The curious eclipse of prison ethnography in the age of mass incarceration

■   Loïc Wacquant

University of California, Berkeley

Centre de sociologie européenne du Collège de France

A B S T R A C T ■ This article first takes the reader inside the Los Angeles County Jail, the largest detention facility in the 'Free World', to give a ground-level sense of how the entry portal of the US detention system operates by way of prelude to this special issue on the ethnography of the prison. A survey of the recent sociology and anthropology of carceral institutions shows that field studies depicting the everyday world of inmates in America have gone into eclipse just when they were most needed on both scientific and political grounds following the turn toward the penal management of poverty and the correlative return of the prison to the forefront of the societal scene. Accordingly, this issue seeks to reinvigorate and to internationalize the ethnography of the carceral universe understood both as a microcosm endowed with its own material and symbolic tropism and as vector of social forces, political nexi, and cultural processes that traverse its walls. Field researchers need to worry less about 'interrupting the terms of the debate' about the prison and more about getting inside and around penal facilities to carry out intensive, close-up observation of the myriad relations they contain and support. This article discusses the obstacles to such research, including questions of access and funding, the professional organization of academe, the lowly social and therefore scientific status of the object of investigation, and the (mis)use of the military metaphor of 'collateral damage'. It concludes by suggesting that getting 'in and out of the belly of the beast' offers a unique vantage point from which to contribute to the comparative ethnography of the state in the age of triumphant neoliberalism.

Since the mid-1990s, the Los Angeles County Jail proudly holds the title of largest penal colony in what used to be called the Free World, just ahead of New York City's Rikers Island – its warden boasts about it on the county's web site. In 1998, its seven mega-houses of detention held more than 23,000 inmates, nearly half the total prison population of France or Italy, as against fewer than 9000 in 1980, before California launched headlong into the most dramatic carceral expansion recorded in history.[1] A quarter of a million souls enter through its gates every year, with nearly one thousand 'fresh fish' being brought in by busloads from police lock-ups to be 'booked' into the system on a typical day. Annual budget of the beast: $1.1 billion.

Welcome to Men's Central Jail, hub and oldest facility of the city's detention network, a.k.a the Custody Division of the Sheriff's Office. The bare carcass of concrete shorn of openings located on Bauchet Street, a stone's throw from City Hall at the eastern edge of a downtown emptied of all life, is the biggest urban etablishment of penal confinement on earth. Its five floors, two below ground level and three above it, house some 7000 inmates – for a capacity generously estimated at 5200 after converting classrooms, gymnasia, bathrooms and broom closets into cells – crammed six together in 4-by-3-meter 'multi-cell units' and stuffed in gigantic dormitories where up to 150 men jostle idly among the bunk beds that eat up all the room, with a single television set for sole distraction. (For comparison, Fleury-Mérogis, the largest prison in Western Europe, located 30 kilometers south of Paris, houses 3900.) In conditions that evoke the dungeons of the Middle Ages more than the glitzy 21st century toward which President William Jefferson Clinton is busy building his famous bridge. Nine hundred thousand square feet divided by 7000 inmates – you do the math, but don't forget first to substract the space allotted to hallways, stairways, elevators, ventilation shafts, offices, staff dressing rooms and rest rooms, the jail store and storage, the guard-posts, the armory, the 781-bed hospital, the chapel, the library, the repair and maintenance shops, and the factory-sized kitchens. The building also harbors the Transportation Bureau, the Inmate Reception Center and the Central Jail Arraignment operations from where half-a-million detainees are carted to and from the courts over the course of a year. Of these, 30,000 will be sent to 'state' after conviction, to serve hard time in one of California's 33 state prisons mostly located in remote rural areas.

MCJ is full to bursting even though the city has opened its gleaming 'jail of the 21st century' just across the street, the Twin Towers, a 4100-bed, $380 million facility containing the new Inmate Reception Center, to which

women, declared homosexuals and detainees needing medical care, have been hastily transfered to relieve dangerous overcrowding.[2] The Twin Towers are the epitome of the new podular design: sleek, airy, clean, bright, silent, with none of the architectural stigmata that readily identify a prison (they have no bars on windows and no keylocks on doors).[3] Not so Men's Central Jail, which has a furiously 'fifties' look with its shabby and drab-colored lobby, its large front grate with gold-painted bars that opens with a huge metal dead bolt – just like in the movies – its resolutely modernist if not brutalist building style, its gray metallic office furnishings, and the conspicuous absence of any recent equipment: the most technologically advanced implement in sight is the telephone! MCJ and the Twin Towers are the two faces of the US carceral cosmos, homologous to the two visages of the country's 'apartheid economy' (Freeman, 1999): the one hypermodern, high-tech, high-skill, fluid and continuous flow, and high productivity; the other, anchored in deskilled services and downgraded manufacturing, characterized by antiquated means, low technical input, stop-and-go, and low yield. One must not dismiss or disregard either, for neither is 'the' American prison: the two components, the backward and the futuristic, must be held together and understood in their relation of structural hierarchy and functional complementarity – much like the two planes of the US economy.

What grabs you immediately and before all else upon penetrating into this humongous human storehouse is the deafening and disorienting *noise*: doors banging, bolts opening and closing, keys jangling, feet shuffling, shrill shouts, blunt orders, and tattered shreds of conversations that russle, ripple and resound in a high-density sonic mishmash unlike any other. Next is the ubiquitous *filth*: everywhere they can – onto the metal frame of their beds, the locks on their bars, the toilet that sits smack in the middle of their miserable living space – the inmates hang plastic bags filled with the day's trash. The passageways are strewn with débris, yogurt containers, orange peels, soiled paper, torn pieces of cardboard, and trails of spilled juice that a 'trustee' (a low-security inmate in charge of upkeep) will come sweep up when he makes his rounds. Not to mention the roaches and rats. Then, aside from the promiscuity pushed to the point of obscenity, from which the detainees protect themselves as best they can by draping their discolored towels between their bunk beds, to veil themselves when they use the john, create a semblance of intimacy (a protective, self-made, mini-jail inside the jail), comes the *total absence of natural light*, which reinforces, to the extent that it is even possible, the feeling of enclosure. You would think that you're in a tomb. A subterranean grotto. A safe for men buried alive far away from society's eyes, ears, and mind.

Erected in 1963 for 16 million dollars and expanded in 1976 for another 35 million, the building has no exterior opening aside from the front gate

and two service doors – a gross violation of the municipal fire code that the city has chosen to disregard for decades, in spite of repeated court orders to enforce it. If a fire were to break out, MCJ would transform itself into a genuine sepulcher for hundreds of detainees. A shower every other day and one outing per week on the caged roof, the residents' only chance to see the sky, to know whether it's sunny, rainy or windy, to breathe for two hours outside of the cold draft of the air-moving system that operates round the clock (to contain the risk of tuberculosis, which is making a spectacular comeback inside penal facilities).[4] Once a week. The inmates commonly complain not only about the severe dearth of exercise – they are legally entitled to three weekly trips to the 'yard' (or 'roof' in this case) – but also about the cold: in many tiers, the ventilation is set too high and the units are swept by gusts of chilly air; in the disciplinary cells, the atmosphere is downright frigid.

Finally, one cannot but be struck by the *skin color* of the inmates, over 80 percent of whom are recorded as black or Latino.[5] The few whites in sight are older and appear more experienced: regular customers who know how to 'pull time' if one judges by their demeanor. The Asians, whose numbers have increased abruptly in recent years due to the infusion of migrants and the spread of organized crime in their urban lower-class districts, are grouped together in a separate tier because the gangs which wrestle to impose their own order in the facility – nested, as it were, within the official carceral order – have 'given the green light' on them and any 'Oriental' is liable to be assaulted at any moment. The caste regime, weakened on the outside, regains its full vigor inside the gaols of America. Thus the daily life of every resident of MCJ is stamped by the merciless struggles that the Mexican Mafia (or its currently dominant factions of the 'Maravilas' and 'Southsiders', thus named because, coming from south of the border, they speak Spanish and retain a primary cultural allegiance to Mexico), the Black Guerilla Family, and the White Aryan Brotherhood wage against one another under the impavid eyes of the guards who count the blows [6] – when they don't dish them out. Indeed, prisoners like to say that there is more violence, hustling, and drugs 'in the joint' than outside.

