: each consisting of ‘an outer *membrane* enclosing a mass of *cytoplasm* in which is contained a *nucleus*’ (ibid: 7, emphasis added) (see Figure 1.1). If we extend the analogy to carceral space, we might consider the cell membrane to represent the walls of the individual cell; the nucleus is the individual prisoner housed within it; and the

mass of cytoplasm is all the other matter that is contained within the walls of the cell. The nucleus determines the form and function of a cell; the cytoplasm facilitates cell reactions; and the membrane prevents the cell contents – the prisoner – from mixing with the outside medium. All of these components are critical to the successful functioning of the overall structure – in this case the working of the prison itself. In this respect, we may draw parallels between biological and carceral space. Whilst overarching penal rhetoric may vary country-by-country, the walls of a prison cell serve the purpose of the prison; that is to hold individuals securely and largely prevent contact with the outside world. Neither should the contents of a cell come into contact with those of neighbouring cells. Whilst it is necessary to acknowledge that the two hold fundamental differences, the biological cell provides conceptual apparatus for interrogating and making sense of the prison cell.

Moreover, and continuing the analogy, a biological cell membrane is permeable; it permits but more so relies on transfers (Wood 1974: 39). As Mackean and Jones outline,

Although each cell can carry on the vital chemistry of living, it is not capable of existence on its own. A muscle cell cannot obtain its own food or oxygen. These materials are supplied by the blood and transported or made available by the activities of other specialized cells. Unless individual cells are grouped together in large numbers and made to work together by the co-ordinating mechanisms of the body, they cannot exist for long. (Mackean and Jones 1975: 11)

For the most part, transfers in the case of biological cells take place in a controlled manner (usually from an area of high concentration to an area of low concentration). However, there are also processes that take place, which go against the gradient. This is known as active transport, where particles are said to ‘interfere’ with the conventional workings of the cell

(Wood, 1974: 41). This process allows us to reflect on the workings of the prison cell whereby acceptable transfers may enter and leave the cell: food, letters, library books; and others may cross the cell membrane in a manner that goes against the grain: contraband such as drugs, alcohol or mobile telephones. Accordingly, although there are other spaces of significance in and around the prison establishment, the ‘life’ work of prison – eating, sleeping, washing, ageing, socialising, working, learning, entertaining ‘rehabilitating’ – is predominantly carried out in the space of the cell: the ‘container’ of much prison life.

In short, the prison cell and the tripartite system of a biological cell arguably demonstrate similarly functioning components. The biological cell as analogy allows us to interrogate the nature and systems of carceral space – two of the foci noted as central concerns of carceral geographies (Moran 2015); and provides an opportunity to (re)consider complex biological theorisations of spatial relationships such as biological systematics that explain relationships between organisms that may have fallen out of favour since the poststructuralist turn, which challenges grand structures and essence, in favour of a world shaped by emergence, that is ever becoming (Cosgrove 1989). This work does not argue for a return to biological analysis, to be clear, but it does contend that we might interrogate space differently through drawing such analogies, with the recognition that such spaces are not collapsible or intrinsically comparable. Subsequently, thinking of the cell and unpacking the term through its biological ‘traits’ provides much purchase for interrogating the processes of emergence, development and experience of carceral spaces.

This is necessary, for although the prison cell has become one of the central components of incarceration, it has received surprisingly sparse treatment from academics. Much work from a variety of disciplines – such as criminology, carceral geography, sociology, penology, psychology, and architecture – has, of course, explored cell spaces as part of their empirical and conceptual appraisals of carceral space more generally. Such work

