

# Champ pénal/Penal field

Vol. I | 2004 :  
Varia

## Prison and sociological perspective

For an off-center critical analysis

GILLES CHANTRAINE

Traduction de Helen Arnold

Cet article est une traduction de :

Prison et regard sociologique

---

### *Texte intégral*

- 1 Is a qualitative sociological study of prisons useful? What a question! Doesn't it seem pointless, out of place or provocative, or all three? Aren't knowledge, the will to know, truth, objectivity and the scientific character of the work justifications in their own right, with their own positive value? Isn't it legitimate for sociologists, and a fortiori, committed sociologists, to concentrate on deciphering the social forces and mechanisms at work in the reality of the prison world? An affirmative response to the latter question should not elude the complexity of the problem.
- 2 First of all, it must be said that there is no lack of knowledge and discourse about prison nowadays: there are weighty parliamentary reports, original documentary films, expressive autobiographical narratives, first-hand accounts by sensible professionals, all sorts of newspaper articles, militant circulation of information and so on. These documents often reflect an authentic investigational effort and they present a vast panorama of descriptions and interpretations. Do of course some areas pertaining to life (and death) in confinement definitely remain in the dark.<sup>1</sup> However, the usual, almost monotonous claims, both that sociological research is justified by the need to put an end to the "miscomprehension" of the institution and that such "miscomprehension" is the main factor in its "historical inertia" are inadequate today. At the least, we have a problem here that merits deeper scrutiny. What sort of knowledge do we want to set up in contrast to the knowledge we deem less relevant?
- 3 Our conception of the complexity of the problem is based on the conviction that at a time when the *dominion of confinement* is unprecedented, at a time when discourse of a managerial type aimed at developing the efficiency of the

criminal justice system prevails over any other type of discourse, at a time, too, when the space for imagining other possibilities is shrinking within the intellectual sphere,<sup>2</sup> it is essential that sociologists studying prison intensify not only their *sociological imagination*<sup>3</sup> but also their *critical vigilance* with respect to their own assumptions and habits and to the principles of social justice on which their critical posture is predicated. Criticism must therefore be subjected to criticism, not to annihilate it but rather, to seize its *nature* and assess its potential impact. This reflexive self-scrutiny entails some obvious risks: it may unsettle conceptual routines, making conceptualization, and by the same token research work, more laborious. Doing without this self-scrutiny entails another, converse risk, one which is much more prejudicial: that of producing analyses that have a strange resemblance with the systems, practices and perceptions which the researcher seeks, paradoxically, to criticize, or at least are easily accommodated by them.

- 4 We will begin by ferreting out those self-proclaimed “critical” ordinary *and* scientific statements which embrace the unspoken assumptions, goals and myths of the institution, thus tending toward the silent and therefore efficient reinforcement of the system behind it. This first step will throw a new light on the *dilemma of prisons*, in which thinkers are torn between the “urgency of reforms” and the “rejection of the institution”. This dilemma structures various sociological discourses on prison. Next we will discuss an alternative to this dilemma, consisting of articulating qualitative field research within prisons with a more comprehensive analysis of contemporary forms of *government* and the exertion of political power. The thrust of this off-center, transversal approach is to broach research on prison as a particular application of a general sociology program, in an attempt to open a new avenue, distinctly different from and complementary to the more classical sociology of prisons.

# 1. Humanism, efficiency and rejection of the institution

## 1.1. *The compelling issue: corrections-centeredness*

- 5 Michel Foucault excellently demonstrated the structure of criticism of the modern correctional institution. It is composed of six observations which, taken together, unremittingly denounce “the failure” of prison to perform the functions officially assigned to it at different periods. This criticism may be formulated as follows: “prisons do not bring down the rate of crime”, “confinement causes recidivism”, “prison necessarily produces offenders”, “prison encourages the structuring of a criminal milieu”, “the situation open to prison-leavers is conducive to recidivism”, “prison produces offenders indirectly by impoverishing the prisoner’s family”.<sup>4</sup> These critiques are still quite consonant with concrete, qualitative findings as to the present-day correctional scene, with its stigma, uncertainty, powerlessness, broken families, corporal punishment, disaffiliation, unequal prison conditions, physical and symbolic violence, etc. To these observations, as recurrent as they are relevant,<sup>5</sup> our own analysis of correctional itineraries and of the concrete functioning of detention has added two serious charges: the

pathogenic meaninglessness of vacuous time in prison<sup>6</sup> and still more comprehensively, the patent disconnection between “real” prison experience and punishment as it is construed in judicial discourse.<sup>7</sup>