The official figures don't exactly contradict them: in the first half of 1998, the Jail Investigation Office of MCJ recorded 1857 'reported crimes' – the tip of an immense iceberg of multifarious illegalities and brutalities whose size is unknown and shall remain so. The presentation of the jail in the Sheriff's press package given to me by Deputy Leatherman candidly recognizes that it is a patently criminogenic environment:

> Crimes committed in Central Jail are generally of the same types as those found on the streets: robberies, batteries, narcotics, weapon possessions,

assaults, destruction of property, arson, attempted murders and homicides. Although the nature of the criminal population lends itself to the commission of crime within the jail environment, there are problems unique to Central Jail that must be recognized to fully understand the situation. Gangs themselves are a source of criminal activity between gang members. They also prey on other non-gang affiliated inmates. The deputies assigned to the gang unit work to identify and isolate gang members when possible. They also develop cases to prosecute gang members who commit crimes within the jail.

The high volume of inmates at Central Jail also contributes to criminal activity. The facility was designed to accommodate far fewer inmates than it currently does. As the inmate population has grown, attempts to separate inmates by type of crime committed have given way to the urgency of housing demands.

Seated at his metal desk in the near empty, bunker-style office, Sergeant Frank Ibanez concedes in a sing-song voice that he conducted 26 investigations in the past two weeks but that most will lead nowhere; he shows me the small pile of yellow folders containing the files of felony cases against detainees he just took to court, all seven of them. He explains approvingly that the jail will only go after inmates with a long 'rap sheet' or awaiting sentencing for serious crimes: 'For instance if a guy slaps another guy, he doesn't want to testify, 'cause he's afraid or intimidated, the guy who slapped him is doin' three months on a car theft, we're not going to waste our resources to press charges. But if he's got two felonies and this is his third one, *then* we're looking at sendin' him twenty-five to life, *then* we'll make sure to press charges.'[7]

A large sign in black block letters stipulates: 'NO TALKING', another blares: 'BE QUIET, KEEP SHOULDERS ON WALL'. Tight lines of inmates hug the corridors decorated with life-sized murals in garish colors, the work of house artists, whose martial themes – 'Tombstone', a scene with a sheriff in a street lifted out of a Western movie, a visual ode to 'Desert Storm', a cluster of strapping cowboys galloping away across the desert at full speed – awkwardly evoke the space that is so lacking and so desired. Blue uniforms for the GP ('General Population'), orange for detainees under medical supervision (which makes them ready targets for violent residents), blue with white sleeves for gang members and convicts from state prisons consigned to the city jail for lack of space in the overpopulated penitentiaries, and green for the 'trustees'. The visual sorting through colored uniforms is complemented by the plastic bracelet that each detainee wears on his wrist: white for GP, blue for 'Keep Aways' who must be protected at all times from other inmates (e.g., K9s who are former police sent behind bars), red for maximum-security customers, purple for the 'Three Strikers' who are presumed most perilous because 'they got nothing to lose'. The K10s, or

inmate 'Keep Aways' enthroned at the very top of the hierarchy of 40 categories among which the office of 'classification' distributes the jailed population according to criminal background and presumed level of dangerousness, are never moved but with their arms and feet bound in chains, handcuffed, and surrounded by a minimum of three guards.

These internal peregrinations have two main destinations: legal consultation and visiting. The 'attorney room', a drab and naked area roughly 15 by 30 meters at the entrance of which sits a stern-looking deputy who barks curt instructions from his elevated metal desk, is occupied by three long tables, hardly wider than a bench. Each table is divided into 20 small partitions to which the detainees are manacled and where they sit on low stools facing across from their lawyer. With up to 60 inmate-lawyer pairs, shoulder to shoulder, the din of conversation can be deafening. Off in one corner, eight wood-and-glass cubicles offer a refuge of privacy to those who manage to reserve them for consultation. As for the attorneys, they are not exactly the high-powered, corporate type: dressed in jeans, short-sleeved polos and t-shirts, they await their clients seated on their side of the long table with their feet up on the chairs. A sign on the wall assures that the deputies 'do their best to bring detainees within 30 minutes of request' for their 30-minute session.

The nearby visiting room is a world unto itself, with its own rules and atmosphere, kindred to yet distinct from those of the jail at large, where the queer impression of having returned to the 1950s becomes downright eerie. The sheer density, physical intricacy, and industrial layout of the booths make you better realize, palpate as it were, the reality of the 'mass' in mass incarceration: the turnover in this dimly lit area cluttered with pier-like stalls lined up with phone booths partitioned by an inch-thick, unbreakable glass pane oscillates between 600 and 1100 per day, with a peak at 1500 visitors on Fathers' Day. 'It's a people warehouse', quips the mustachioed older guard who oversees the activity with two colleagues. Each seated in one of the 174 booths (in stalls accommodating 34, 32, 21, 18, 15, 18, and 36), the jailees can talk to their 'loved ones' (the expression recurs like a leitmotiv on the lips of the inmates but also of the staff) for 20 minutes. Three officers tame the never-ending flow of detainees, on the one side, and three more handle that of the visitors, on the other. The inmate comes in, hands his visiting 'pass', is assigned a booth whose number is transmitted by intercom to the visitor in the adjacent room (typically a female relative or companion).[8] A battery of timers automatically cuts off the phone connection when time is up. The inmate treks away and back to his housing unit. All physical contact is prohibited and indeed impossible. That there have been only three violent incidents in three years in this nerve center of transaction between inside and outside says just how much the inmates value this 'privilege'.

That's what makes working in the visiting area valued by guards too: it's busy but comparatively cushy. Not the same story on the other side of the wall of phones, where fracases among visitors are run of the mill: people who refuse to come out of the booth and have to be dragged out forcibly, behave erratically, engage in arguments, raise hell, go off. The three deputies regale me (and themselves) with stories of fights among rival visitors: 'Many of these guys, they will have several girlfriends showin' up at the same time, or a girlfriend and the wife, or *several girlfriends and the wife*! Some of them, uh, they even have a girlfriend *and a boyfriend*!' Laughter all around. Much less laughable is the section reserved for visits to 'dangerous inmates'. In an enclosed block, locked with extra gates, a row of booths whose component on the inmate's side consists of a metal cage with thick bars to which are attached chains, padlocks, and manacles which serve to convoy 'assaultive inmates and hard-core gang members'. You cross them in the hallway on any given day being ferried from their cell to that visiting block, hand and feet heavily bound in chains, trailed by a deputy shooting the transfer videocam (as back-up evidence to pre-empt frivolous lawsuits for guard brutality). They are 'freed' in the metal box of 1 meter by 0.8 meter by 2.20 meters, for 30 minutes of conversation on the phone – ten minutes more than the rank-and-file jailee because of all the trouble it takes to transfer them there. Another possible destination of internal journeys is the 'school', or what passes for it, a dingy room with educational posters plastered over its aging walls. Miriam, the young white woman who runs it, gushes that MCJ offers ABE (Adult Basic Education), ESL (English as a Second Language), high school remedial education (including the GED), and Health-Safety-Parenting classes. Sounds terrific. Only problem is, these programs reach a grand total of 40 to 60 inmates, less than 1 percent of the jail's average daily population. At least they won't consume too much of the jail's scarce resources.[9]

