



# Conceptualizing the carceral in carceral geography

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**Abstract**

Carceral geography has yet to define the ‘carceral’, with implications for its own development, its potential synergies within and beyond geography, and effective critique of the carceral ‘turn’. A range of explicatory alternatives are open, including continued expansive engagement with the carceral, and attendance to compact and diffuse carceral models. We trace the origins of the term ‘carceral’, its expansive definition after Foucault, the apparent carceral/prison symbiosis, and the extant diversity of carceral geography. We advance for debate, as a step towards its critical appraisal, a series of ‘carceral conditions’ that bear on the nature and quality of carcerality.

**Keywords**

carcer, carceral conditions, carceral geography, Foucault, prison

**I Introduction**

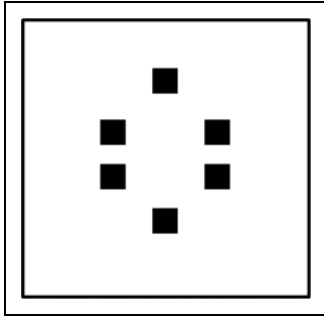
The ‘carceral turn’ – the deployment of a new range of strategies of social control and coercion – has seen resentful views of the poor and vulnerable inform punitive turns in both welfare and justice policy. This turn is epitomized both by growth in the legal, state-sanctioned incarceration of offenders sentenced to ever-longer prison terms in punitive conditions, and the extra-penal mass supervision of increasing numbers of people whose lives are thus penetrated by the criminal justice system. It has pre-figured the use of semi-sanctioned forms of confinement for asylum seekers and refugees subject to intimidation, violence and detention.

Technologies of surveillance and control enable a carceral ‘fix’ to operate beyond conventional carceral spaces and when persons remain mobile – for example through electronic tagging and the far-reaching stigma of incarceration. Nation-states out-source imprisonment to neighbouring countries: renting out surplus space in under-capacity facilities; funding overseas facilities to enable deportation or extradition; and commodifying the (im)mobility

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**Figure 1.** Carcer in geomancy/occult divination – one of 12 geomantic signs.

inherent in prisoners' confinement. At the same time migrants are detained outside of the territories they wish to enter, contesting established notions of state sovereignty.

Carceral geography attends closely to these issues through work which is diverse and multi-scalar, which focuses on structural, political and institutional contexts as well as everyday experiences, practices and agency, and is increasingly recognized beyond the discipline (Shantz, 2017). Although rapid, its development is far outpaced by the expansion, diversification and proliferation of those strategies of control and coercion towards which it is attuned. Tracking these strategies has perhaps meant that whilst 'carceral' has proven expedient in that it encompasses both the prison and other institutions and experiences, a thorough exegesis of the term has yet to emerge. This is critical – for the future development of the subdiscipline itself, for its position within human geography, and in order to sharpen its critique of the 'carceral turn'.

Engaging with developments in human geography more broadly, the carceral is approached from a range of ontological orientations. A Marxist approach views prisons in relation to neoliberal landscapes, as industrial complexes for the generation of value (Peck, 2003; Gilmore, 2007), and through the lens of carceral circuits (Gill et al., 2016). The new mobilities paradigm ensures attendance to confinement in relation to

mobilities (Mincke, 2016; Turner and Peters, 2016, 2017). Understandings of carceral space as relative, and increasingly as relational, draw upon broader poststructuralist influences. Although emergent scholarship sketches out carceral geography's more fine-grained synergies with subdisciplines of animal geographies (Moran, 2015a; Morin, 2015, 2016a), children's geographies (Disney 2015a, 2015b; Schliehe, 2015; Moran et al., 2016a), legal geographies (Villanueva, 2016, 2017, forthcoming), historical geographies (Morin and Moran, 2015) and geographies of architecture (Moran et al., 2016b), their potential is arguably restricted by a relative definitional vacuum. The intent of the present article is therefore to open a space for debate, thinking through what it is that we might mean by 'carceral', and with what implications.

Reviewing recent work, Routley notes that 'carceral geography is not just a fancier name for the geography of prisons' (2016: 1). But *not* being 'just' the geography of prisons begs the question of what it *is*. To address this question, we first trace the etymology of the term 'carceral' and its use by Michel Foucault. We next consider the development of scholarship around this term in human geography, before turning our attention to the implications of the apparent anchoring of the carceral to the prison, and finally discussing the challenges and opportunities for carceral geography in attempting a delimitation of the carceral.

## II Carcer → carceralis → carceral

The dictionary definition of carceral is '*relating to, or of prison*'. The late-16th-century word comes from the Latin *carceralis*, whose origin is *carcer*, the name of the ancient state prison of Rome (Platner, 2015: 99). Carcer may also be connected with other Indo-European words for circle or round object, such as *curvus* [Latin], *κῆρκος* [Greek] and *hringr* [Old Norse]. Intriguingly, 'carcer' is also the name of one of the geomantic signs in occult divination (see Figure 1).

Described as the outline of an enclosure, a link in a chain, or a prison cell, wherever it appears it bodes ill, denoting delays, setbacks, or bindings. Although related to strength and willpower, it generally connotes restriction and immobility. According to occult scholar Heinrich Agrippa, it ‘raiseth enemies, detaineth in prison, and inflicteth many evils’, signifying hatred, wickedness and ‘great detrement’ (1655: 40). So synonymous is ‘carceral’ with ‘prison’ that ‘K.C. Carceral’ is even the pseudonym adopted by the prisoner-author of ‘Prison, Inc.’, an exposé of prison life in a privately-run US facility (Carceral and Bernard, 2006).

Despite its archaic origins, ‘carceral’ has become a significant word for our times. Debate over the legitimacy of incarceration in all of its manifestations transcends and is differentiated by local and national cultural norms and practices. We now speak of living in a ‘carceral age’ (Bosworth and Kaufman, 2011; Brown, 2014b; Simon, 1998) characterized by unprecedented fluidity between forms of confinement, be they state-sanctioned, quasi-legal, ad-hoc, illicit, spatially fixed, mobile, embodied or imagined, and in which the scale of deployment of carceral techniques and infrastructures demands critical attention.