6 We should not rush into any interpretation and criticism based on these sociological observations. The history of corrections has indeed shown that it is precisely the search for emergency “solutions” to the most crucial “problems” and to the most “intolerable” situations which has enabled the institution to adjust to contemporary sensitivities. Depending on the latter, different aspects of punishment are considered “degrading”, “inhuman” or “unacceptable” or again, “tolerable” or even “necessary”. This adjustment turns out to be essential to the long-term (re)production of the functional homology of the institution, and consequently to the (re)production of its “failure”.<sup>8</sup>

7 We will use the term *corrections-centered*<sup>9</sup> for compartmentalized, walled-up criticism, which goes hand in hand with a lack of in-depth thinking about the organic relationship between prisons and the rest of the repressive apparatus and even more comprehensively, about all of the ties connecting prison with social relations in general. Sociologists whose analysis is merely grounded in and aimed at “rehabilitation” – and who confine themselves to the enumeration of everything that prevents its successful achievement – run the risk of implicitly embracing the correctionalist project, thus producing spineless criticism, strangely compatible with the disciplinary powers which would have been pointed up by a more complete deconstruction.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, with those foundations and that search for concrete solutions, corrections-centered criticism is closer than it seems at first glance to managerial, technocratic discourse on the institution.<sup>11</sup>

8 We must be wary of attempts at correctional reform aimed at “improving the prisoner’s lot” when they are not integrated in a comprehensive theory of confinement. Researchers who are not in search of that kind of theory remain trapped in the “*fly bottle*”, to use Watzlawick’s expression, of an apparently obvious “reality” (with statements such as “we must give prisoners control of their own fate by setting up appropriate schemes for making them face up to their responsibilities”) whose only objectivity resides in the fact that it is not challenged, but blindly accepted as genuine. In precisely this sense, these “obvious facts” are primarily *ideological realities*.<sup>12</sup> Inside that fly bottle the conceptual framework is devoid of contradictions, whereas viewed from outside as suggested above, this framework turns out to be a trap.<sup>13</sup> In other words, those people who believe they are being critical and rethinking the system are deluding themselves and may well reinforce (by omission or compromise) the “lines of force of the world”, of which they are a vector.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2. *Rejection: abolitionism and the prison dilemma*

9 Rather, the task of the thinker as viewed by Watzlawick and Wittgenstein, would be to convince the fly trapped in its bottle that the only way out is to go back up the narrow path by which it entered, even if that avenue seems more dangerous than the space in which it is imprisoned.<sup>15</sup> Radical criticism of prison as developed during the 1970s and 80s may be viewed as an attempt to get out of that fly bottle. Prison reform is judged impossible, so that the only conceivable prospect of social-historical change is abolition. Thus, given the intrinsic failure of prisons to accomplish all of the contradictory missions assigned to them, the pure and simple elimination of prison, denounced as a

source of sterile suffering<sup>16</sup> has been considered and demanded at regular intervals.<sup>17</sup> Some extreme optimists even claim that its abolition is imminent,<sup>18</sup> although we see no reason for this strange optimism. This stance is definitely intellectually fertile, primarily in that it demystifies the Law and produces a genuine epistemological break with the correctionalist project, thus opening new horizons for analysis.

10 But “critics” may well find themselves in a new dead end here. Indeed, since the analysis peaks with the bold assertion that any reform reinforces the institution (by adjusting it and/or making it more commonplace), the Cause becomes paradoxically more important than the immediate, concrete situation of the people (behind the bars) whom the Cause alleges to defend, thus creating another ideological reality no less pernicious than the one it claims to reject.<sup>19</sup> So we find ourselves faced once again with the “dilemma of prisons”, the terms of which have been formulated by Y. Cartuyvels: *on the one hand, the attempt to make prison a place respectful of the law is tantamount to ratifying the existence of a correctional space that is seriously lacking in legitimacy, to accepting the persistence of a criminal justice system based on personal restraint which may be viewed as contrary to human rights, and to accepting the violence of a discriminatory, managerial logic of social exclusion . . . while on the other hand, to refuse any prison reform is to refuse to conceive of the development of a legal system for sentence-enforcement which would provide guarantees, protection and true improvement for prisoners faced, day after day, with arbitrary decisions and the vacuity of life in prison.*<sup>20</sup>

11 The *urgency* of reforms – corrections-centeredness – and *rejection* of the institution—abolitionism(s)—represent two types of critical attitudes, then, often combined in a single argument, which structure a non-negligible part of (heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory) rightly or wrongly self-proclaimed “critical” sociopolitical rhetoric. There have been occasional attempts to ferret out a new historical dynamic susceptible of overcoming this dilemma. This was the case for “minimalism”, in which the utopia of the end of the institution offers a prospect of practices commanded by a goal: that is, constantly decreasing numbers of inmates for increasingly shorter prison stays.