Seven thousand inmates; one shower and two hours on the roof every week; twenty-minute phone 'visits'. Another privilege prized by the residents of MCJ, which a puny 80 of them enjoy at any moment, is working in the kitchens, where 32,000 meals are prepared daily for a yearly tab topping 6 million dollars. 'That's why the rats are so big round here, because of all the leftover grub that we have to destroy and throw in the dumpsters', since it is forbidden to give it to the homeless and beggars for fear of possible legal complications. This is where most inmates who are eligible to become 'trustees' aspire to work. Sorry, not *trustee*: 'We say "*inmate worker*" now, we don't say "trustees" any more', clarifies Deputy Johnson, who's taking me around for the day. ''Cause it's misleading people. It has "trust" in it, it's making people think these are inmates we can trust, so then we, people let their guard down and it's not good.' I thought it might be to recognize their dignity as workers, but not at all. Besides, these 'workers' are not paid

and they do not receive time off for their labor either. Deputy Johnson summons a green-jacketed inmate playing busy cleaning a wall down the gloomy corridor: 'Trustee [sic], come here!' He asks him what he gets in return for his work: nothing outside the fact of being active and out of his cell most of the day. And, yes, he gets to stay in one of the quieter dorms with a large-screen TV, a true treat – which compensates for having not 150 but 250 roommates.[10]

Go up on the narrow metal escalator, past the guard control booth, to the first floor on which no fewer than 2400 detainees are housed. If the figure boggles the mind, the sight of these swarming human coops threatens to warp it. You've got to anesthetize yourself to pretend nothing's the matter and keep going. Block after block after block of parallel tiers of 12 'multi-bed units' of four or six inmates, packed like human sardines in tight metal boxes under the perpetual glare of the fluorescent lights (which some detainees obstruct with a piece of cardboard to lessen their irritating bright-ness). These cages of 3.5 by 2 by 4 meters contain three bunk beds, two against the wall separating adjacent units, one against the back wall where the toilets are, a wash basin and a pay phone. The phone is always a highly prized resource in a detention facility. Until recently, residents of MCJ could access it only on the roof, during their 'yard time', and every day there were fights, small and big, to grab and keep it. Two years ago, the Sheriff's office hired a private company to install pay phones *inside* the housing wards, but only in the multibed units since to do so in singlebed cells would not be financially profitable. It works out for the best: the inmates are happy that they can place calls, the phone company makes good money, and the Sheriff's office rakes in millions of dollars by overcharging their clientele.[11]

> . . . *I walk to the end of the tier on my own, both to do a drawing of the cell in my noteboook (the last cell turns out to be empty so it's convenient for measurement) and to catch my breath. I'm literally gasping trying to get my emotions under control. I can't tame the nauseating feeling of being a voyeur, an intruder into this plagued space. At the same time, it's obvious that it is not the inmates' space either. Nothing is theirs here. It's obvious in the manner we walk by without addressing them. I would like to say, 'I'm sorry to disturb you', but it would be incongruous.Their faces tell me that much. We do as if they were mere pieces of furniture. I am horrified by the inten-sity of promiscuity, the total subjection to the permanent and pervasive gaze of others who are themselves subjected to the same ongoing visual and sensory penetration (Sartre's sentence,* 'l'enfer, c'est les autres*', is truer here than anywhere else), the instantaneous and irresistible negation of self it carries. One of the most degrading aspects of penal confinement is this denial of any 'backstage', of any 'territory of intimacy', to speak like Goffman. The jail effects a sort of instantaneous 'decivilizing', a brute and brutal stripping*

of centuries of education of our bodily, moral, and aesthetic senses. As we go from tier to tier, Johnson and I exchange mock evaluations: 'If I was in the tank, I'd prefer to be in this unit here rather than that other one.' . . . (Field note from my first day in MCJ, 28 August 1998)

In each new block, an inmate whispers (respectfully) to the guard serving as my sherpa: 'Hey, chief, is this the ACLU? I gotta talk to him.' The American Civil Liberties Union is the rights defense organization to which the County of Los Angeles court has entrusted the supervision of the Sheriff's Office of that same county, as part of a consent decree, in hopes of gradually inciting it to improve conditions of detention, which, as in the overwhelming majority of the country's centers of incarceration, violate daily the sacrosanct US Constitution, supposed to protect every individual from 'cruel and unusual punishment'.[12] This half-baked compromise makes the ACLU 'the accomplice of a grossly dysfunctional detention system', to quote the words of a lawyer formerly in charge of this sham oversight, which periodically forces the courts to order the early release of thousands of inmates in order to disgorge the cells for a time and free up the space needed to pack away the next batch. Thus, with its 781 beds, MCJ's clinic comes in third place in the hierarchy of American public hospitals according to size; but it does not meet the minimal standards established by federal law, despite pressure from the courts which have demanded for years that it be brought into conformity with health regulations. The Los Angeles remand center is also by far the country's largest hospice for the mentally ill.[13] And, to top it all, it is the number one shelter for the homeless in America, and therefore the (free) world. For the human débris strewn on the streets, incarceration has de facto become a form of treatment at once cruel and usual.

By itself, LA County supplies 36 percent of the clients of the California Department of Corrections (CDC for the initiated), the administration in charge of the 'state prisons' to which criminals sentenced to terms of reclusion exceeding one year are consigned. Los Angeles thus leads California, which, having quadrupled its population behind bars in only 14 years, leads America with 159,585 prisoners as of 1 August 1998, for a total in municipal jails plus state penitentiaries topping the 200,000 mark – four times the figure for France with 62 million in a land of only 33 million. The policy of punitive containment of those groups deemed superfluous, threatening, or disruptive into which California has blindly thrown itself, in keeping with its traditional role of beacon and compass pointing the way for the country to follow, has resulted in the explosive growth of its carceral system which has turned it into the *first mass penal colony* of the democratic era, and the CDC into the avant-garde of this new penal state *in statu nascendi* which 'liberal paternalism' reserves for the dispossessed of the new economic order (Wacquant, 1999).

Thus, the budget for the state's corrections administration has sprung from under $200 million in 1975 to over $4.3 billion in 1998 (no, that is not a typo: it is a 22-fold increase). California prison guards numbered fewer than 6000 when Ronald Reagan entered the White House; today they are more than 30,000 to 'walk the toughest beat' in the Golden State (to invoke the official motto of the California Correctional Peace Officers' Association), to which total should be added the 2700 parole officers charged with supervising the 107,000 convicts released on parole and assigned to 131 offices in 71 localities. The CDC prides itself on having conducted 'the largest prison construction program in history' in the 1980s. And with good reason: California inaugurated 12 penitentiaries between 1852 and 1965, and none from 1965 to 1984; since then, it has opened 21 establishments, six of them reserved for inmates who are expectant or new mothers with their infants – African-American and Hispanic women are the fastest growing category among the carceral population.[14] In one decade, the Golden State sank $5.3 billion into building and renovating cells, contracting over $10 billion of debt in the form of bonds in the process. Each new facility costs on average the trifling sum of $200 million for 4000 inmates and requires the hiring of an additional 1000 guards.