### III Foucault and carceral ubiquity

The sense in which carceral is inseparable from the prison is reinforced by the influential work of Michel Foucault. In the final chapter of *Discipline and Punish* (1977), entitled ‘The Carceral’, Foucault described a ‘carceral system’ that reaches far beyond the prison, drawing on disciplinary control that encompasses the most ‘coercive technologies of behaviour’ (Foucault, 1977: 293). Referring to Mettray – a 19th-century French reformatory for young boys (see also Driver, 1990) – five models of organizational control (family, army, workshop, school, judicial system) are suggested, which merge and intertwine wider society with the carceral

in a diffuse way. This diffusion, he argued, takes place via ‘carceral circles’, which, like ripples in water, extend far from the prison. Mettray is chosen as an example of disciplinary control at its most extreme by combining diffuse and compact forms of discipline with corrective training – despite not having fences or walls around it.

Foucault identified colonies for the poor, almshouses, institutions for abandoned children and factory-convents flowing out from, and adopting aspects of, the ‘compact’, institutional, carceral model. Moving ‘still further away from penality in its strictest sense’, he argued, ‘the carceral circles widen and the form of the prison slowly diminishes and finally disappears altogether’ (Foucault, 1977: 298). Beyond the ‘compact’ institutions, then, lay the more ‘diffuse’ carceral models, such as charitable organizations, housing associations and moral improvement societies, which used ‘carceral methods’ that assisted but also surveilled. And beyond these still lay the ‘great carceral network’ that ‘reaches all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society’ (Foucault, 1977: 298). This societal spread of the carceral is termed ‘carceral archipelago’, transporting the disciplinary techniques of the prison into the social body as a whole. Foucault’s influential ideas are recognizable in Baudrillard’s passing observation that ‘prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral’ (Baudrillard, 2001: 461).

Much in the way that *Discipline and Punish* is ‘now a work utterly familiar to human geographers’ (Philo, 2012: 500; see also Philo, 2001), the same work has dominated criminological engagement with Foucault (Valverde, 2008). It is thus unsurprising that this book, perhaps to the exclusion of Foucault’s wider *oeuvre*, has heavily influenced carceral geography inasmuch as it is yet to define the carceral, and thus obliquely adopts Foucault’s expansive definition. This is a significant point, notwithstanding Valverde’s (2008) criticism that terms

drawn from Foucault are misused when they are turned into sociological ‘concepts’. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault largely focused on the disciplinary programs as being intended to normalize individuals – the ‘atomised’ human body, for Philo (2012: 500) – and ‘generate uniform, disciplined bodies of citizens’ (Valverde, 2008: 210). Looking beyond the individual towards the creation of ‘carceral’ populations, Philo argues that in this earlier work ‘we can readily see seeds . . . of Foucault’s subsequent turn to “biopower” – to matters of massed life, its vitalities, unruliness and demanding of “technological” responses’ (2012: 501). Foucault’s move towards concentration on practices of governance ‘developed by and for “free” subjects’ (Valverde, 2008: 214) took place in the latter two books of the *History of Sexuality* trilogy (Foucault, 1985, 1986), the *Society Must Be Defended* 1975–76 lectures (Foucault, 2003), and through the concepts of biopolitics and governmentality. All of which is to suggest that, whereas in *Discipline and Punish* the cast of his carceral net was indefinite, encompassing ‘all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society’ (1977: 298, our emphasis), perhaps in the light of his later writings, that which lies beyond the ‘compact’ and ‘diffuse’ carceral models can be considered to merge with the biopolitical. As Valverde argued, individualization and the formation of normal populations ‘are of course two sides of the same coin’ (2008: 214).

Reconsidering Foucault’s postulation of the carceral in this way, i.e. in relation to ‘compact’ and ‘diffuse’ models, and to what might lie ‘beyond’ them in the social body as a whole, perhaps presents an opportunity for carceral geography. Moran et al. (2013a: 240) alluded to the exponentially mounting possibilities of the carceral, and whilst on the one hand the increasingly diverse application of the term signals a productive expansion of analytical field, on the other, if the social *in its entirety* is carceral, then what, if anything, lies beyond the

latitude of carceral geography? How should its subject matter be determined? What is ‘carceral’, and in which way(s)? Before we can address these questions of import for the future of carceral geography, it is useful to reconsider what it has already become – or, in other words, what elements of ‘the carceral’ are already its objects of study.

#### IV The development of carceral geography

Carceral geography is in close dialogue with longer-standing academic engagements with the carceral, most notably criminology and prison sociology. Dialogue initially comprised learning and borrowing from criminology, but within a more general criminological engagement with spaces and landscapes (Campbell, 2013; Hayward, 2012, 2016; Kindynis, 2014) recent years have seen criminologists increasingly considering and adopting perspectives from carceral geography. Crewe et al. (2013), for example, have examined the emotional geographies of carceral spaces; Pickering (2014: 187) examined the micro politics of ‘new carceral spaces’ at border crossings; and Woolford and Gacek (2016) drew on carceral geography to theorize ‘genocidal carcerality’ in Indian residential schools in Canada. Discussions of carceral geography are now appearing in landmark criminological collections (e.g. Jewkes and Moran, forthcoming; Moran, forthcoming).

It is immediately apparent that the development of carceral geography has been characterized by a dual focus on compact and diffuse carceral models. Spaces of confinement are very broadly conceived, and a key area of interest is the relationship between the spaces of the institution and the embodied spaces of the self (Moran, 2015b). Scholarship has investigated diverse aspects of the prison, and of other compact carceral sites which resemble the prison both in functional form and in mode of operation, such as detention centres (e.g. Hiemstra,

2013; Mountz et al., 2013) and halfway houses (e.g. Allspach, 2010) or secure holding facilities for children and young people (Schliehe, 2015), with acute sensitivity to change and difference across space and time, space/time and between cultures and jurisdictions.