## 2. Off-center and transversal thinking

12 The fecundity of some present-day research on prisons resides in the resolute pursuit of new modes of articulation between micro- and macro-sociology. Following a brief overview of some trends investigating this vein, we will go on to explore the research ethos of another perspective which is radically transversal in its thinking and also attempts to free itself of the dilemma described above.

### 2.1. Prison and social order

13 As some major postmodern thinkers would suggest, the impasses of prison may be sought in its very essence: a *modern project guided by organizing Reason*.<sup>21</sup> The rational search for a well-ordered world which legitimates itself through a meta-narrative of emancipation, as “a future to bring into being”,

“an Idea to put into practice”,<sup>22</sup> necessarily generates its own kinds of violence, fears and risks – which represent the “productive refuse of the order-producing factory”<sup>23</sup> – for which prison is supposed to be an answer. Thus, part of the problem is contained in the very search (modern and state-propelled) for its solution. This creates a vicious circle: the process of criminalization of various acts may be limitless and generate potentially limitless penal repression directed at all acts judged undesirable.<sup>24</sup> The touchstone of analysis here is the assumptions and self-reproducing frustrations of the Leviathan. More classically, and in relative continuity with the pioneering work of Rusche and Kirscheimer,<sup>25</sup> other thinkers tackle the task of deciphering the crumbling of the “social” state and its gradual replacement by the “social-safety” state,<sup>26</sup> or even by a “punitive” state,<sup>27</sup> under strong neo-liberal pressure.

14 The motivations—more or less explicit depending on the writer—behind the first golden age of ethnographic field work in the sociology of prisons may be seen as a desire to articulate micro-sociological observation of the prison environment with the socio-historical forces that shape the institution. One thinks of Sykes, for example, who has brilliantly shown how social relations in prison are the outcome of the clash between the various ends it supposedly pursues (*Custody, Internal Order, Self-Maintenance, Punishment, Reform*),<sup>28</sup> or of Goffman and his concept of the *total institution* which, as a structural concept, questioned the entire social system.<sup>29</sup> At present, one part of the sociology of prisons continues in the same spirit, describing the basic contradiction between “security” missions and “rehabilitation”, as well as the domination of the imperative of security over any other logic.<sup>30</sup> A. Chauvenet, in particular, has recently revisited the articulation between micro- and macro- aspects, with an extremely stimulating analysis of social relations in prison, showing confinement for what it is: a *defensive warring system* which, instead of manning the borders and warding off an enemy from outside, is built into the sociopolitical and spatial fabric and is aimed at the enemy from within, shut up behind walls and unable to leave as long as the justice system has not decided otherwise.<sup>31</sup>

15 What is crucial to this articulation, then, is the *order* underlying the institution, forming the focal point of critical analysis, guided in this case by the postulate that the way a political system treats its deviants tells a great deal about the system itself.<sup>32</sup> This transversal character can be taken further at present.

## 2.2. Governmentality and subjection: renewing qualitative analysis

16 As we know, *Discipline and Punish* is not a book on prisons as much as on discipline, power relations<sup>33</sup> and social engineering set up to produce mentally sovereign, normatively self-disciplined subjects. The strength of the analysis also resided in the fact that it was off-center and transversal, using prison for what the French call a *mise en abîme*, an endless series of reflections as in parallel mirrors, through which to explore the subterranean mechanisms of modern societies. By offering tools which integrate thinking about prisons in the dynamics of research on *governmentality*,<sup>34</sup> an alternative avenue for research appears, one which may take this research ethos further.

17 This approach may be complementary with “classical” sociology of prisons, but it also confronts some of its postulates. It is heuristic mainly in that it sets aside the founding illusion of a “norm-free” institution (or one with norms of

its own), to consider the social relations developed in prison as comparable in nature to those developed outside, but considerably amplified.<sup>35</sup> The perspective proposed is located outside the corrections-centered fly bottle and does not suggest any program for improving prison governance. To the contrary, it tries to “destabilize the present”, to objectify and deconstruct the *apparatus* underlying a specific type of governance.