California's 'screws' – as prisoners commonly refer to line officers – not only make up the most numerous and best-paid administrative branch of the government of the world's fifth greatest economic power relative to their qualifications. They are also one of the most powerful lobbies in Sacramento, where they support to the tune of millions of dollars in election 'donations' the transition from the social treatment of poverty and its correlates to its penal management, a transition tailor-made to ensure them a flourishing professional future. The social worker is thus being succeeded by the prison guard – or rather, the 'correctional officer', as the guards union insists – as the state representative entrusted with exercising public guardianship over the 'dangerous classes'. Another decisive change, this one of a qualitative order, partakes of this swing from the social to the penal: 30 years ago, California was at the forefront of progressive penology, resolutely turned toward rehabilitation and the development of so-called intermediate sentences aimed at avoiding the deprivation of liberty except as a last resort. Nowadays it is a devoted advocate of the all-carceral model and assigns scarcely any function to imprisonment outside of the sorting, storage, and neutralization of convicts (Simon, 1993). Witness the allocation of correctional expenditures: according to CDC accountants, the operational cost of incarceration (excluding construction) in a state house of punishment comes up to some $21,470 per resident per year. Half of this amount is devoted to security (the pay of California's guards is 50 percent higher than the national average) and one-quarter to the basic upkeep of the inmates (food, clothing, health). Activities geared toward rehabilitation, education, training, and

work receive at most 5 percent of the carceral budget. By way of comparison, in 1995, on the eve of its replacement by a program of forced labor or 'workfare', a single mother with three children residing in California received a total of $555 per month under the main public assistance program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. If one adds administrative expenses to this grant, the cost to the public aid budget of a family *of four* rises to $7229 per year, *one-third* of the monies devoted to locking up *a single* inmate.

In point of fact, California sports the most expensive penitentiary system in the land – and therefore in the (free) world – as well as the most murderous: between 1992 and 1998, CDC guards shot 12 prisoners dead and wounded 32 others with bullets during simple brawls between inmates. In the same period, only six prisoners were gunned down in the rest of the country, and in all cases during escape attempts. This is because the rules and regulations of the California correctional administration authorize the use of large-caliber firearms and recourse to 'lethal force' in order, it says, to compensate for the low ratio of guards to inmates resulting from the staggering inflation of the carceral population. The director of the CDC himself conceded this much during a hearing before a state legislative commission inquiring into the 'gladiator fights' staged at the maximum-security prison of Corcoran, during which rogue guards used the pretext of brawls they had themselves organized among inmates to shoot them like rabbits: 'The administration grew too fast, too much. It did not have the possibility to mature . . . The expansion of the system has been so sudden that it was uncontrollable.'[15]

Johnson accompanies me back to the entrance of the jail. Shock of the daylight, the sun, the fresh air. Overpowering feeling of emerging from a dive into a mine shaft where everything is apparently in order but where a firedamp explosion threatens to strike disaster at any moment. A murky factory for social pain and human destruction, silently grinding away. Emerging back into 'society', from darkness to light, I cannot but be struck by the hypervisibility of the issue of crime *in US culture and politics and the total* in-visibility *of* punishment, *especially when it assumes this industrial form . . . .*

I am like numb *coming out of this long afternoon inside MCJ, and I drive silently straight to the beach [of Santa Monica], to wallow in fresh air and wade in the waves, as if to 'cleanse' myself of all I've seen, heard, and sensed. I feel so bad, like scrambled eggs, that I chafe at writing up my notes until the following Tuesday (but my memory is seared by what I've seen and I've got detailed scribblings in my little phone message pad). A sentiment of embarrassment, of 'dirtiness', to have infringed on the dignity of human beings by the mere fact of having been there and seen that place, and thus to have treated its denizens as one might the occupants of a zoo. But it takes*

that, it is indispensable to go see, touch, feel. What a difference it makes!
Every time my mind drifts back to it, it seems like a bad movie, a nightmare,
the vision of an evil 'other world' that cannot actually exist. (Field note from
my first day in MCJ, 28 August 1998)

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

In the past quarter-century, the United States has engaged in a unique socio-
historical experiment: the gradual replacement of the social-welfare regu-
lation of poverty, as encapsulated by Piven and Cloward's (1973) classic
analysis, by its treatment through an emerging *carceral-assistential con-
tinuum* interlinking and intermingling the practices, categories, and dis-
courses of 'workfare' with those of a hypertrophic and hyperactive
criminal-justice apparatus (Wacquant, 2002a). This shift from the mater-
nalist (semi-)welfare state to the paternalist penal state, it must be stressed,
does not target all Americans. It is trained primarily on the destitute, the
disreputable and the dangerous, and all those who chafe, in the lower
regions of social space, at the new economic and ethnoracial order being
built over the rubble of the defunct Fordist-Keynesian compact and the dis-
located black ghetto: namely, the colored subproletariat of the big cities, the
unskilled and precarious fractions of the working class, and those who reject
the 'slave jobs' and poverty wages of the deregulated service economy and
turn instead to the informal commerce of the city streets and its leading
sector, the drug trade.

The result of this policy shift, accompanied by a sea change in the ways
in which this society views and talks about crime, punishment, and
(im)morality (Garland, 2001a), has been the sudden and stupendous growth
of the jail and prison system. On the eve of the 1971 Attica riots, the penal
debate in America revolved around intermediate or community sentencing,
harm reduction, and 'decarceration'; the number of inmates was going down
slowly but steadily; facilities of confinement were being closed; America was
a leader in penological innovation and primed to show the world the way
toward a 'nation without prisons', to recall the title of a book emblematic of
the mood of the time (Dodge, 1975; see also Bright, 1996). But, counter to
these hopeful expectations, the carceral population ballooned abruptly from
380,000 in 1975 to one million in 1990. It has since doubled to pass the two-
million mark, of which more than one million are non-violent offenders.
With nearly 700 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants – six to twelve times more
than Western European countries – the United States has snatched the title
of biggest incarcerator of the planet from postcommunist Russia, whose
imprisonment rate has doubled since the collapse of the Soviet state and the
advent of the 'free market' but recenty dipped to 678 per 100,000 following
measures of mass amnesty (Favarel-Garrigues, 2002: 128).

This vertical extension of the US penal system is historically unprecedented not only for its sheer scale and suddenness but also because it has occurred in a period during which levels of crime have remained essentially unchanged (Wacquant, 2002a: chapter 3). And it has been supplemented by its horizontal extension: the population under criminal justice supervision outside of jail and prison walls (that is, put on probation and released on parole) has increased *pari passu*. In 1980, 1.8 million Americans were under penal authority; today there are 6.5 million, amounting to 5 percent of all adult males, including one black man in ten and one young black man (aged 18 to 35) in three. To feed this Gargantuan penal state required a huge diversion of public resources: the United States thus compressed its public expenditures for health, social welfare and education while boosting the budgets and personnel for its police, courts and corrections. Prison operations alone jumped from $7 billion in 1980 to $44 billion in 1997 and the number of employees of the criminal justice system doubled in two decades to reach 2 million, among them 708,000 staff in jails and penitentiaries making custodial bureaucracies the third largest employer of the country, just behind the international distribution chain Wal-Mart (728,000) and the global 'temp work' agency Manpower (1.6 million employees). Every year since 1994, California has spent more for its prisons than for its four-year universities and it presently employs more correctional officers than it does social workers. In 1997, the District of Columbia, seat of the national capital, confined nearly three times more inmates in its jail than it enrolled students at its sole public university; and the incarceration rate for its black residents exceeded 3000 per 100,000, which for a country the size of England would translate into a prison population of 1.2 million (instead of 65,000).