Of particular note is the breadth of empirical focus. A growing body of literature focuses upon compact carceral spaces, such as those of ‘mainstream’ incarceration of ‘criminals’ for custodial sentences imposed by prevailing legal systems, or spaces of migrant detention that confine irregular or non-status migrants pending decisions on admittance or removal. Dirsuweit (1999) explored women’s prison experiences in South Africa; in New Mexico, Sibley and Van Hoven (2009) and Van Hoven and Sibley (2008) described negotiation of material and imagined carceral spaces through ‘vision’. In the UK, Baer (2005) identified unique personalization of prison space, a notion further developed by Moran et al. (2013b) and Milhaud and Moran (2013) for prisoners’ privacy in Russia and France. More recently, Hemsworth (2015) explored the role of sound in historic prison sites and Michalon (2015) described micro-spaces inside migrant detention facilities in Romania. There is also scholarship of overlaps and synergies between spaces. In particular, Loyd et al. (2013) and Morelle (2015) have influentially demonstrated interactions between prisons, migration policing and detention, including in the Global South. Following Foucault’s rippling carceral circles, a variety of domestic, urban, and embodied sites have been theorized as spaces of surveillance and control reminiscent of the diffuse carceral model, with carceral geographers tracing the relationships between the prison as a compact but porous carceral institution and these other spaces. This scholarship has three complementary foci: on the ways in which the prison seeps into its surroundings; in relation to the porosity of the prison boundary itself; and with reference to a mobile and embodied carcerality.

Techniques and technologies of confinement leach into everyday domestic, street, and institutional spaces with which both former inmates and their loved ones (such as prison visitors) come into contact. Brown (2014a) and Fishwick and Wearing (2017) have worked on juvenile delinquency and youth justice, and Morin (2016a) on parallels between the treatment of animals and prisoners. Examples of work on the prison’s influences on communities both local to and distant from it, and on the impact of prison siting, include Bonds (2006, 2009), Che (2005) and Shabazz (2015a, 2015b); and Mitchellson (2014) provides an example of research into prison privatization as part of a wider state economy.

In relation to tangible and intangible things that cross the prison wall, Moran (2013a, 2013b) and Moran et al. (2016b) have undertaken substantial work regarding in-between spaces of the prison visiting room, and liminal spaces of prisoner transportation (Moran et al., 2012, 2013c). Baer (2005) and Schliehe (2017) have both explored prisoner possessions and their significance and movement in the prison setting. Baer and Ravneberg (2008) and Schliehe (2016) explored notions of inside and outside; Bony (2015) has studied continuity of social relations beyond the prison wall; and Turner (2016) has interrogated the notion of an absolute and Euclidean prison boundary. Conlon and Hiemstra (2014) outlined micro-economies in and associated with detention centres, and Moran (2015a) discussed animal geographies of carceral space with reference to animals as contraband that penetrates the prison.

Pertaining to the third focus on mobile and embodied carcerality, carceral geographers have argued that the carceral does not require a spatial fix – it can operate through ‘forms of confinement that burst internment structures and deliver carceral effects without physical immobilization’ (Moran et al., 2013a: 240). Increasingly recognizing ‘the carceral’ as

spatial, emplaced, mobile, embodied and affective, they have studied the experiences of prison time inscribed on the body (Moran, 2012, 2014) and have paid specific attention to ‘trans’ carceral experiences – that is, of embodiment and transgender prisoners (Rosenberg and Oswin, 2015; Rosenberg, 2017).

Further pursuing the diffuse carceral model, carceral geographers have increasingly described spaces beyond prisons as ‘carceral’. Research focus has been trained upon sites beyond the traditional, landed prison by Mountz and Loyd (2014) regarding islands, and Peters and Turner (2015) and Turner and Peters (2016) in historical research on the convict ship. And beyond carceral geography, geographers have begun to suggest that other institutional settings have carceral features. Waters and Brooks (2015), for example, have suggested that the separateness and isolation of elite schools bear some comparison to more conventional carceral settings (see also Gallagher, 2010, for schools and panopticism).

‘Carceral’ spaces beyond prisons are sometimes denoted by prefixing carceral qualifiers, apparently to differentiate them from the compact model, and the use of such qualifiers suggests gradations of carcerality. Smith (2011) uses the term ‘graduated incarceration’ to describe microgeographies of occupation in the West Bank. Lock-down urban security around global mega-events (e.g. Coaffee, 2014: 208, drawing on Mike Davis’ deployment of the ‘carceral city’) and military prisons such as Abu Ghraib (Stevens, 2008: 200; also Gregory, 2007) are described as ‘hyper-carceral’. There are ‘transcarceral’ spaces in which freed inmates experience reconfinement (Allspach, 2010), using terminology that dates back to Lowman and Menzies’ (1986) characterization of Foucault’s portrayal of organized control as broader than imprisonment (Johnson, 1996). There are ‘quasi-carceral’ spaces: those for prisoners’ home-visits (Moran and Keinänen, 2012); day-release prisoners’ workplaces

(Maddrell, 2000, 2017); as well as prisons that no longer function as such (e.g. Felder et al., 2014; Morin, 2013, 2016b; Morin and Moran, 2015; Turner and Peters, 2015). In their article on carceral circuitry, Gill et al (2016) identify the circuitous nature of carceral systems that involve these increasingly diverse institutions. Unrelated to ‘any objective rise in “criminality” per se’ (Gill et al., 2016: 2), these are instead based on neoliberal developments including the mobility of capital and expendability of locations and populations, as well as the criminalization of poor neighbourhoods (Jefferson, 2017). Gill et al.’s use of the Marxist ontology of circuits highlights a critical epistemology of understanding wide-ranging connections and flows in punitive policy and practices of risk containment, and the expansion of the carceral sphere.