is wide-ranging and it is almost impossible to appraise all examples here. However, it is important to note that studies of cells in the context of incarceration cover a variety of empirical settings, such as prison and police cells (Baksheev et al. 2010) to holding cells in extradition camps (Schneider 2004). The academic focus on cells has also come from a variety of different foci: security and safety (Cox and Skegg 1993; Reid et al. 2012), architecture (Fairweather and McConville 2013), technology (Knight 2017), time and space (Leal and Mond 2001), racial tensions (Trulson and Marquart 2010), the neoliberal economy (Mitchelson 2014) and the media presentation of carceral space (Fiddler 2007). There is also a wealth of work on former carceral spaces, such as sites of penal tourism where cells are often the stage on which ‘edutainment’ narratives play out (Wilson et al. 2017). However, although the cell is a focus, its definition and significance as a central component for and through which carceral life is manifest is largely ignored. Important work that attempts to theorise carcerality (Moran et al. 2018) or the prison boundary (Turner 2016), tackles issues related to the cell, but such work has not directed particular attention to the scale of the cell or on what an interrogation of that particular space/spatiality reveals for our wider understandings of prisons and other carceral spaces.

It is well documented in several key texts focussing on prisons (whether academic, policy-directed or practitioner-led) that the cell is ordinarily the primary space in which prisoners spend most of their day and will fulfil this function for a number of months, years and decades. For example, research often reveals significant time spent ‘behind the door’ in a cell space, which can often extend to 23 hours a day for prisoners in maximum security facilities (see Sykes 2007 among many examples). Of course, being a space in which most time is spent does not automatically make it worthy of discussion. The cell warrants further attention because it is the space at the *centre* of prison experience. Beyond the practical aspects of everyday life noted above, research that explores the wider lived experience of

carceral spaces indicates that the cell is also a space for individual resistances, personalities to be enacted, post-release plans to be concocted, and dreams and aspirations to be explored and manifested (see, for example, Crewe 2012; Ugelvik 2014). In the current climate of contemplating rehabilitative strategies and fostering societal understanding of prison and reform, it is pertinent to interrogate the everyday and embodied experiences of incarceration and, of course, the spaces/spatialities in which they take place. Thinking through the balance of rehabilitative strategy and wider management of the prison estate leads to other considerations of the cell as intrinsic to and bound within decision-making processes about the wider prison system. In the UK, architects and planners of new-build prisons have come to replicate a standard model for the prison cell across the estate (Moran et al. 2016) in an attempt to regulate and make cost-effective the custodial environment. Now a generic cell design – often constructed through Building Information Modelling software – is part of a governmental strategy to regulate the estate to ensure safety and security for both staff and prisoners. More than this, using standardised designs, manufacturing processes and regular suppliers for the physical components of the cell space nationwide ensures that the Ministry of Justice in the UK for example can benefit from economies of scale, policies and procedures can be replicated across the estate, and the experience of the prison cell can be regulated through its standardisation. Cells have become the most easily replicable part of the prison estate. They are firmly embedded into the library of prison ‘parts’, so much so that some architects have admitted that they no longer spend time focussing on these areas of the prison – instead hoping to win bids with unique configurations of houseblocks or innovative technological advances to reduce staffing or heating costs, for example (Moran et al. 2016). However, in doing so, policy-makers often diminish the significance and individuality of the embodied and everyday practices that are critical to the lived experience of carceral space.