Until the 1970s, the United States was also world leader in carceral research – timidly challenged from the periphery only by Scandinavia – as well as home to a rich tradition of prison writing by inmates of varied stripes.[16] Claude Brown, Malcolm X, Piri Thomas, Eldridge Cleaver and Angela Davis reached and educated a broad public about prison issues by narrating their experiences behind bars, whether they sprang from political or criminal involvements. It is also in the penitentiaries of Illinois, New Jersey, and California that American social scientists, stimulated by the scientistic belief in the rational betterment of social control and by the challenges to established forms of authority issued from the social movements of the 1960s, conducted the ground-breaking field studies that form the plinth of the modern sociology of the carceral institution.[17] In the more progressive states, departments of corrections had not only staff psychologists and social workers but also their own sociologists. From Donald Clemmer's *The Prison Community* (1940), which introduced the concept of 'prisonization' by analogy with the 'Americanization' of immigrants, to Gresham

Sykes's *The Society of Captives* (1958), which incorporated Clemmer's culturalist approach into Parsonian structural-functionalism to highlight the rise of an 'operating social system' and generic control problems in response to the 'pains of imprisonment'; from John Irwin's *The Felon* (1970), which deployed symbolic interactionism to show that inmates 'import' with them external lower-class and criminal identities, to James Jacobs's *Stateville* (1977), which mixed participant observation and historical analysis to trace the transformation of prison organization and authority with the onset of 'mass society'; not to forget Erving Goffman's pivotal formulation of the notions of 'total institution' and of the 'underlife' of inmates in *Asylums* (1961), close-up studies at ground level of the everyday world of the confined played a decisive role in advancing the science and critique of penal establishments as a distinctive sociosymbolic constellation as well as a laboratory wherein to observe and test more general social mechanisms.[18]

This was not to last. With the jettisoning of the philosophy of rehabilitation (Allen, 1981) and the turnaround towards the criminalization of poverty as a queer form of social policy aimed at containment of the lower classes and stigmatized ethnic groups, the doors of penitentiaries were gradually closed to social researchers and severe restrictions were imposed on the diffusion of inmate writings – which all but dried up with the extinction of government support by the time Reagan renewed his tenure at the White House. Meanwhile, extrapolating from previous long-term trends and magnetized by the diffusion of social control mechanisms more subtle than confinement, leading students of the prison such as David Rothman, Michael Ignatieff, Andrew Scull and Stanley Cohen failed to realize that, far from being fated to recede into the societal background to make room for dispersed disciplines, the prison was here to stay right alongside them – indeed, it was about to grow to proportions never before envisioned. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), published just as penal evolution was reversing direction, Michel Foucault not only declared the 'human sciences' complicit with the emerging 'biopower'; he affirmed the displacement of the prison from the center to the periphery of a generalized 'disciplinary form' he called 'the carceral' and concluded:

> Thus, if there is an overall political stake in the prison, it is not to know whether it will be corrective or not; whether the judges, psychiatrists or sociologists will wield more power in it than bureaucrats and guards; it is not even in the alternative between prison or something other than prison. The problem, rather, now is with the great rise of these apparatuses of normalization and the whole gamut of effects of power they carry through the establishment of novel objectivities. (Foucault, 1975: 306, my translation)

As a historical diagnosis of the present, Foucault could not have been more wrong for, just as he formulated it, the penitentiary was entering into a

period of explosive growth and the question of its internal organization and encroachment onto lower-class society remained pivotal. And not only in the United States: the carceral population of France doubled between 1975 and 1995 and that of nearly every major European and Latin American country has increased rapidly over the past two decades to reach all-time highs as the Fordist-Keynesian compact came undone (Stern, 1998; Wacquant, 1999). Yet, as scholars turned to the study of newer forms of decentralized social control in schools, public aid offices and hospitals, in line with Foucault's verdict, they left the prison off their radar screen.[19]

The result of the closing of the penitentiary to social researchers made redundant by the jettisoning of rehabilitation and the latter's growing disregard for a mode of punishment deemed coarse and passé is that observational studies depicting the everyday world of inmates all but vanished just as the United States was settling into mass incarceration and other advanced countries were gingerly clearing their own road towards the penal state. *The ethnography of the prison thus went into eclipse at the very moment when it was most urgently needed* on both scientific and political grounds. This is vividly demonstrated by Lorna Rhodes's major review essay 'Towards an Anthropology of Prisons' (2001) – covering exclusively the US carceral scene – which is long on theoretical disquisitions and neo-Foucauldian programmatic pronouncements but shockingly short on empirical observations. The paucity of materials even forces her to mix journalistic reports and scholarly studies, conflating militant denunciations of the 'prison-industrial complex' (a vague, catch-all notion that hides more than it reveals, e.g. Davis and Cassandra, 2001) with inmate accounts and academic research based mostly on survey, legal and historical materials. The section 'Entering the Prison: Anthropology' occupies not even two pages and lists a total of three field monographs, all carried out in the 1980s and one of which contains not a shred of observational data,[20] while the section 'Entering the Prison: Sociology' lists no work posterior to those of Jacobs and Irwin. The upshot of this review is that the ethnography of the prison in the United States is not merely an endangered species but a virtually extinct one. With social science deserting the scene, one is forced to turn to the writings of journalists and inmates to learn about everyday life in the cells and dungeons of America.[21]

This is not true in Europe, where prison sociology is experiencing something of a mini-boom (Liebling, 1999; Combessie, 2001). British and French field researchers in particular have recently investigated the carceral setting and drawn fine-grained portraits of ordinary social relations and cultural forms between walls. Marchetti (1997, 2001) has revealed the deep-reaching differentiation of inmates on the basis of class before turning to the distinctive penal experiences and survival strategies of long-term inmates. Rostaing (1997) has mapped out the routine activities and the production

of carceral and post-carceral identities in three French prisons for women. Le Caisne (2000) has explored the gradual 'deconstruction of the self' that occurs during detention based on two years of fieldwork in the prison of Poissy, northwest of Paris. Chauvenet et al. (1994) have depicted the professional practices and representations of guards and wardens to demonstrate the bureaucratic impossibility of their official mission of rehabilitation. Treating the prison as an 'open system', Combessie (1996) has tallied its economic and symbolic exchanges with its proximate milieu to discover a direct connection betweeen the authority structure of a penal establishment and the type of sociogeographic environment it finds itself in. In England, Liebling (1992) has woven a complex tapestry of the dynamics of prison suicide, Genders and Player (1995) have put the doctrine of psychiatric treatment to the test with a close-up study of the model prison of Grendon, while Sparks et al. (1996) have revisited the classic problem of order through fieldwork on the incidence and management of trouble at two English dispersal prisons. There is also a sprinkling of participant-observation studies coming from other countries, e.g., James Waldram's (1997) anthropological account of the spread of Aboriginal spiritual traditions in Canadian prisons and Kiko Goifman's (1999) gripping visual portrait of time, sex, and death in the murderous jails of São Paulo. Yet these monographs come well short of forming a critical mass; they remain dispersed and, with few exceptions, disconnected from the central debates of sociology and anthropology as well as cast out of the mainstream of ethnographic research – contrary to studies of schools and hospitals, two other major 'people-processing' organizations.

So much to say that to plan a special issue of *Ethnography* on 'Dissecting the Prison' represented a chancy challenge, but one that the journal had to take up given the scientific and civic salience of that institution. The purpose of this issue is correspondingly threefold: to help, however modestly, *reinvigorate field studies* of the carceral world by supplying them with a transdisciplinary outlet; to suggest that the latter can and must be investigated *both as a microcosm* endowed with a distinctive material and symbolic tropism *and as template* or vector of broader social forces, political nexi, and cultural processes that traverse its walls; and to *internationalize* the ethnographic discussion on the prison rather than consign it as usual to one or another national tradition at the risk of falsely universalizing the peculiar concerns and patterns of a given country – or, worse, letting it wither away as is happening today in its historic cradle of the United States. For the paramount priority of the ethnography of the prison today is without contest *to just do it.* Contrary to what Lorna Rhodes (2001: 75) counsels, field researchers need to worry less about 'challenging the terms of the discourse that frames and supports prisons' and more about getting inside and around penal facilities to carry out intensive, close-up observation of the myriad

relations they contain and support. To harp on the logocentric fixation with 'interrupting the terms of the debate' acts too often as a brake to systematic field investigation, if not as an excuse for not getting on with it.