Echoing Foucault, ‘carceral’ has been deployed as both adjective and noun – spaces and practices are carceral, but ‘the carceral’ also exists both within and distant from physical spaces of incarceration. But at what distance? How far from the prison must the carceral circle extend before the influence of the prison is lost? Is there utility in arguing that the disciplinary – the carceral – ends where the biopolitical begins? These definitional questions, although asked anew of carceral geography, are not unfamiliar. Every new subdiscipline has addressed them in one way or another, at a similar point in its development. Critique was levelled at the mobilities turn in geography, for example, with Adey (2006) contending that, ‘if we explore mobility in everything and fail to examine the differences and relations between them, it becomes not meaningless, but, there is a danger in mobilising the world into a transient, yet featureless, homogeneity’ (2006: 91). This is undoubtedly caution that we recognize. Although if, for the sake of argument, the scope of the carceral is limited to the compact and diffuse carceral models, then we reinforce the link between the carceral and the prison, with the challenges and opportunities that presents.

## **V The carceral and the (abolition of the) prison**

For Foucault (1977: 231), the prison was the centrifugal point – a complete or austere institution – from which carceral circles radiated. Although ‘the carceral’ exceeds the prison itself through ‘its diffuse and compact forms, its institutions of supervision or constraint, of discreet surveillance and insistent coercion’ (1977: 299), the prison is read as a constant touchstone. It is an eternal reference point; the centre which holds. As Harcourt (2006) argued in discussion of carceral continuities between prison and other forms of coercive confinement, over time the prison has come to replace other confining institutions in terms of their relative captive populations and has become a dominant subject of analytical focus. However, the apparently symbiotic nature of prison and the carceral is complex and significant in three important and related ways, worthy of discussion.

The first is that the prison as an institutional form is diverse: what it is varies across space, and what it has been has changed over time. Although, as Foucault argued, the prison as an institutional form is extremely stable in that it is central to the concept of punishment as well as the producer of delinquency, it is disciplinarily diverse. The nature of prison reflects the penal philosophy of the prevailing social system: its ideas about what prison is ‘for’; what it is considered to ‘do’; and the messages about the purpose of imprisonment that it communicates to prisoners, potential offenders, and society at large. Offensive conduct is sanctioned in different ways in different places. Punishment and crime have very little to do with one another, with imprisonment rates being ‘a function of criminal justice and social policies that either encourage or discourage the use of incarceration’ (Aebi and Kuhn, 2000: 66) rather than of the number of crimes committed. Prison is a conscious response to offending behaviour in light of prevailing understandings of what it is intended to achieve, both

for society and offenders. If the carceral is anchored to the prison, then that anchor drifts with tides of prison policy, media discourse, and imaginative and fictional representations of the prison. In very practical terms, what we consider a prison to be – for the purposes of stating that something else is ‘like’ it – is by no means a given.

The nature of the prison is under question, both in terms of its theoretical purpose and intent and its effect and experience. Foucault’s (1977) now-familiar contention is that the prison replaced the public spectacle of punishment, as the gallows, the stocks, and public humiliation wrought against the body were replaced by internalization of the carceral regime. Regulation of space, segregation of individuals and unseen – but constant – surveillance moulded the subject into its own primary disciplinary force in a panoptic environment (Foucault, 1977). However, in the contemporary context of mass incarceration, Alford (2000) and Simon (2010) argue that Foucault’s ‘panoptic’ prisons have been replaced by institutions driven by ‘a logic of pure confinement’ (Martin, 2013: 498), functioning more like warehouses or waste management facilities, almost like a reverse-panopticon. Wacquant similarly claimed that ‘in lieu of the dressage (“training” or “taming”)’ intended to fashion ‘docile and productive bodies’ postulated by Foucault, the contemporary prison is geared toward brute neutralization, rote retribution, and ‘simply warehousing – by default if not by design’ (2010: 205). Conversely, Chantraine argued for the emergence of the ‘post-disciplinary prison’. Alluding to the well-articulated ‘gap between the modern disciplinary “program” decoded by Foucault and concrete daily life in prison’ (2008: 67), he described the post-disciplinary prison as being neither structured around the disciplinary principle nor an exercise in unconstrained violence. Instead, it is a pragmatic management of everyday life based on a system of individual and collective privileges featuring rewards

rather than punishments, and explicit control of some over others through delegated power. This management system is 'encouraging' rather than disciplinary (2008). Despite an often-stated lack of fit between Foucault's understanding of the prison and how it might work in practice, Martin (2013) contends that *Discipline and Punish* retains analytical purchase even though the purpose of prisons has changed; in the United States, the effectiveness of structures of punitive confinement 'is intensified when interventions follow the logic of warehousing or exclusion rather than transformation' (2013: 498). Armstrong and Jefferson (forthcoming) seek to 'disavow' the prison; that is, to dissolve what they call 'the hegemonic and universalising idea of "the" prison' which seems 'ominously present however hard it is resisted'.