18 Thus, the new diversity, pluralism and growing openness that have characterized custody over the last few decades (with respect to work, socio-cultural activities, prohibitions and sanctions, rights and so on) would no longer be commented, rather irrelevantly, as a process of “normalization” of the conditions of confinement, but rather, would be central to an analysis of the increasing complexity of contemporary modes of exercise of political power, at the heart of a triangle formed by *sovereignty-discipline-government*.<sup>36</sup> Analysis of *sovereignty* emphasizes power as the “negative” ability to inflict sanctions, sometimes spectacularly, throughout a given space or territory; *discipline* stresses monitoring techniques, individuation and normalization; last, through *government*, power tends to be viewed as a function of the “incite, elicit, combine” type, a way of “conducting conduct” producing some reality and truth before it coerces.<sup>37</sup> Emphasis is no longer placed, then, on the strictly security-oriented and coercive dimensions, but rather, on the “apparatus” within which they are shaped, and the variety of *techniques of government* with which they are intertwined. Let us take two examples—certainly too succinct—of our research in process, conducted in France and Quebec.

19 The first study, in France turned up a perverse situation in which inmates are asked to “act responsibly”—“stop their nonsense”, “find a job”, etc.—and at the same time are stigmatized and dispossessed of their usual modes of action. In this sense—and this is a crucial point—the situation represents an extreme form of a new kind of domination, accurately identified by general sociology, which crosses the entire social scene. It is those people whose resources make them least able to shoulder responsibility for themselves and manage their own existence who are most strongly urged to do so.<sup>38</sup> Far from attenuating the pervasiveness of social constraints, contemporary injunctions calling for individuation and responsible behavior produce new forms of subjection. Prison—the end-of-the-road of exclusion-producing circuits—represents the ultimate, most refined form of this process. The socially imposed requirement that one act as an individual turns into a heavy burden for individuals when they do not possess the necessary requisites for doing so and when that norm is not internalized but rather, is imposed on them from outside.<sup>39</sup>

20 Secondly, in Quebec, our present investigation of the role of *leadership* (official and unofficial) in the administration of Quebec’s penitentiaries<sup>40</sup> has uncovered a complex situation. The inmates’ committees,<sup>41</sup> pressured to take initiatives, are free to create activities, which are taken away if any disturbance occurs inside the prison. They themselves thus create the “candy” in the “goody system” (the *système bonbon* as it is called familiarly in Quebec), in the individualized system of personal and collective privileges on which order in confinement is predicated. To put it in Nikolas Rose’s terms, inmates are thus *governed through their freedom*<sup>42</sup>, and this freedom serves to reinforce and complexify traditional sanctions and more strictly disciplinary prerogatives, revealing a complex governing technique.<sup>43</sup>

21 More generally speaking, analysis of the governing of prisons, taken as a history of the present form of “personal restraint” must therefore be articulated with a history of “freedom” itself, or more accurately, with the forms of subjection elaborated in its name. Foucault described a corrections-



oriented prison at a time when Enlightenment-type freedom went hand in hand with normalcy, whence the expansion and development of the major social disciplines to which he applied his critical analysis. At present, following a period in which freedom had a strong connotation of social solidarity, it seems to be connected more with injunctions to individuation, autonomy and self-accomplishment through work, psychological introspection and the joys of consumerism.<sup>44</sup> Ongoing interplay between the *ordinary* (governmental techniques existing both inside and outside of prison walls) and the *extraordinary* should enable us to renew and complexify criticism. The idea, then, is not to overlook the specific features of the correctional world (the reign of security-mindedness, promiscuous confinement, different modes of resistance, reduction of the “options” open to actors, etc.), but nonetheless to objectify those shared, complementary and/or distinctive forms of subjection found in inclusive and exclusionary circuits, including prisons.<sup>45</sup>