Accordingly, in seeking to highlight, the ‘remarkable’ nature of cell space, *The Prison Cell* focuses upon this central institution of carcerality. Building upon recent work on carceral atmospheres (Turner and Peters 2015), cell capacities (Peters and Turner 2018) and extending work, for example, that considers the importance of objects in carceral lives/cell spaces (Baer 2005; Schliele 2017) this volume explores the intricate material, human and more-than-human connections that make cell space function. To this end, the cell analogy, and thinking of the nucleus, cytoplasm and cell membrane of the *prison* cell permits a deep interrogation of this central, but oddly overlooked, space. The book brings together a series of chapters that negotiate the complexities of this type of carceral space and address the significance of the cell in relation to the embodied and everyday experiences of incarceration. Furthermore, the work in this volume highlights the importance of the prison cell as a space that is crucially connected to wider carceral space, recognising cells as more than simply static entities and instead imbued with and embroiled within practices and processes of carceral movement and mobilities (Turner and Peters 2017). We highlight the array of processes and practices that shape carceral life from this perspective to provide a unique volume that provides advances in our understandings, conceptualisations and experiences of the space of the cell. As we have considered, the cell is an intriguing space – a space many researchers find difficult to access practically, safely, decently, morally and ethically. And, yet, the cell symbolically represents the monolithic values of the prison where it largely remains uncontested, often free from scrutiny and direct observation by staff, other prisoners and prison visitors like researchers. As a response to this, this collection extends discourses about the cell and offers novel accounts of the cell in its various forms and in varying contexts. Together this book offers readers a captivating journey deep inside the cell to characterise it as a distinctive, complex and powerful space that has, above all, become positioned as central to incarceration as a process and tool for penal power.

The chapters

This body of work offers new insights for scholars, researchers and practitioners. All of the contributions are theoretically informed and draw from extensive and rich data. Our collection offers readers a potential framework, as a metaphor, for understanding the centrality of the cell's role in system of containment and punishment, as well as wider imaginations of the penal system. Imaginations of the cell are steadfast, often rooted in cultural expectations – as cultural artefacts that are communicated through television, literature and film – of how punishment and incarceration is administered and experienced. Moreover academic studies, particularly in criminology, are grounded in Western ideologies and too often our view of the prison and the cell are aligned to cultural contexts. These imaginations are, in many ways, challenged by the intensive scrutiny contributors have offered. This volume draws upon a multitude of range of international case studies from a global collective of authors across a range of disciplines (including criminology, penology, anthropology, sociology, geography, literary and cultural studies, media studies, architecture and law) to critique these persistent ontologies by provoking renewed and extended understandings of the prison cell as an everyday and embodied experience of imprisonment. Here these insights offer rich discussions about the ways in which humans respond to the prison at large; through sensory engagements with the physical environment and the people around them in experiences that often include both adaption and resistance to surroundings.

Part One: The Nucleus

In this section we introduce chapters that speak to the underpinning mechanisms and aims of imprisonment such as forms of power and philosophical interpretations. Here the chapters

interrogate the role of the cell as a conduit of power – where the cell is inherently interlinked with the overarching ideology or management principles of the wider penal system.

In Chapter 2 Helen Johnston takes the reader on a historical journey highlighting how English penal philosophies of the early nineteenth century focused upon the prison cell. Johnston outlines how the cell was constructed as a space of transformation, isolation, conflict and punishment; a site in which the individual offender would, in theory, reflect upon and repent their sins and alter their future behaviour. In revealing the relationship between this particular space and the wider institutional agenda, this chapter explains how the use of the cell as a pivotal part of the disciplinary regime has persisted in the modern prison.

Leading on from this, in Chapter 3 Jordan Hyatt, Synøve Andersen and Steven Chanenson further demonstrate how attending to contemporary carceral design provides a perspective on the prevailing ideological and pragmatic goals within penal systems. Hyatt et al. compare the distinct penal ideologies of Norway and the United States through in-depth focus on cells in a newly-constructed prison in each country. Here, they identify a contrast between utilitarian punishment goals like reintegration and “normality” through environmental-based rehabilitation and the primacy of efficiency and other non-utilitarian correctional goals across both contexts. In highlighting the myriad nuances of the Norwegian and United States’ approach to cell design in their new-build prisons, this chapter reveals the prison cell as a space that clearly communicates the contemporary priorities of the prison system. In Chapter 4 we turn to the prison cell in the context of The Philippines where Raymund Narag and Clarke Jones attend to multiple occupancy cells where prisoners are themselves deputised as part of a leadership structure called the *mayores* system to help with custodial, rehabilitative, and administrative tasks. This chapter draws upon qualitative data gathered over 20 years to demonstrate how traditional Filipino culture imported into prison reinforces a shared governance model that impacts how prisoners experience cell life and