The second issue in relation to the apparent indivisibility of prison and carceral is that despite the diversity of the prison itself, it is commonly deployed metaphorically in ways that arguably dilute its potency as a concept and deflect attention from the details of its actual operation. In the use of metaphors, plausibility relies upon the extent of feature intersection between things being equated: the degree of overlap of words' semantic fields. (In 'life is a rollercoaster', the metaphor relies on an immediately-apparent overlap between their characteristics.) Danish criminologist Nils Christie, writing at the same time as Foucault, criticized the commonplace metaphorical usage of 'prison' in which understandings of the meaning of prison are projected onto a variety of situations considered to share its prominent features. Quite apart from the shifting and uncertain nature of the prison itself rendering the metaphor unstable, for Christie (1978) it was the 'imperialist' tendency 'to call anything and everything prison' that led him to warn against the 'hollowing out' of the concept, and the specificities of the *actual* prison being forgotten (cited in Jefferson, 2014: 47). Similarly, criminologist Pat Carlen later argued that

at the extremes, 'prison' has been both romanticized as a prime site for the engendering of human resistance in the face of oppression...and invoked as the stock metaphor to best describe the state of psychologically oppressed people who have never experienced the actual pains of penal incarceration. (Carlen, 1994: 134)

So whilst Foucault pointed to the ubiquitous presence of the prison (as itself, as institutions which physically and functionally resemble it or as widely-deployed techniques developed within it), Christie and Carlen's concern was to retain focus on the prison in order to, in Carlen's words, understand its power 'both to promise and deliver pain as punishment' (Carlen, 1994: 138).

Driven by cognisance of this pain and punishment, the third issue is that some (although by no means all) carceral geography aligns with an abolitionist movement seeking eradication of the prison and the systems that support it. From the US perspective, Gilmore's (2007) *Golden Gulag* concerns the extreme growth of state prisons in California in the last decades. She argued that 'prisons are partial geographical solutions to political economic crisis, organised by the state, which is itself in crisis' (2007: 26); and some carceral geographers are aligned to the anti-prison movement comprising a variety of grassroots organizations, lobby groups, activist collectives, prisoner associations and student groups (Critical Resistance, 2016; Morris, 1995; Sudbury, 2008). Much of the intellectual inspiration for penal abolitionism is connected to critical theory on gender and patriarchy, class or political economy (West, 2000). The prison's 'total irrationality in terms of its own stated goals' (Mathiesen, 1998: 9) is perhaps *the* main unifying element within a heterogeneous field of abolitionists, including some carceral geographers. Particularly embedded in critical discourse, abolition is viewed as a necessary step to address 'racialised state violence that must be dismantled as part of a wider social justice agenda' (Sudbury, 2009).



The term ‘prison industrial complex’, established as a concept for penal abolition, was first used by Mike Davis (1995) to underline the huge costs of imprisonment and the subsequent commodification of prisoners as ‘profit’ (see also Davis, 2003). Unsettling relationships between regions’ economic dependence on prisons, displaced prison labour and global restructuring of profit in relation to incarceration throws up wider questions of safety, security and social cohesion. Wider penal abolitionism theoretically evolved out of prison abolition; both essentially reject population segregation and imposed exclusion, which is seen as counterproductive in the context of community safety (Saleh-Hanna, 2000). Ideas of abolition co-exist (often in tension) with efforts to reform – a line of argument that has much resonance in the UK context. The Howard League for Penal Reform, for example, proposes abolition of imprisonment for certain types of offences (Ashworth, 2013). Abolition and reform have much potential from a carceral geography perspective, including a more activist-oriented ‘take’ on research itself (Gilmore, 2007). Imagining the downsizing of the prison industrial complex (with its expansive use of criminalization and ‘cages as catchall solutions to social problems’ [Gilmore, 2007: 2]), and changing public views about imprisonment as the only viable response to ‘offending’ behaviour, are the main aims of the anti-prison movement (Critical Resistance, 2016). In recognition of this body of work, the eventual outcome of carceral geography *could* be to render itself obsolete: to contribute to the eradication of its own subject matter. However, by contending that the carceral extends in various ways beyond the prison, carceral geography challenges any simple definition of what it is that abolitionism seeks to eliminate.

## VI (Re)capturing the carceral?

Rather than advocate a particular definition or delineation, the purpose of this article is to raise and think through some of the issues

surrounding the adoption of the term carceral to define this subdiscipline. In remaining reflectively open on that point, there are perhaps some observations that may prove useful for its future development.

Carceral geography seems thus far to have adopted an expansive interpretation of ‘the carceral’, underscored by the closing chapter of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*; an approach that has yielded the diverse, multifaceted and interdisciplinary work surveyed here. However, whilst this interpretation has thus far been enabling, and the potentialities of this unboundness are undoubtedly appealing, we must consider the possibility that it may prove debilitating in the future, insofar as it opens out ‘the social in its entirety’ as the purview of the subdiscipline, making its potential subject matter almost impossible to determine. At the same time, ‘the fantasy of a separate carceral sphere, whereby carceral and non-carceral are neatly segregated’ (Gill et al., 2016: 15) has already been widely problematized, not least by carceral geographers pointing out the blurring, porosity, liminality, and heterogeneity of carceral boundaries, and the various circulations that reach within and beyond them (Gill et al., 2016). There may be virtue in considering a delineation or consolidation of the subfield around the compact and diffuse carceral models described by Foucault; such a move perhaps offers different opportunities for carceral geography, in following the carceral ‘circles’ outwards from the prison.

Such an orientation might better enable carceral geography to continue to contribute to developing understandings of what the prison is; how this has changed in space and time; and how the prison continues to change and develop, including paying attention to the lives of the prison before and after it exists *as such*. Recent scholarship has already considered the ‘post-prison’ landscape – in particular ‘penal tourism’ and the transformation of carceral spaces (Felder et al., 2014; Morin and Moran,

2015; Morin, 2013, 2016b; Turner and Peters, 2015). Although work in this area is already underway (e.g. Moran et al. [2016b] interrogating the ‘architectural assembly’ of prison buildings), further attention could be paid to the production of other carceral sites and spaces, including conversion of other types of institution into prisons (e.g. Medlicott [2015] on the conversion of Shaker sites in the US).