22 In conclusion, when thinkers aim at “unsettling the present” rather than grounding their critical approach in a search for universal Progress, they break with the abolitionist stance and with its miserabilist tendency to reduce reality to squalor, to view people as victims, and to “compress” reality under the seal of suffering. They do so by deconstructing governmental techniques, the *knowledge* that structures them and the ways in which actors resist those forces exerting power on them, through them and using them supportively. Their analysis is an attempt to comprehend the diversity and heterogeneity of prison experiences and the complexity of modes of exercise of power in custodial institutions, with their historical dimension, their contingency and their localism. At the same time, it is important to put an end to the *moral indifference* displayed by society for its prisoners, not on the basis of some universal humanism this time<sup>46</sup>, but more modestly and more practically by objectifying the ways in which prison participates actively in new forms of domination which both exceed confinement and tend toward it. Prison adjusts easily to those forms precisely because it reinforces them. By demonstrating the existence of similar types of subjection outside prison walls, this transversal approach does away with the stigmatization, the reduction of people to the status of criminal and the alterity produced by criminalization. It is the strength, the solidity and the simultaneity of the various dimensions of this transversal detour and conversely, its ability to test the basic tenets of criminal justice that will enable us to assess the “utility” of the qualitative sociology of prisons.

## ***Bibliographie***

Barry, A., Osborne, T., Rose, N. (Eds.), 1996, *Foucault and Political Reason. Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Bauman, Z., 2003 [1995], *La vie en miettes. Expérience postmoderne et moralité*, Rodez, Le Rouergue/Chambon.

Bauman, Z., 2002 [1989], *Modernité et Holocauste*, Paris, La Fabrique.

Becker, H. S., 2001, La politique de la présentation: Goffman et les institutions totales, dans Amourous C. Blanc A. (Eds.), *Erving Goffman et les institutions totales*, Paris, L'Harmattan, Logiques Sociales, pp. 59-78.

Bernheim, J.-C., 2003, Un "modèle" surfait au Canada, *Manière de voir. Obsessions sécuritaires*, octobre-novembre, pp. 69-71.

Bessin, M., Lechien, M.-H., 2000, *Soignants et malades incarcérés. Conditions, pratiques et usages des soins en prison*, rapport de recherche, Paris, EHESS.

- Boullant, F., 2003, *Michel Foucault et les prisons*, Paris, PUF.
- Bourdieu, P., 1997, *Méditations pascaliennes*, Paris, Seuil, Liber.
- Brodeur, J.-P., 1993, La pensée postmoderne et la criminologie, *Criminologie*, vol. 36, N° 1, pp. 73-121.
- Brossat, A., 2001, *Pour en finir avec la prison*, Paris, La Fabrique.
- Buffard, S., 1973, *Le froid pénitentiaire. L'impossible réforme des prisons*, Paris, Seuil.
- Burchell, G., Gordon, C., Miller P. (Eds.), 1991, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentability*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Carrabine, E., 2000, Discourse, governmentability and translation, *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 4, N° 3, pp. 309-331.
- Cartuyvels, Y., 2002, Réformer ou supprimer: le dilemme des prisons, dans O. De Schutter, Kaminski D. (Eds.), *L'institution du droit pénitentiaire*, Paris, LGDJ, La pensée juridique, pp. 113-132.
- Castel, R., 1989, Institutions totales et configurations ponctuelles, dans Goffman E., *Le parler frais d'Erving Goffman*, Paris, Minuit, Arguments, pp. 31-43.
- Castel, R., 2003, *L'insécurité sociale, Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?*, Paris, Seuil, La République des idées.
- Chantraine, G., 2000, La sociologie carcérale: approches et débats théoriques en France, *Déviance et Société*, vol. 24, N° 3, pp. 297-318.
- Chantraine, G., 2003, Prison, désaffiliation, stigmates. L'engrenage carcéral de l'"inutile au monde" contemporain, *Déviance et société*, vol. 27, N° 4, pp. 363-387.
- Chantraine, G., 2004a, *Par-delà les murs. Expériences et trajectoires en maison d'arrêt*, Paris, PUF/Le Monde.
- Chantraine, G., 2004b, Les temps des prisons. Inertie, réformes et renforcement d'un dispositif institutionnel, dans Artières Ph., Lascoumes P. (Eds.), *Gouverner, enfermer. La prison, un modèle indépassable?*, Paris, Presses de Sciences-Po, pp. 57-82.
- Chantraine, G., 2004c, Prison, risque, contrôle. Mutations de l'emprise carcérale, *Ecorev'.* *Enfermement de la misère, misère de l'enfermement*, vol. , N° 15, pp. 9-13.
- Chantraine, G., 2004d, La mécanique du temps vide. Structure sécuritaire et réactions individuelles au temps carcéral, dans Kaminski D., Kokoreff M. (Eds.), *Sociologie pénale: système et expérience*, Paris, Erès, pp. 257-271.
- Chantraine, G., 2004e (à paraître), L'industrie de la punition, le livre de Nils Christie, *Universalialia 2004*.
- Chauvenet, A., 1998, Guerre et paix en prison, *Les cahiers de la sécurité intérieure*, vol. 31, pp. 91-100.
- Chauvenet, A., Orlic, F., Benguigui, G., 1994, *Le monde des surveillants de prison*, Paris, PUF.
- Christie, N., 2003 [1993], *L'industrie carcérale. Prison et politique pénale en Occident*, Paris, Autrement.
- Deleuze, G., 1986, *Foucault*, Paris, Minuit.
- Deleuze, G., 1990, *Pourparlers*, Paris, Minuit.
- Dilulio, J., 1987, *Governing Prisons: A Comparative Study of Correctional Management*, New York, Free Press.
- Erbin, J., 2003, En France, suicides ou morts suspectes? *Le Monde Diplomatique*, juin.
- Faugeron, C., 1996, Une théorie de la prison est-elle possible, dans C. Faugeron, A. Chauvenet, Ph. Combessie (Eds.), *Approches de la prison*, Paris, De Boeck et Larcier, pp. 15-42.
- Faugeron, C., 2002, Prisons: la fin des utopies?, dans De Schutter O., Kaminski D. (Eds.), *L'institution du droit pénitentiaire*, Paris, LGDJ, La pensée juridique, pp. 289-297.
- Foucault, M., 1975, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Goffman, E., 1968, *Asiles, Études sur la condition sociale des malades mentaux et autres reclus*, Paris, Minuit, Coll. Le Sens Commun.