constructs the cell as a disciplinary tool (Foucault 1977), which, although somewhat contra to Western versions of inadequacy in terms of its infrastructural resources and levels of overcrowding, results in positive outcomes for the prison system in this particular context. The focus then shifts to the police cell – which exists as both a detainee’s first encounter with carceral cell space and as a liminal space ‘betwixt and between’ life within and outside of the criminal justice system – where, in Chapter 5, Andrew Wooff reveals how cells in police custody suites in the UK play a central role in police practice. Wooff argues that police custody has, until recently, been treated in a fairly monolithic way and is, instead, a complex and multi-faceted environment. In this chapter, Wooff draws on observations and interviews with police officers and custody staff to reveal the police custody cell as a space of monitoring risk and managing emotional turmoil.

Part Two: Cytoplasm

This next section of our book interrogates how prisoners and detainees respond to their confinement within the bounded parameters of the cell space itself. The contributors’ insights provide novel readings of the performative concept of being a prisoner through focus on the embodied and everyday experiences of life in imprisonment in the cell.

In Chapter 6, Irene Marti’s ethnographically-informed study explores the experience of long-term prisoners in Switzerland who have been given indeterminate sentences and offers insights into the prisoners’ ways of inhabiting a cell. Despite furnishing and maintenance being highly constrained by prison’s regime, this chapter explores the prisoners’ individual ways of (re)arranging their prison cell. Here, Marti reveals how prisoners ascribe new meanings and values to the prison cell and create personal and intimate space as a way of inhabiting a cell in a life situation that is characterised by a high degree of uncertainty.

Following this, another interpretation of the prison cell is offered in Chapter 7 by the Another Chance at Education (ACE) Steering Committee. Here, this collaborative team of writers (including university undergraduates, academic faculty members and serving prisoners) co-produced their examination of dimensions of the cell as experienced by men in a maximum security penitentiary in the United States. In particular, ACE open up the cell as an emotional landscape, which posit them as mutable spaces, often exhibiting many things simultaneously that are particular to their occupant(s). In exemplifying the complexity of prison cells as a dynamic and significant space within prison, this chapter reveals them as not only constraining spaces, but also sites and sources of ingenuity and agency.

Bénédicte Michalon also interrogates power relationships through in her examination of cells in immigration detention centres in Romania in Chapter 8. She examines the cell as a source of tension between spatial restriction and domestication of space, whereby cells are typically multi-occupancy. Cells in this context are also used for disguising power relationships; under the pretext of respect for their privacy, the detainees are driven to treat the cell as a domestic space. Their relations to this imposed spatial unit are characterised by their heterogeneity. Domestication of the cell therefore does not appear to be a process of emancipation, but rather a subtle but efficient way of maintaining order within the cell's walls.

In Chapter 9, Rossella Schillaci extends our enquiry into the prison cell as a space for everyday interaction by drawing upon research produced as part of the documentary film *Imprisoned Lullaby* to interrogate the suitability of cell life for children in a prison mothers' unit in Italy. The chapter reveals how mothers must overcome several obstacles in raising their children within the prison environment, particularly in relation to the physical landscape of the prison cell and the daily routine of mother- and childhood that must be contained within it, such as washing, eating and sleeping. Schillaci explores how both mothers and

children adopt several strategies to use the cell as a space to build intimate relationships. However, despite these deliberate goals of transforming prison life, such intentions rarely attempt to construct the prison cell as a 'home'. Instead, all long-term emotional and material connections to this 'cursed' space are deliberately avoided

Part Three: The Cell Membrane

In the final section of the book we present a series of chapters that illuminate what we might term the prison cell boundary. The chapters in this section focus on cell experiences that are tied to spaces outside of it – other cells; connecting corridors; and spaces outwith the prison, among others – to explore how inside of the cell and the outside of the cell symbiotically dis/connect. In particular, these chapters address how experiences of the prison cell are developed through sensations and human connections.