The recognition of the prison as both the key reference point but not the full extent of carceral geography – i.e. the confirmation that this is not ‘just fancy prison geography’ – enables carceral geography to trace, after Harcourt (2006), the contours of both the compact carceral core and the carceral diffuse. Although Foucault’s description of compact and diffuse carceral models is inherently spatial – with its discourse of radiating circles, receding functional forms, and increasing distance – the spatiality of the relationship between these two carceral forms remains underdeveloped. The nature of the compact and diffuse forms in the contemporary era is unclear, when, as Harcourt (2006: 24) has argued, the prison dominates analysis. Carceral geography could delineate the contours of the carceral core, and trace the ways in which the techniques of the prison disseminated to more diffuse carceral forms. It could determine the spatial relationship between the compact and diffuse, and the extent of their overlap or mutual exclusivity, as well as their fluid or static nature, and the potential for the diffuse to intensify into a compact form, spatially and/or temporally, and vice versa.

In Foucault’s (1977) consideration of ‘compact’ carceral institutions, he was able to list types of institution that have since dramatically changed, although many studies point towards prevailing ideas of discipline (e.g. see Disney [2015a, 2015b] on the Russian orphanage). Alongside the prison, Foucault noted the orphanage, the reformatory, the disciplinary battalion, the almshouse, the workhouse and the factory-convent, institutions whose prevalence has arguably waned in the contemporary period.

What are the other carceral institutions of the contemporary carceral core? The military? Nursing homes? Universities? Labour camps for migrant workers (e.g. Bruslé [2015] on such camps in Qatar)? Spaces of confinement for trafficked workers? Secret detention centres for extraordinary rendition (e.g. O’Neill [2012] on such sites in Romania)? And if we do consider such constructions, with their diverse spatialities and legal statuses, to be carceral, what is the analytical purchase of such a move?

Is a gated community, for example, carceral? In his study of prison constellations around US cities, Mitchelson compared prison and gated communities, arguing that ‘prisons are no less important to the urban fabric than are the suburbs, exurbs, and gated communities that similarly “orbit” large cities’ (2012: 155). Lynch (2001) has pointed out synergies between the two, with both proliferating at similar rates in the United States – sharing characteristically homogeneous populations and security infrastructures, and with fear of prisons being used as an explicit sales technique for gated communities.

But what if we think of the gated community *itself* as carceral? Descriptions frequently invoke the prison metaphor, referring to gates, locks, surveillance and armed response. Lai noted that ‘[a] gated community can resemble a high-security prison in physical appearance and atmosphere’ (2016: 381). But, with the caveat that ‘voluntary’ acts are rarely free of some sort of obligation or influence, gated community residence is usually understood to be a choice, a privilege attainable only by a select few. At the same time, as Roitman (2005) has argued, the need for gated community enclosure suggests fear and escape of circumstances outside, such that voluntary enclosure could be carceral, albeit considered a lesser evil than the alternative. Gated community life comes with its own incapacitations:

If you don’t want to be isolated from the larger community, hate fiddling with gate swipe cards

and don't want to be told what color to paint your mailbox or whether you can park a recreational vehicle in your driveway, then gated communities are probably not for you. (Fletcher, 2013)

Although parking restrictions seem trivial in comparison to the privations of incarceration or detention, the issue here is the subjectivity and relativity of the carceral.

Foucault spent very little time considering the thoughts of the governed or the precise and lived nature of their self-discipline or self-development. His focus was on how individuals are governed; although the logic of the panopticon was that inmates would internalize the schema, this internalization is discussed from the perspective of the powerful, rather than the imprisoned. Drawing on this (alongside other 'conceptual' inspirations like Goffman [1968] or Agamben [2005]), carceral geography has established a distinctive corpus of scholarship that attends precisely to the lived experience of compact and diffuse carceral models, and shows that the individual subjective experience of carceral institutions is diverse and divergent. Carceral geography should therefore continue to focus on *more* than the diffusion of the institutional practices perfected within the prison; it should uncover the *subjectivity* and *relativity* inherent in the experience of carcerality, since in its lived experience the carceral is *relative* rather than absolute. To paraphrase Jefferson (2014), it enables an understanding of how practices and meanings are articulated *between* carceral sites, through social relations and subjectivities.

Since the 16th century, *carcer* as a geomantic sign has communicated ideas of 'great detrement' – a symbol which 'inflicteth many evils'; and Foucault's theorization of the prison rests on ideas of punishment – the intent, experience and achievement of which could be the defining feature of the carceral. For both Christie (1978) and Carlen (1994), the focus was squarely on the prison and its infliction of pain. For Foucault

(1977), the 'universality of the carceral lowers the level from which it becomes natural and acceptable to be punished', lowering the threshold of tolerance to penalty as the carceral 'naturalises' the legal power to punish, just as it 'legalises' the technical power to discipline (1977: 301, 303). For him, it was the quality and quantity of punishment that diminishes as the carceral circles widen with distance (literal or metaphorical) from the prison – a perspective implicitly shared by Christie and Carlen in their appeal to keep asking 'important questions about the prison's punitive capacity' (Carlen, 1994: 138).

Considering the carceral as relative rather than absolute echoes the 'differential and relational' (Adey, 2006: 83) within mobilities studies. Adey recognized that there 'is never any absolute immobility, but only mobilities which we mistake for immobility, what could be called relative immobilities', dependent upon the person and their social context. A plane, rail or car passenger, for example, is apparently 'still' in their seat, yet hurtling through space at high speeds. In a similar way, we must go beyond taken-for-granted, absolute notions of carcerality to emphasize the subjective and the relational.

So where does this leave us? For the purposes of conceptualizing the 'carceral' in carceral geography, there are alternatives. We might retain an expansive understanding of the carceral following the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*. We might narrow the scope in some way, perhaps in terms of the compact and the diffuse models of the carceral archipelago – both the prison and other institutions that resemble it physically and/or functionally, and the rippling out of carceral technologies and practices to more diffuse structures and institutions which bear less resemblance. Whichever path we take, the central problematic of the prison as a diverse and contested reference point is likely to remain. What carceral geographical scholarship to date tells us very clearly is that

the carceral is in the eye of the beholder – its perception is complex, nuanced, contextual and only partially predictable. What is felt acutely as suffering by one individual may not perturb another. What is not intended to punish may deliver significant harm. What it also tells us is that, given the political imperative to track the carceral age, time devoted to introspective classificatory debate about what is, or is not, carceral, according to pre-formed criteria, could be better spent.