- Hannat-Moffat, K., 1999, Moral agent or actuarial subject: Risk and Canadian women's imprisonment, *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 3, N° 1, pp. 71-94.
- Hannah-Moffat, K., 2000, Prisons that empower. Neo-liberal Governance in Canadian Women's Prisons, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 40, pp. 510-531.
- Hulsman, L., de Celis, J., 1982, *Peines perdues. Le système pénal en question*, Paris, Le Centurion.
- Kaminski, D., 2002, Les droits des détenus au Canada et en Angleterre: entre révolution normative et légitimation de la prison, dans De Schutter O., Kaminski D. (Eds.), *L'institution du droit pénitentiaire*, Paris, LDDJ, La pensée juridique, pp. 91-112.
- Kaminski, D., Adam, C., Devresse, M.-S., Digneffe, F., Cauchie, J.-F., Francis, V., 2001, L'instrumentalisation dans les pratiques pénales, *Sociologie et sociétés*, vol. 33, N° 1, pp. 27-51.
- Landreville, P., 1976, Les détenus et les droits de l'homme, *Criminologie*, vol. 9, N° 1-2, pp. 107-117.
- Landreville, P., Gagnon, A., Desrosiers, S., 1976, *Les prisons de par ici*, Montréal, Parti-pris.
- Lemonde, L., Landreville, P., 2002, La reconnaissance des droits fondamentaux des personnes incarcérées: l'expérience canadienne, dans De Schutter O., Kaminski D. (Eds.), *L'institution du droit pénitentiaire*, Paris, LGDJ, La pensée juridique, pp. 69-87.
- Lyotard, J.-F., 1993, *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants: Correspondance 1982-1985*, Paris, Galilée.
- Martuccelli, D., 2001, *Dominations ordinaires. Explorations de la condition moderne*, Paris, Balland, Voix et Regard.
- Mary, P., 2001, Pénalité et gestion des risques. Vers une justice "actuarielle" en Europe?, *Déviance et société*, vol. 25, N° 1, pp. 33-51.
- Mathiesen, T., 1974, *The Politics of Abolition*, Londres, Martin Robertson.
- Mills, C. W., 1997 [1967], *L'imagination sociologique*, Paris, La Découverte.
- O. I. P., 2003, *Les conditions de détention en France, rapport 2003*, Paris, La Découverte.
- Petit, J.-G. (Ed.), 1991, *Histoire des galères, bagnes et prisons, XIIIe-XXe siècles*, Privat, Toulouse.
- Rose, N., 1993, Government, Authority and Expertise in Advanced Liberalism, *Economy and society*, vol. 22, N° 3, pp. 283-300.
- Rose, N., 1999, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, N., 2000, Gouvernement and Control, dans D. Garland & R. Sparks (Eds.), *Criminology and Social Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 183-208.
- Rusche, G., Kirscheimer, O., 1994 [1939], *Structure sociale et peine*, Paris, Le Cerf.
- Salle, G., 2003, Situations(s) carcérale(s) en Allemagne. Prison et politique, *Déviance et société*, vol. 27, N° 4, pp. 389-411.
- Simon, J., 2000, The "Society of Captives" in the Era of Hyper-incarceration, *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 4, N° 3, pp. 285-308.
- Sykes, G. M., 1999 [1958], *The Society of Captives. A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Wacquant, L., 1999, *Les prisons de la misère*, Paris, Raisons d'agir.
- Wacquant, L., 2001, Symbiose fatale. Quand ghetto et prison se ressemblent et s'assemblent, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 139, pp. 31-52.
- Watzlawick, P., 1988a, Avec quoi construit-on des réalités idéologiques?, dans Watzlawick P. (Ed.), *L'invention de la réalité. Contributions au constructivisme*, Paris, Seuil, pp. 223-253.
- Watzlawick, P., 1988b, La mouche et la bouteille à mouches, dans Watzlawick P. (Ed.), *L'invention de la réalité. Contributions au constructivisme*, Paris, Seuil, pp. 269-276.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1961, *Investigations philosophiques*, Paris, Gallimard.