Jennifer Turner, Dominique Moran and Yvonne Jewkes explore the significance of sensory interactions with blue space through the bars of a prison cell window in Chapter 10. Much previous literature has explored how the architecture of incarceration impinges on the lives of those residing in carceral space, and rarely considers the prison environment as a therapeutic space. Drawing on notions of therapeutic landscapes and data collected from a UK prison in a coastal town where many cells have a view of the sea, Turner et al. theorise the prison as a nurturing rather than punitive environment by examining the relationship between the prison cell and the lived experience of blue space. In doing so, this chapter reveals the possibilities for both the disciplinary theorisation of therapeutic blue space and the micro-scale health benefits that may be generated by a reconsideration of prison siting and environmental outlook, particularly from the prison cell.

In contrast, moving away from previous studies that have employed a primarily visual approach to prison research, in Chapter 11, Kate Herrity draws on a research project on

the significance of sound in prison using aural ethnography in a local men's prison in the UK. Herrity highlights how sounds, such as cell door banging and music permeate life in the prison. In particular, these auditory experiences foreground cell life and, for some, offer a source of sanctuary and/or enforce practices of 'sousveillance' within the cell. In registering the sensory experiences that take place 'beyond our line of sight' this chapter adds texture and depth to our understanding of life in prison.

Extending focus to another of the senses, Elisabeth Fransson and Francesca Giofrè explore the significance of touch in Chapter 12. The chapter draws upon material generated as part of a comparative study in two female prisons in Italy and Norway and disrupts traditional understandings of the prison cell as an isolated unit within the prison by exploring various prison cells, their boundaries and extensions. Here, Fransson and Giofrè take inspiration from considerations of sensuous architecture and the philosophy of touch to explore the intersection of spaces inside cells, and those outside of them such as corridors and thresholds. In doing so, this chapter not only reveals the value of taking an embodied approach to prison studies but moves beyond an often limited and singular understanding of what a prison cell is and can be.

The prison cell is not simply linked to spaces within prison but also inherently connected to spaces outside of the institution too. In Chapter 13 Jana Robberechts and Kristel Beyens discuss their research into the digitalisation of the prison cell through the introduction of information and communication technologies, which offer a variety of methods for prisoners to communicate within and beyond the walls of the prison. This ethnographic study of a Belgian prison equipped with the digital platform *PrisonCloud*, interrogates the impacts of this increasingly multifunctional digital cell upon physical and social interactions. Drawing upon observations and interviews with prisoners, prison officers, and administrative staff, this chapter interrogates the impact of the relocation of activities within the everyday regime,

such as telephone calling and booking medical appointments, inside of the cell. Accordingly, Robberechts and Beyens reveal consider how the use of in-cell digital technology has the potential to alter prisoner-staff interactions in addition to reinforcing the prisoner's position of dependency as well as generating new forms of isolation.

Also recognising the relationships between prison cells and the spaces beyond them, Hanneke Stuit takes us, in Chapter 14, into the world of real life games to explore one example of how the prison cell enters into our cultural imaginations. In this final empirical chapter, Stuit's close reading of the *Prison Escape* game, in the former prison in Breda, the Netherlands highlights how the space of the cell is deployed as an entry point into understanding the prison. The game, where as many as 200 players are locked inside the former prison and tasked with escaping from it, evokes popular imaginations of the prison and panoptic architecture. Here, principles of play rely on a metaphorically constructed, fantastical lure of the prison cell, which engineers resistance to the landscape of surveillance. Stuit posits the prison cell as a heterotopic, liminal space of play offering an embodied, if limited, experience of incarceration which foregrounds reflection on the mechanics of intensified surveillance.