Bound to this term, carceral geography must drive debate on this topic. In the spirit of our mobilities-oriented colleagues, if boundless potentialities present challenges of emphasis, we might call for a ‘recapturing’ of carceral geography. Transposing Adey’s mobility theorizations, carcerality too could be argued as ‘profoundly relational and experiential’ (Adey, 2006: 83). Thus, rather than pursue a potentially reductive binary categorization of carceral-or-not, we advocate discussion of a continuum of qualities – or *conditions* – which, whilst further facilitating the productive openness of this field, still enable a means to appraise carcerality itself.

### *I Carceral conditions*

We suggest that the carceral relies on three characteristics, which we term ‘carceral conditions’. Although these signal both the contingency of the carceral designation upon them and convey the importance that we place upon how the carceral is experienced – its circumstantial, subjective nature – we envisage them not as *qualifying* conditions, but rather as considerations that bear on the nature and quality of carcerality. They emerge as a crystallization of our thinking on this point, developing both out of foregoing discussion of the origins of the carceral and consideration of the scholarship that has developed under this banner. In this way, we engage the notion of ‘punishment’ central to criminological debates over the nature of the prison and key to the tensions between intent and effect, design

and default, as articulated by criminologists such as Mary Bosworth, who asked:

What is it about prison that makes it prison? What are its defining characteristics? Is it the walls and the wires and the security apparatus? Is the prison best defined according to its purpose, or its effect? Should we give primacy to intention, or to experience? (Bosworth, 2010)

As human rights researcher Andrew Jefferson puts it, ‘to understand the experience of confinement we must look not only at institutions or sites but also at practices and meanings, or more crucially at the relations between sites, practices, social relations and subjectivity’ (Jefferson, 2014: 49). We suggest that a move towards enriched discussion of the carceral might be served by considering three such conditions: detriment, intention and spatiality. None of these terms is itself straightforward, but what we mean by each is as follows.

By *detriment*, we mean the lived experience of harm, as perceived by those suffering it. Although we acknowledge that detriment may be intentionally aligned with punishment (such as the deprivation of liberty in incarceration), or arguably unintended (such as the lingering stigma of a previous prison sentence, or frustration at the irksome regulations of a gated community), we intend with this condition to pry experience from intention, focusing here on the ways in which detriment is *experienced*, rather than whether it was *intended*. In focusing on this lived experience, we afford primacy to the confiscation of various types of opportunity or potentiality that would otherwise have been available, and whose loss is experienced as detrimental. This treatment of detriment embraces migrant detention, in which conditions of detention commonly resemble prisons intended for punishment of criminals (and indeed some share the same, or repurposed, prison premises). In a context of ‘cimmigration’, even if noncitizens in detention are often not explicitly or formally *being* ‘punished’ for criminal offences, they

commonly experience both this physical detention, and the precarity of their position outside within civil society (as illegal and insecure labour), *as* punishment. We acknowledge that this definition is extremely broad and that it encompasses both physically, psychologically and emotionally painful suffering and comparatively mild inconvenience.

The second condition, which we term *intention*, we develop *vis-à-vis* detriment, to refer to the agent intending it, e.g. the state that operates prisons or mandates detention of non-citizens. We acknowledge the problematic of considering intended harm within a Foucauldian framing wherein disciplinary power, albeit oriented toward the making of ‘docile bodies’, is conceived as the effect of *productive* as well as destructive power. Returning to our earlier suggestion that that which lies beyond the compact and diffuse carceral models may mesh with the biopolitical, rather than the anatomo-politics of the individual body under disciplinary power, the notion of intent within detriment could signal the decision-making of calculative governance.

There is a key issue here around the agentic nature of intention. Detriment can be caused by medical conditions such as claustrophobia (extreme or irrational fear of confined spaces) or agoraphobia (ditto of open or public places), and other diseases or disabilities that limit individuals in different ways. However, the lack of an agent means that these situations may not necessarily be considered carceral. For example, the medical condition ‘Locked-in Syndrome’, which arises when a brain stem stroke or neurological disorder destroys neural pathways that carry voluntary movement commands from the cerebral cortex to the muscles, leaves the affected individual fully conscious but trapped in a completely immobile body without direct means of communication. This syndrome is frequently described using the prison metaphor; ‘Locked-in syndrome represents an extreme form of imprisonment. The individual

is not merely locked-in a prison cell but within their own body’ (Sledz et al., 2007: 1407). Whilst there certainly are appalling parallels with conventional incarceration, we would argue that the lack of agentic imposition of detriment within the brain stem stroke or neurological disorder that leads to Locked-in Syndrome means that its designation as carceral might be questionable.

There is also an issue of temporal distance. Carceral geographers have identified detrimental effects of incarceration that persist long after actual incarceration has ended. These include embodied, stigmatizing effects such as loss of teeth in prison (Moran, 2012, 2014) and embodied practices which limit activity post-custody (e.g. Caputo-Levine [2013] on the ‘yard-face’), including subsequent mental health problems (e.g. Schliehe, 2014). In these cases, although the intent has ceased directly to act on the individuals in question, its effects persist. Or in other words, the detriment felt by those individuals originates in an intention to harm, and exists as a lasting effect beyond potential spatial institutional confines.

Although the key issue here is the notion of an external agent – a *formal* structure or organization that intends and administers punishment – we would argue that this structure or organization need not necessarily be legal or ratified by the state. It could, for example, be an organized network of traffickers who confine labourers; a family structure that restricts the movement and agency of some of its members; or the action of armed militia who take over a hotel building and confine residents to their rooms, as in the case of hotels in war zones or in siege situations (e.g. Fregonese and Ramadan, 2015). Whilst confinement of one person by another (e.g. through kidnap or grounding) might also fit this bill, in these cases our inclination would be to consider the structures and motivations behind this practice – such as formal expectations of behaviour.