This brings up the crucial *question of access*. An all-too-obvious reason for the precipitous decline of prison ethnography in the United States has been the lack of openness of correctional facilities to inquiry and the limited cooperation forthcoming from the various authorities that oversee them. By becoming simultaneously more bureaucratic and more porous to the influences of the political, juridical, and media fields, jails and penitentiaries have turned into opaque organizations that can be difficult and sometimes nearly impossible to penetrate (e.g., in California, even journalists are barred by state law from talking to prison inmates without express permission from the Department of Corrections, in violation of the constitutional right of freedom of information). But this opacity is highly variable and it can be circumvented or overcome, as the papers gathered in this issue (especially those of Jacobson-Hardy, Marchetti, Goifman, Rhodes and Sparks) amply demonstrate.[22] And it must not blind us to the impediments that lie not on the side of the carceral bureaucracy but squarely on that of social science.

Here a first constraint lies in the 'absence of sustained commitment of research funding from government agencies and foundations [that has] frustrated efforts to build a vital prison research community' (Tonry and Petersilia, 1999: 4). But a second, more powerful and generally overlooked, limiting factor is the *social and professional organization of academic life* itself. If journalist Daniel Bergner (1998) could spend ten months inside Louisiana's most infamous prison of Angola and freelance author Ted Conover (2000) managed to get himself hired and trained as a guard at Sing Sing for an entire year, what prevents a sociologist or anthropologist from embarking on similar forays? The short answer is that the Human Subjects Committee of their university would forbid it. The longer answer points to the temporal setup of scholarly activity which severely curtails the possibility of conducting the kind of long-term and intensive fieldwork required to habituate oneself to life behind bars; to the lowly social and therefore scientific status of the object of investigation, which entails intimate contact with a population thrice stigmatized (inmates are law-breakers who are overwhelmingly poor and darker skinned); and to the apprehension that academics leading sheltered lives stamped by civility and respect for bodily integrity cannot but feel at the prospect of spending extensive periods inside an institution predicated on the industrial desecration of the self, not to mention the real or imagined threat of physical injury.

A second premise behind this special issue, as well as a lesson emerging from the papers that compose it, is that it is essential to *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. The complementary articles by Combessie on penal stigma in peri-carceral space, Comfort on the importation and twisting of family life inside penal facilities, and Gowan on the mutually reinforcing dynamics of homelessness and incarceration converge to prove both the insufficiency of studying the prison as a world unto itself and the inadequacy of the oft-invoked notion of 'collateral damage' to look at its ramifying social effects (e.g., Chesney-Lind and Mauer, 2002). This catchy military metaphor is misleading in that it suggests, first, that it is the prison alone that acts when in reality any output of the carceral institution entails continuous inputs from and complex coordination with other organizations, from the family, labor market and neighborhood all the way to the bureaucratic and political nerve centers of the state. It also presumes that the prison is an institution external to social space, as it were, in which it selectively intrudes from outside, when in fact it is woven deep into the fabric and lifecourse of the lower classes across generations. Finally, the idiom of 'collateral damage' implies that the influence of the prison is necessarily distortive and wholly negative, whereas the prison can also act, counterintuitively and within limits, as a stabilizing and restorative force for relations *already* deeply frayed by the pressures of life and labor at the bottom of the social edifice. For example, prisons extirpate abusive men from domestic space; interrupt for a time spirals of addiction; and provide some health care to derelicts who otherwise receive none. Indeed, one can argue that the US carceral system has become a perverse agency for the delivery of human services to the social refuse of the market society (Wacquant, 2002a), a function that the imagery of 'collateral damage' can neither admit nor display.[23]

A third recommendation implicit in the very make-up of this issue is to contest the narrow national parochialism and unthinking Americanocentrism of research on the carceral world. Michael Tonry and Joan Petersilia (1999: 4) note that, on issues of correctional treatment and detention regimes, 'much of the most important recent work [on the prison] has been done outside the United States'. But this is true also of ethnographic inquiries. Yet those inquiries conducted outside of the English-speaking world are hardly read, taught and used in the United States, so that the concepts and concerns of American scholars continue to dominate world research, even as field studies have vanished there and in spite of the glaring *carceral exceptionalism* of the United States. By bringing together original articles based on participant observation in and around penal establishments in America, France, Brazil and Scotland, it is hoped that this issue will foster the international circulation of field research on the prison and stimulate *less asymmetric exchanges* among scholars,[24] as well as encourage them to avail themselves of the complete gamut of sources and expository resources, from narrative to photography and video (as in Jacobson-Hardy's and Goifman's

pieces) to intensive interviews that use inmates as informants on social relations rather than as respondents (Marchetti), to administrative documents (Rhodes, Combessie) and self-analysis (Sparks).

Substantively, getting 'in and out of the belly of the beast', to twist the title of Jack Henry Abbott's (1978) famous prison letters, offers a propitious vantage point from which to contribute to the *comparative ethnography of the state* after the triumph of neoliberalism. Advocates of 'state-centered' approaches to social inequality have concentrated their attention on the welfare, health, housing, labor and educational arms of the state, to the remarkable neglect of the conception, deployment and effects of penal policies and institutions. Yet the police, the courts, and the prison are major instruments of penetration and oversight of the nether zones of social space, and prime vehicles for the symbolic construction and material management of 'problem' populations and territories. 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.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 See Zimring and Hawkins (1994) for a compact account of California's sudden 'carceral boom', and Tonry and Petersilia (1999) for a broad overview of the determinants and dimensions of mass imprisonment in the United States during this period. This opening section of the paper draws on field notes taken during a pilot study of Los Angeles County Jail conducted in Spring and Summer of 1998; it aims to give the reader a raw sense of what a big-city American jail looks and feels like to a newcomer by way of prelude (I thank the Sociology Department at UCLA for providing a supportive base for carrying out this work during that rocky year).

2 This transfer in January 1998 was in response to a scathing report by the Federal Department of Justice of September 1997 ordering the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department to take drastic measures to ameliorate care for the thousand-odd severely mentally ill detainees crammed in its dark and cramped psychiatric ward or face a lawsuit for violation of the Constitution's 8th Amendment – which protects Americans from 'unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain'.

3 For an ethnographic vignette of life and labor in the Twin Towers shortly after their opening, see Wacquant (2000).

4 Farmer (1999) offers a gripping ethnographic-cum-medical analysis of the return of drug resistant tuberculosis in prisons in the United States and in Russia.

5 Some 48 percent of Los Angeles County Jail detainees are Latinos and a third are black; whites account for only 18 percent of the city's jail population, as against 45 percent of its residents. Half are between the ages of 18 and 29 and seven in ten hold no school credentials (these data come from Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, *5th Semiannual Report by Special Counsel Merrick J. Bobb and Staff*, mimeograph, February 1996; for a broader demographic portrait of California state prisoners, consult Eisenman, 2000).

6 On racial relations inside US prisons and their transformation in the post-Civil Rights era, see Carroll (1974), Jacobs (1983), and Wacquant (2001); on racial gangs and their impact on everyday life in California prisons, see Hunt et al. (1993). According to Knox's (2000) questionnaire survey of 133 state prisons across the United States, the presence and disruptive activities of gangs behind bars are pervasive and have increased over the past decade.

7 California's 'Three Strikes and You're Out' legislation mandates an automatic penalty of 25 years to life imprisonment in the case of any third felony violation following two convictions for serious crimes; it is the most stringent in the country (Zimring et al. 2001).

8 The social scene of visiting in a major California prison is finely described and analyzed by Comfort (2003), who reveals it to be a female space subjected to the masculine (and masculinizing) authority of the prison.

9 American jails and prisons have sharply reduced their educational, vocational and therapeutic programs in the past two decades, as part of a general shift from 'rehabilitation' to mere 'neutralization' or warehousing of criminals, translating into a deterioration of detention regimens, a rising tide of parole failures, and an increase in return to confinement (Irwin and Austin, 2001: chapter 5).