Moving Forwards

Returning at the end of this chapter to Alberts et al.,

Cells are small and complex: it is hard to see their structure, hard to discover their molecular composition, and harder still to find out how their various components function. An enormous variety of experimental techniques have been developed to study cells, and the strength and limitations of these techniques have largely determined our present conception of the cell. Most of the advances in cell biology –

including the most exciting ones of recent years – have sprung from the introduction of new methods. (Alberts et al. 1994: 143)

Just like the biological cell described here, the prison cell is often regarded simply as ‘the cell’ – yet without careful attention it is hard to understand its structure, composition and how it may function in relation the larger ‘whole’ of the prison and to penal philosophy. More so, although there have been attempts to research or ‘study’ the prison cell, these shape our present understandings and there remains a need to introduce new methods to help us grapple with, make sense of, and understand the cell for academic and policy purposes. As with cell biology, without continued development of, and adaption to, our approach to the study of prison cells, our very conception and understanding of them is limited. Through this collection we have offered some consolidation of what the cell is, what it does and how it is experienced in a variety of different empirical and theoretical perspectives in different contexts. The prison cell is revealed as a crucial yet complex component in regimes of incarceration. It is a paradoxical space where power and resistance converge, which is both anaesthetising and overwhelming in terms of sensory experiences and isolated from, and simultaneously interlinked with, spaces surrounding it in and beyond prison. This body of work presented in this volume is wide-ranging and strong in its contribution to this field of interest. However, it is, unsurprisingly, incomplete and we hope that new knowledge and modes of inquiry continue to develop to interrogate this critical space. In particular, this contribution draws from an array of disciplines and the eclectic lenses applied in this book highlight the need to open new ontological pathways to enhance our understanding of the cell, perhaps most importantly in multi-disciplinary ways. By way of conclusion to this introductory chapter, we offer four trajectories for development in this area.

Our first consideration builds upon the very metaphor of the biological cell that is set out in this introduction. Considering the prison cell as a set of components akin to nuclei, cytoplasm and cell membranes offers a new conceptual tool to unpack and underpin the complex actions, reactions and interactions of the space of the cell. Much like recent work that has driven the interrogation of the specificity of the ‘carceral’ itself (see Moran et al. 2018), forward-going analysis of the prison cell may be enhanced further through a (re)consideration of the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the ‘prison cell’ as a tool for deployment both within an academic and a policy-orientated scope. What does the prison cell consist of? What does this definition include and/or exclude and does this change the scope of research attention to it? In this volume, we recognise include the likes of cells in immigration detention (which are the focus of Michalon’s study in Chapter 8) collectively here under the previously-mentioned renewed scope of the carceral (Moran et al. 2018), in doing so there are key distinctions between these and traditional spaces of the prison that could still be unpacked further from a conceptual point of view. The biological prison cell, so to speak, reminds us to look more closely, at minute, forgotten details, and calls our attention to embodied and everyday experience of carceral life. There may be other conceptualisations beyond the biological cell analogy that offer similar, and/or varied considerations, of this complex landscape.

Secondly, and likely in conjunction with any progression of our conceptual toolbox, we offer a plea to extend the empirical range and scope of research associated with prison cells. If our understandings of what exactly the prison cell is and where it can be found are augmented, the potential range of the field of study also increases. We now have the capacity to study a range of different aspects of the prison cell from its sonic properties (as in Herrity’s work in Chapter 11) to its architectural design (explored in relation to the view from prison cell windows by Turner et al. in Chapter 10) and its percolation into other cultural artefacts

related to the prison (such as in the escape noted by Stuit in Chapter 14). As will be highlighted in this volume, there is a range of context-specific manifestations of the prison cell but only some of which have we been able to exemplify within this collection. In particular, difficulties of access to not only prison spaces but, also, restrictions on academic scholarship in some countries may have a bearing upon the geographical range of such studies. Particular types of cell are far more closed than others. We could, for example, extend our enquiries to spaces such as detention camps and military prisons but these spaces are often even more ‘closed’ than traditional prisons as research sites. Recent work, such as Moran et al.’s (2012) work on prisoner transportation also reveals significant difficulties in appraising carceral space in contexts – here Russia – where the specificities of the geographical landscape and infrastructure present quite significant challenges. Whilst there may be immovable obstacles surrounding some of the practical issues associated with access, there are, perhaps, some considerations to offer in relation to how our work may evolve methodologically to respond to these challenges.