## Notes

1 Such as “suicides, rarely elucidated” and the patently excessively high suicide rate in prisons. See Erbin, 2003, among others.

2 Castoriadis (quoted by Bauman, 2003, 288-289) does not mince his words: he speaks of a “horrendous ideological regression among thinkers” in a period defined as withdrawing into conformism at best.

3 In the sense of Mills, 1997 [1967].

4 Foucault, 1975, 308-312.

5 On the situation in France, see the recent OIP (*Observatoire International des Prisons* [International Prison Watch] report (2003)

6 Chantraine, 2004d.

7 Chantraine, 2004a.

8 I have suggested a comprehensive interpretation of this reproductive dynamic of the institution in Chantraine, 2004b.

9 This timely expression is borrowed from Salle, 2003, 406-407.

10 Worse, by cloaking the institution in more respectable dress, politically correct denunciation of inhuman prison conditions turns out to be strangely compatible with growing demands for security in everyday life. See, among others, Kaminski, 2002 ; Bouillant, 2003 ; Salle, 2003.

11 This does not mean that we shun the idea that some prisons are less unacceptable than others (Faugeron, 2002). Some movements for the defense and promotion of prisoners' rights have been fruitful and led to the objective improvement of conditions of detention. To understand the spirit of the struggle and see how far it has gone in Quebec, compare Landreville, Gagnon, Desrosiers, 1976, Landreville, 1976 and Lemonde, Landreville, 2002. Having said this, the point today, as will be shown further down, is not so much to glorify this improvement as to evidence the shift and repatterning of power relations in prisons (necessarily) generated by this improvement.

12 See Watzlawick, 1988a.

13 Watzlawick, 1998b, 274-275.

14 Bourdieu, 1997, 11.

15 Wittgenstein, 1961, commented by Watzlawick 1988b, 269.

16 Hulsman, Bernat de Celis, 1982 ; Mathiesen, 1974.

17 See, for example, Buffard, 1973.

18 Brossat, 2001, 8.

19 It would then, no doubt, remain for us to decipher the way different kinds of formal and informal social control are repatterned outside prison walls, and these may not be any better than the “abomination” of prison.

20 Cartuyvels, 2002, 130-131.

21 Christie's invaluable analysis (Christie, 2003 [1993]), influenced by one of Bauman's major works (2002 [1989]) immediately comes to mind of course. We have emphasized Christie's ties to the postmoderns, probably less obvious in the original text. For a clear overview of the relative consensus on the impasses of modern reason in thinkers labeled “postmodern” (sometimes against their own will), see Brodeur, 1993.

22 Lyotard, 1993.

23 Bauman, 2003 [1995]; 114.

24 See my review of Christie's book in Chantraine, 2004e (forthcoming).

25 Rusche, Kirscheimer, 1994 [1939].

26 Mary, 2001. See also Castel's broader reflections (2003).

27 Wacquant, 1999.

28 Sykes, 1999 [1958], 13-39. This is only one aspect of his work. According to Sykes, social order in prison, a negotiated order, is the pragmatic outcome of a twofold necessity : for the prisoner, the need to find ways to make his stay the least

intolerable possible and for the guard, to make sure there are as few problems as possible on the wards (leading him to make concessions, but always erratically).