The third condition is *spatiality*, and it is *through* spatiality, we argue, that the carceral is achieved. It is a geographical truism to say that the carceral will always relate to some kind of space; this could be a detention centre, a half-way house, a domestic home, a former prison converted into a hotel, an operational prison, a school, the street, the body – in other words, any space, at any scale. If there is detriment and intention, there will be a space or spaces to which these relate, but both the nature of the space/s and the ways in which the carceral is enabled and determined by its spatiality may radically differ. As we have already seen, carceral geographers have explored, but likely not exhausted, the range and multiplicity of material, virtual and imagined spaces with which the carceral is articulated. So whilst there is little analytical purchase in simply observing that the carceral is spatial, it is perhaps more instructive, for the appraisal of carcerality, to consider *how* this might be the case.

Carceral spatiality, however manifested, seems characterized by a technology of confinement: (intentionally) keeping-in, (detrimentally) containing, those ‘within’. Where it purposively keeps people and things *out* (e.g. contraband in the case of a prison), it arguably does so primarily to protect its ability to keep those inside *in*. Thus, related to but distinct from detriment and intention themselves, carceral spatiality refers to diverse (im)material techniques and technologies (which deliver intent), and spatial relationships to them (through which detriment is experienced, contested and resisted). Together these enable the *achievement* of carcerality. The specific contribution of carceral geography is in its precise attention to this carceral spatiality.

Carceral spatiality is apparent in the spatial phenomena that literally enclose (walls, bodies of water), those which restrict diverse mobilities (curfews, electronic tags, stigmatizing corporeal inscriptions of incarceration), and the ways in which detriment and intention have a spatial

‘after-life’; for example, leading individuals to subsequently engage space in ways that express the effects of prior incarceration (Lowen and Isaacs, 2012). Included here might be the elusive and intangible techniques through which the carceral ‘adheres’ in such a way that spaces encountered post-custody assume a certain carcerality. It also encompasses the calculation and provocation of a carceral ‘atmospheric’ (Turner and Peters, 2015) through visual/material manifestations and cues used to shape visitor experience of prison museums.

We intentionally advance these carceral conditions as a starting point for debate. Our purpose in putting them forward is to expand upon and critique a fundament of the argument which has preceded – i.e. that the carceral is indivisible from the prison, and that the prison is the bellwether of the carceral. By identifying carceral conditions, we can engage counter-intuitive logics through which the prison is justified, such as in recent debate over so-called *carceral humanism*. In Judah Schept’s work (2013), for example, the construction of a new ‘justice campus’ in an otherwise liberal, progressive urban US community is justified on the basis that the institution will be educational, rehabilitative, even therapeutic, rather than punitive – even whilst it represents the further expansion of US mass incarceration, a phenomenon vehemently opposed by the supporters of the new ‘campus’. It is also the cornerstone of the work of Whetter (2016) on ‘human flourishing’ on Kainos (faith-based) prison wings. Similarly, the ‘green’ credentials of new prisons are used to deflect criticism of the social and human costs of incarceration (Jewkes and Moran, 2015; Moran and Jewkes, 2014). Considering carceral conditions enables us to appraise the carcerality of such institutions, through the interplay of detriment, intention and spatiality.

There are tensions within the ‘carceral conditions’ advanced here, not least the nature of the subjectivity that we rely upon. When we consider detriment, by whom is this considered

to be imposed or experienced, and in whose eyes does it exist? Even if we can imagine a prison whose experience is not felt as punishment by those incarcerated within it – either because of the nature of the prison itself or the nature of the lives of its prisoners – it is conceivable that the separation of those prisoners from their families is felt as punishment by those left behind (in the mode of the secondary prisonization thesis well established within criminology). The punitive and therapeutic intentions of Justice Ministers, prison governors and prison officers may not align; prison officers seeking to enable rehabilitation may be hampered by structural issues of prison organization and high-level policy well beyond their own control, just as reforms imposed from on high may be diluted by organizational inertia. And it could equally well be the case that, regardless of the nature of the prison itself, society as a whole suffers from its sheer presence.

## VII Conclusion

We call for continued interrogation of carceral conditions. Forty years since Foucault deployed the term ‘carceral’, and two decades since geographers adopted it, for carceral geography to meaningfully engage both with human geography per se and with interdisciplinary scholarship of confinement we must consider the possibilities presented by interpretations of the term that has become central to both our academic inquiry and the functioning of the societies within which we live.

Thus far, carceral geography seems tacitly to have adopted the expansive definition of the carceral that emerges from the conclusion of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. In this interpretation, the social in its entirety is carceral in that the ‘carceral archipelago’ transports the disciplinary techniques of the prison into the social body as a whole. This approach has yielded a rich diversity of scholarship, ranging from work at the microscale on aspects of the embodiment

of incarceration, to work that considers the ways in which carceral techniques and technologies pervade everyday spaces and attitudes. In this flourishing of carceral geography, through its attempts to keep pace with the expansion, diversification and proliferation of the strategies of social control and coercion towards which it is attuned, arguably the term with which it identifies has remained relatively unchallenged.

We have opened for debate the potentialities of alternative paths for the development of carceral geography, derived from interpretations of its central term, and intended to enable appraisal of carcerality without eliciting an introspective definitional debate. There are benefits in continuing to explore the potentialities of an expansive definition, in the opportunities offered by a narrower conceptualization based on the compact and diffuse carceral models derived from Foucault, and in framing the vectors and considerations which bear on the nature and quality of carcerality. Further debate is necessary, both to enable carceral geography to more lucidly articulate that which is the core of its enquiry, and to support its continued tracking of strategies of control and coercion.

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