In addition, although this volume has illuminated the prison cell as vitally connected to other areas of the prison, much of this connection is revealed by the recognition that, methodology, most discussion of the prison cell takes place *outside* of the cell itself. Although some authors have been given favourable access to these spaces (such as that which facilitated the documentary film that became the basis for Schillaci’s work in Chapter 9), for reasons of security, prisoner management and researcher safety, interviews with prisoners often take place outside of the cell. In a similar vein, it is also very difficult to capture experiences of cells at certain time periods within the cycle of incarceration. For example, as Wooff (Chapter 5) highlights, the transient and often unpredictable nature of police cells presents clear challenges to accessing participants who may only spend hours in that particular carceral space. Indeed, the in-depth analysis of work such as that offered here by

Narag and Jones (Chapter 4) is predicated on a number of years of ethnographically-informed research. These challenges may also apply to researchers interested in other transitory cell spaces such as prison reception areas, first-night centres and, at the other end of the journey, rooms in half-way houses and temporary accommodation offered around the time of release. Here, the practicalities of research converge with ethical considerations surrounding informed consent and the tensions of conducting research with individuals who may be experiencing acute distress in that particular location at that particular time. In the first instance, we may consider the value of historical accounts (such as Johnston's in Chapter 2) and existing data sets – which are often available as submission of data sets acquired through public funding are required to be submitted to an archive for future use – are an invaluable tool for tracing philosophical, political and cultural understandings of incarceration without the invasive nature of the creation of 'new' knowledge. However, where the nature of the research enquiry makes this impractical, we could push further for the inclusion of a much wider range of voices from within carceral space. As the contribution by ACE (Chapter 7) will demonstrate, co-creative techniques that celebrate co-authorship and co-production of knowledge from 'within' the prison cell could be offered as a way to explore these spaces more effectively. Taking lead from Robberechts and Beyens (Chapter 13), modes of digitisation – which enable new interactions from within the prison cell – may present new opportunities and new challenges for researchers reaching participants who dwell inside cell spaces.

Finally, we use this volume to call for an extension of the relationship between our empirical knowledge and the policy developments related to it. As many of our chapters contend – most notably in the chapters offering comparative case studies such as those offered by Hyatt et al. (Chapter 3) and Fransson and Giofrè (Chapter 12) – there is a clear relationship between penal philosophy and the prison cell; both in terms of its physical landscape, the regime that it serves and the possibility and capabilities it can achieve. Many

of the chapters in this collection reveal not only shortcomings of the prison cell – perhaps in terms of its suitability as a space for dealing with particular groups of residents such as young families or prisoners who are likely to spend extended periods in these kinds of spaces (such as in Marti’s interrogation in Chapter 6 of prison cells for prisoners with indeterminate sentence) – but also the positive associations with this space. In a penal environment where loss of liberty is deliberately and acutely felt, further interrogation of the space in which prisoners spend most of their daily lives is likely to illuminate many occasions of poor and good practice that have a wider implication for our understandings of the nature and purpose of carceral spaces more generally.

In sum, the prison cell, whilst a central part of carceral life, has not achieved focused scrutiny because it is so pervasive, so central, so taken-for-granted. It is both commonly acknowledged, yet critically unacknowledged at the same time. Therefore, serious interrogation of this space is often lacking. It is precisely because the cell is so discernible we are in danger of missing the everyday, the mundane and ordinary features of incarceration. It is our intention that this volume provides a foundational point from which to continue and expand our understandings of the space of the prison cell, arguably – whether for good or otherwise – the fundamental building block of life in prison.

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