10 The main advantages of the big dorms is that its residents are low-security and have free and open access to a collective shower area. Their main drawback is the increased danger due to the sheer number of co-occupants,

with ethnic antagonisms, personal enmities, and thefts fueling confrontation and assaults. It is frequent for an inmate in a dorm to ask to be transfered into a multibed unit in a higher-security tier: 'They'll come up to you and ask to be put in the gang module, they'll say, "hey, I got too many enemies in there, I can't stay in there, I gotta get with my homies".'

11 This is a common practice by departments of corrections in the United States, as a means of generating funds to deflect the escalating cost of mass incarceration. In 1997 for instance, the state of New York garnered upwards of $20 million from its exclusive contract with MCI, thanks to a price mark-up of 40 percent over regular phone rates (on this and related strategies to make prisoners pay for part of the costs of their confinement, see Wacquant, 2002b).

12 In 1990, 40 of 50 states had been ordered by the courts to improve conditions of detention in their prisons or face sanctions.

13 On the dramatic and systematic mistreatment of the mentally ill in US jails and prisons, and the industrial-scale traumatization it generates, read Kupers (1999), who estimates that 'more prisoners suffer from major mental disorders than the total number of inpatients in noncorrectional facilities', and that a fourth of the US prison population is 'in need of intensive psychiatric services'. Nicknamed 'dings' or 'bugs', psychiatrically deranged inmates stand at the bottom of the prison pecking order and are subjected to more brutalities than any other category.

14 The US inmate count for women has exploded from 12,300 in 1980 to 156,000 in 2000, of whom 69,500 are African American and 19,500 are Latina (Beck and Karsberg, 2001: 9). For comparison, France incarcerates a total of 2200 women.

15 Testimony of Jim Gomez, former head of the California Department of Correction, in Senate Select Committee (1998: vol. 5, p. 11).

16 An excellent introduction to and discussion of the varied strands and cultural significance of this tradition is supplied by Franklin (1998); on the converse tradition of 'writers in prison', from Dostoyevsky and Gramsci to Genet and Breytenbach, see Davies (1990).

17 Combessie (2001) shows the centrality of these works in his brief overview of that sector of research extending into recent European works.

18 Sykes occupies an odd place in this regard. *The Society of Captives* (1958) is often read as an ethnography of the carceral microcosm (e.g., Hagan, 1987; Rostaing, 1997: 56–7), but in his 'Note on Method' Sykes explicitly rejects participant observation as a 'defective technique for securing data' in the prison context. Moreover, he is concerned not with documenting the cultural specificities of the prison as a symbolic system (although he does it rather well in his discussion of 'argot roles') but with dissecting generic processes of order maintenance and 'almost total social control' as prescribed by the AGIL scheme of Talcott Parsons.

19 For a raw indicator of the abandonment of the prison by sociologists, compare Hazelrigg's (1968) collection *Prison Within Society*, which contains numerous essays by the leading sociologists of the day – Donald Cressey, Richard Cloward, Harold Garfinkel, Morris Janowitz, David Street, Mayer Zald, and Lloyd Ohlin – with Latessa et al.'s (2001) *Correctional Contexts*, from which sociologists and anthropologists are conspicuously absent, or with Tonry and Petersilia's (1999) important volume which features only two sociologists among 17 authors and only one social scientist drawing on fieldwork. An apparent exception to this trend is David Garland's (2001b) conference volume on *Mass Incarceration: Social Causes and Consequences*, which contains two essays by sociologists using field data, but neither of them reports new materials on life inside the prison.

20 They are Fleischer's (1989) realist depiction of the 'warehousing of violence' in the federal penitentiary of Lompoc, California; Thomas's (1988) study of resistance to jailhouse lawyering in Texas, and Feldman's (1991) interview research on political violence in Ireland (a study which relies entirely on the verbal recollections of former inmates, which Feldman rationalizes by glibly asserting that 'in a culture of surveillance, participant observation . . . is a form of complicity with those outsiders who surveil').

21 I was shocked, when I started my field project on US jails, to discover that the most recent ethnographic description of the port of entry into the carceral cosmos remains, 20 years after it was written, the monograph by John Irwin, *The Jail: Managing the Underclass* (1984). The two most instructive collections of reports by US inmates are Rideau and Wikberg (1990) and Burton-Rose et al. (1998); see also Evans (2001). Two accounts by prisoners of middle-class origins who find themselves plunged into a netherworld they had no clue existed are Hassine (1999) in Pennsylvania and Lerner (2002) in Nevada. For journalistic accounts of life in New York City's Rikers Island jail, see Wynn (2002); in a Texas prison, Early (1995); in Angola, Louisiana's infamous penitentiary, Bergner (1998). Freelance author Ted Conover (2000) gives a skillful narration of his remarkable experiences as a novice guard working in Sing Sing prison. A vivid visual introduction to contemporary US prisons is supplied by Jacobson-Hardy (1999) and by Kornfeld and Cardinal's (1997) extensive documentation of prison art.

22 Another example is Owen's (1998) 'quasi-ethnography' of strategies and paths of survival in the largest women's prison in the world, located in California's central valley, and the research of Rhodes herself (in this issue and in press) on psychiatric practice in a maximum-security penitentiary in Washington state.

23 A mini-cottage industry of research on the 'social impacts' of incarceration has recently arisen in America, driven largely by the sudden availability of

funding related to 'welfare reform' which mandates 'moving people from welfare to jobs'. In this perspective, dominated by quantitative researchers coming from the study of poverty, social policy, and the family, the carceral system is construed as an obstacle or a factor of inertia that depreciates desirable social outcomes: it interrupts schooling, lowers labor market participation and earnings, hampers marriage, and increases involvement in crime – in short it is a generator of costly 'antisocial behaviors'. It remains to be seen whether this emerging body of inquiry will challenge or reinforce the metaphor of 'collateral damage' and question or entrench the hallowed tenets of the normal social science of poverty and racial division in America.

24 We also actively sought articles from field researchers working in Russia, Venezuela, Italy, Spain and Japan, but we either did not find any or did not succeed in recruiting suitable pieces in time for publication in this issue.

References

Abbott, Jack Henry (1978[1991]) *In the Belly of the Beast : Letters from Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Allen, Francis (1981) *The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal: Penal Policy and Social Purpose*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Beck, Allen and Jennifer Karsberg (2001) *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2000*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Bulletin.

Bergner, Daniel (1998) *God of the Rodeo: The Search for Hope, Faith, and a Six-Second Ride in Louisiana's Angola Prison*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Bright, Charles (1996) *The Powers that Punish: Prison and Politics in the Era of the 'Big House', 1920–1955*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Burton-Rose, Daniel, Dan Pens and Paul Wright, eds (1998) *The Celling of America: An Inside Look at the US Prison Industry*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.

Carroll, Leo (1974) *Hacks, Blacks, and Cons: Race Relations in a Maximum Security Prison*. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co.

Chauvenet, Antoinette, Françoise Orlic and Georges Benguigui (1994) *Le Monde des surveillants de prison*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Chesney-Lind, Meda and Marc Mauer, eds (2002) *Collateral Damage: The Social Impact of Mass Incarceration*. New York: New Press.

Clemmer, Donald (1940) *The Prison Community*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Combessie, Philippe (1996) *Prisons des villes et prisons des champs*. Paris: Editions de l'Atelier.

Combessie, Philippe (2001) *Sociologie de la prison*. Paris: Repères.

Comfort, Megan (2003) 'In the Tube at San Quentin: The "Secondary

Prisonization" of Women Visiting Inmates', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32(1): in press.

Conover, Ted (2000) *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. New York: Random House.

Davies, Ioan (1990) *Writers in Prison*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Davis, Angela Y. and Shaylor Cassandra (2001) 'Race, Gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex: California and Beyond', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 2(1): 1–25.