29 Goffman, 1968. For further, enlightening reading on this comprehensive scope, see Castel, 1989 and Becker, 2001.

30 For an overview, see Chantraine, 2000. See, for example, Chauvenet, Orlic, Benguigui, 1994, on prison guards, and Bessin, Lechien, 2000 on health and h 19993 and health care.

31 Chauvenet, 1998. We have attempted to think along the same lines, deciphering the social relations between inmates, in Chantraine, 2004a, 183-223. Wacquant (2001) has also formulated an articulation between micro- and macro-levels, showing the historical singularity of prisons in the United States.

32 Perrot in Petit, 1991, 12.

33 Deleuze, 1990.

34 For some general introductions, see Rose, 1993; Burchell, Gordon, Miller (eds.), 1991; Barry, Osborne, Rose (eds.), 1996. For specific applications of this approach to the world of prisons, see Dilulio, 1987 ; Simon, 2000 ; Hannat-Moffat, 2000 ; Carrabine, 2000. We will confine our comments to a presentation of the most seminal present trends, but it must be said that other directions are now being developed. Examples include Hannat-Moffat's analysis (1999), integrating theories of risk management and actuarial justice ; Carrabine (2000), who uses Latour's approach to investigate operations of *translation* by which corrections agents "translate" the broad missions devolved on prisons into concrete practices ; lastly, Kaminski et al. (2001) have given new hues to the concept of *instrumentalization* applied to criminal justice practices on both sides of prison walls, and use this transversal approach to take apart some ideas usually taken for granted. These various perspectives may be articulated with the approach presented here.

35 Faugeron, 1996, 40.

36 See Rose, 1999.

37 See Deleuze, 1986.

38 See, for instance, Martucelli, 2001 and his post-face in Chantraine, 2004a; see also Chantraine, 2003.

39 The conference, organized by the *Centre d'Etudes des Mouvements Sociaux* (Center for the Study of Social Movements) on April 28-29, 2004 on "injunctions to individuation and social backing for individuals" is one example of this transversal approach.

40 This study, which will be the object of more in-depth analysis, aims at exploring the ambiguities of the leader figure in the economy of interpersonal relations in confinement, oscillating between active participation in controlling inmates *and* potential threat to the prevailing order.

41 For a brief description of the role of inmates' committees, see Bernheim, 2003.

42 See Rose's overall analysis, 1999.

43 See Hannat-Moffat, 2000.

44 N. Rose (1999) offers an enlightening perspective on the comparative history of freedom and the ways political power is exerted. See also Chantraine, 2004c.

45 On forms of control in both of these circuits, see Rose, 2000.

46 On the crisis in meta-narratives of emancipation, see Lyotard, 1993.

## ***Pour citer cet article***

### *Référence électronique*

Gilles Chantraine, « Prison and sociological perspective », *Champ pénal/ Penal field* [En ligne], Vol. 1 | 2004, mis en ligne le 19 juin 2009, consulté le 06 décembre 2013. URL : <http://champpenal.revues.org/238> ; DOI : 10.4000/champpenal.238

## ***Auteur***

**Gilles Chantraine**

Gilles Chantraine is permanent researcher at the CNRS (CESDIP). His first book is entitled *Par-delà les murs* (Paris, PUF, 2004).

*Articles du même auteur***Why a Special Issue on “White Collar Crime”?** [Texte intégral]

Contribution to a renewal of collective sociological interest in France

Paru dans *Champ pénal/Penal field*, Vol. X | 2013

**Pourquoi un dossier sur la « délinquance en col blanc » ?** [Texte intégral]

Contribution à un regain d'intérêt sociologique collectif

Paru dans *Champ pénal/Penal field*, Vol. X | 2013

**Un moment d'histoire des sciences humaines et sociales** [Texte intégral]

Introduction à la traduction de “The Problem of White Collar Crime” d'Edwin Sutherland

Paru dans *Champ pénal/Penal field*, Vol. X | 2013

**Editorial. July 2009** [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *Champ pénal/Penal field*, Editoriaux

**Éditorial Juillet 2009** [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *Champ pénal/Penal field*, Editoriaux

**Rights in prison** [Texte intégral]

Institutional police, juridical activism, democratic struggles

Paru dans *Champ pénal/Penal field*, Séminaire Innovations Pénales

Tous les textes...

***Droits d'auteur***

© Champ pénal