Dodge, Calvert, ed. (1975) *A Nation Without Prisons: Alternatives to Incarceration*. Lexington: Lexington Books.

Early, Pete (1995) *The Hot House: Life Inside Leavenworth Prison*. New York: Bantam.

Eisenman, Russell (2000) 'Characteristics of Prisoners in the California Department of Corrections: Race, Ethnicity, and Other Aspects', *The Mankind Quarterly* 41(2): 211–15.

Evans, Jeff, ed. (2001) *Undoing Time: American Prisoners in Their Own Words*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Farmer, Paul (1999) 'Cruel and Unusual: Drug Resistant Tuberculosis as Punishment', in Vivien Stern and Roy Jones (eds) *Sentenced to Die?*, pp. 70–88. London: King's College.

Favarel-Garrigues, Gilles (2002) 'Priorités et limites de la politique pénitentiaire en Russie', *Critique internationale* 16: 121–35.

Feldman, Alan (1991) *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fleischer, Mark S. (1989) *Warehousing Violence*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Foucault, Michel (1975[1977]) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.

Franklin, H. Bruce, ed. (1998) *Prison Writing in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Penguin.

Freeman, Richard (1999) *The New Inequality: Creating Solutions for Poor America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Garland, David (2001a) *The Culture of Control*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Garland, David, ed. (2001b) *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*. London: Sage.

Genders, Elaine and Elaine Player (1995) *Grendon: A Study of a Therapeutic Prison*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goffman, Erving (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Goifman, Kiko (1998) *Valetes em slow motion*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.

Hagan, John (1987) 'The Imprisoned Society: Time Turns a Classic on Its Head', *Sociological Forum* 10(3): 519–25.

Hassine, Victor (1999) *Life Without Parole: Living in Prison Today*, 2nd edition. Boston: Roxbury Publications.

Hazelrigg, Lawrence, ed. (1968) *Prison Within Society*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Hunt, Geoffrey, Stephanie Riegel, Tomas Morales and Dan Waldorf (1993) 'Changes in Prison Culture: Prison Gangs and the Case of the "Pepsi Generation" ', *Social Problems* 40(3): 398–409.

Irwin, John (1970[1987]) *The Felon*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Irwin, John (1984) *The Jail: Managing the Underclass in American Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Irwin, John and James Austin (2001) *It's About Time: America's Imprisonment Binge*, 3rd edition. Belmont: Wadsworth.

Jacobs, James B. (1977) *Stateville: The Penitentiary in Mass Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jacobs, James B. (1983) 'Race Relations and the Prisoner Subculture', in *New Perspectives on Prisons and Imprisonment*, pp. 61–79. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Jacobson-Hardy, Michael (1999) *Behind the Razor Wire: Portrait of a Contemporary American Prison System*. New York: New York University Press.

Knox, George W. (2000) 'A National Assessment of Gangs and Security Threat Groups (STGs) in Adult Correctional Institutions: Results of the 1999 Adult Corrections Survey', *Journal of Gang Research* 7(3): 1–45.

Kornfeld, Phyllis and Roger Cardinal (1997) *Cellblock Visions: Prison Art in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kupers, Terry (1999) *Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Latessa, Edward J., Alexander Holsinger, James Marquart and Jonathan R. Sorensen, eds. (2001) *Correctional Contexts: Contemporary and Classical Readings*, 2nd ed. Boston: Roxbury.

Le Caisne, Léonore (2000) *Prison. Une ethnologue en centrale*. Paris: Odile Jacob.

Lerner, Jimmy (2002) *You Got Nothing Coming: Notes from a Prison Fish*. New York: Broadway Books.

Liebling, Allison (1992) *Suicides in Prison*. London: Routledge.

Liebling, Allison (1999) 'Doing Research in Prison: Breaking the Silence?', *Theoretical Criminology* 3(2): 147–73.

Marchetti, Anne-Marie (1997) *Pauvretés en prison*. Ramonville Saint-Ange: Cérès.

Marchetti, Anne-Marie (2001) *Perpétuités. Le temps infini des longues peines*. Paris: Plon-Terre Humaine.

Owen, Barbara (1998) *In the Mix: Struggle and Survival in a Women's Prison*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Piven, Frances Fox and Richard A. Cloward (1973) *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*. New York: Pantheon.

Rhodes, Lorna (2001) 'Towards an Anthropology of Prisons', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 65–83.

Rhodes, Lorna (in press) *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in 'Maximum Security' Prison*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rideau, Wilbert and Ron Wikberg (1990) *Life Sentences: Rage and Survival Behind Bars*. New York: Times Books.

Rostaing, Corine (1997) *La Relation carcérale. Identités et rapports sociaux dans les prisons de femmes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Senate Select Committee on Prison Management (1998) *Hearing: California State Prison, Corcoran: Department of Corrections' and the California Attorney General's Efforts to Investigate Incidents of Staff Brutality of Inmates*. Sacramento: California Legislature.

Simon, Jonathan (1993) *Poor Discipline: Parole and the Social Control of the Underclass, 1890–1990*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sparks, Richard, Anthony Bottoms and Will Hay (1996) *Prisons and the Problem of Order*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Stern, Vivian (1998) *A Sin Against the Future*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Sykes, Gresham (1958[1974]) *The Society of Captives: A Study in a Maximum Security Prison*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thomas, J. (1988) *Prisoner Litigation: The Paradox of the Jailhouse Lawyer*. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield.

Tonry, Michael and Joan Petersilia, eds (1999) *Prisons*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wacquant, Loïc (1999) *Les Prisons de la misère*. Paris: Raisons d'agir Editions. [tr. *Prisons of Poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, in press]

Wacquant, Loïc (2000) 'L'étalon des maisons d'arrêt pour le vingt-et-unième siècle', *Le Passant ordinaire* 28: 18–20.

Wacquant, Loïc (2001) 'Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh', *Punishment & Society* 3(1): 95–134.

Wacquant, Loïc (2002a) *Punir les pauvres. Le nouveau gouvernement de l'insécurité sociale*. Marseilles: Agone.

Wacquant, Loïc (2002b) 'Four Strategies to Curb Carceral Costs: On Managing Mass Imprisonment in the United States', *Studies in Political Economy* 18 (Fall): in press.

Waldram, James B. (1997) *The Way of the Pipe: Aboriginal Spirituality and Symbolic Healing in Canadian Prisons*. Toronto: Broadview Press.

Wynn, Jennifer (2002) *Inside Rikers: Stories from the World's Largest Penal Colony*. New York: Griffin.

Zimring, Franklin and Gordon Hawkins (1994) 'The Growth of Imprisonment in California', *British Journal of Criminology* 34 (special issue): 83–96.

Zimring, Franklin, Gordon Hawkins and Sam Kamin (2001) *Punishment and*

Democracy: Three Strikes and You're Out in California. New York: Oxford University Press.

■   **LOÏC WACQUANT** is Professor of Sociology and Research Fellow at the Earl Warren Legal Institute, University of California-Berkeley, and Researcher at the Centre de sociologie européenne du Collège de France. His interests include comparative urban marginality, ethnoracial domination, imprisonment, embodiment, and social theory. He has conducted fieldwork in the South Pacific island of New Caledonia, on the South Side of Chicago, and in the jails of big cities in the United States, France and Brazil. His recent books include *Prisons of Poverty* (1999, translated in 13 languages), *Body and Soul: Ethnographic Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2000, translated in 7 languages), *Los Parias Urbanos* (2001), *Punir les pauvres* (2002), and *Deadly Symbiosis: The Coming of Neoliberal Penality* (forthcoming with Polity Press, Spring 2003). He is a co-founder and editor of *Ethnography* and a regular contributor to *Le Monde diplomatique*. [email: loic@uclink4.berkeley.edu] ■