

## CHAPTER 8

# “It’s important to not lose myself”

## Beds, Carceral Design and Women’s Everyday Life within Prison Cells

*Franz James*

This article reveals the prison bed’s *carceral design* and damage to the body. The bed, however, is also a place where “time flies” and where an ongoing negotiation with the self occurs. To gain further knowledge about how the physical environment in prison is experienced this article will present and discuss the narratives of three female inmates at a Scandinavian prison. These women’s narratives implicitly and explicitly express how corporal and psychological punishment is interwoven into the prison system through the design of the prison cell, its objects, and the system’s theoretical concept. By using the ethnographic design method ‘Sketch and Talk’, which employs text and visual documentation, these narratives uncover both a micro and macro picture of lived experience produced by the interior design of the prison cell.

In the field of research on architecture and design the focus favors exterior expressions and planning of space. However, interior design and its objects such as beds, chairs and tables are experienced long-term by inmates in a close and intimate relationship, and therefore can be expected to have a greater impact. This article attempts to expose details and phenomena produced by *interior design* as well as the inmate’s production of space and its meaning. The article also suggests further areas of design that could mitigate the damage inflicted on inmates by prison cell design.

## Introduction

*“Prison is an unpredictable place, rules change,” says Nina and continues, “It’s important to not lose myself. Prison can take away a lot, but not me”.*

*I am sketching the jars and bottles standing on the shelf above her toilet. It’s the first time we meet. The plastic chair I’m sitting on is cold and uncomfortable. It’s placed right in front of the toilet. Nina is sitting on her bed to my right and we’re talking about objects, furniture, rules and regulations; figuring out the meaning of the physical environment together.*

This article is an attempt to create further understanding of how the *designed* physical environment in prison is experienced by its inmates. To do so I have met Nina, Susan and Gunilla, three female inmates in a Scandinavian prison. I have chosen to stay close to their narratives. In doing so my hope is to convey thickened narratives rather than fragmented excerpts. This article is a tentative first reflection and exploration of this type of material, methodology and theoretical standpoint.

Nina’s, Susan’s and Gunilla’s narratives are personal descriptions of lived experience of the prison’s interior design. It is the space where design, materiality and designed objects get close to the body, and form a socio-material place in which the inmate’s everyday life is produced. The cell is also one of the few places in prison that affords some privacy. Meeting the three inmates in *their* cells, a place that rarely receives visitors, allows a close study of the everyday environment and its phenomena. “Conducting research in everyday settings also allows study participants to have access to the people and artifacts that define the activities in which they are engaged as they respond to requests by researchers to describe those activities” (Blomberg and Karasti, 2012), and “studying real places also provides a greater understanding of the theoretical relationship between people and the built environment” (Cranz, 2016). Nina’s, Susan’s, and Gunilla’s narratives speak of furniture such as beds, chairs and desks with *carceral design*, a term that I suggest could be used to understand objects in prison that control, hold and shape the body. But what is the underlying idea for the design of these objects?

The physical environment in prison can be understood through three underlying concepts of the prison system: (1) penal ideological principles, (2) rehabilitation and care ideology, and (3) economy and rationality.

(Hammerlin, 2004, Hammerlin, 2000)(Hammerlin 1994, 2008). These theoretical standpoints, materialized and experienced by inmates and staff, point to ideas that underlie the design of the physical environment in prison. Hammerlin's studies of the prison system, its space and ideology, are based on the following questions and analytical components, which underscore design related issues in this article: What type of *humanity* is expressed in the prison system and its realization of punishment, the material or social conditions; which *ideologies* frame the services; which *ethical* guidelines, requirements and adaptations; which *theory, methods* and *practice* form the framework for the idea of the prison, sentence, care and rehabilitation measures? Hammerlin also raises questions to the underlying aesthetic principles. (Hammerlin, 2004, Hammerlin and Larsen, 2000, Hammerlin, 2010b, Hammerlin, 2017 Forthcoming). The penal ideological concept is thus manifested through materiality which explicitly and implicitly portends distrust. The lack of trust does not solely refer to a risk of vandalism and violence and as such is represented by stainless steel toilets and mirrors. Distrust is also manifested in fixing interior furniture to walls and floors. The interior then places the body in a position to be monitored and controlled so "[...] staff always have the ability to view in and enter" (Wener, 2012). As such, the interior design repeatedly reminds the prisoner (and staff) that the inmate is a risk of violence and needs to be controlled. Does not security in this sense become counterproductive to the aim of (re)habilitation and care, since it strives to keep the inmate in her role as a distrusted person of risk? Materiality and interior objects thus become a manifestation of the three concepts of the prison system, as suggested by Hammerlin, and where the punitive elements are perceived as the foreground of the punishment, and as such display their intentionality. Today the cell is still a cell, and prison cell design has not changed much since the 1960s and 1970s when Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* was published and a lively debate argued for higher prison standards and inmate democracy (Wener, 2012, Hagberg, 2006). The cell consists of one room with a locked door and a window. Furniture and specifically the bed are placed traditionally to aid surveillance. In this way the prison cell's design has not developed much.

Since the 1960s and 1970s progressive ideas have declined and the political idea of total security (and its harm to inmates) is expected to be mitigated

through ‘good’ architecture, landscaping and interior design (Petersen, 2013, Humber et al., 2013, Gentleman, 2012). However, as Wener states, “The history of correctional design is based on various approaches to control through hard barriers [...] Many of these models started in the nineteenth century [...], and still have influence today” (ibid). The concepts of ‘economy and rationality’ are thus linked to the prison’s genealogy not only by regenerating simple and cost effective interiors produced in prisons by prisoners, but also by its lack of aesthetics as a product of ‘penal ideological principles’.

## Disposition

This article is sectioned in three parts. First I will present the field of design in relation to prisons, followed by theoretical and methodological considerations, and an introduction to the applied ethnographic design method ‘Sketch and Talk’. In the second section I present the ‘Sketch and Talk’ material which aims to give both a rich descriptive understanding of the three inmates’ everyday experience of the prison cell, as well as to elucidate phenomena that are specific to design related human experience in prison. The third section, the discussion, will critically view and discuss the specific phenomena and finally suggest further areas of investigation and possibilities in the field of design.

## Design

Design is neither good nor bad, but can operate in alignment with specific intentions in the socio-material space of the prison cell, a space of constant negotiation and uncertainty. Inmates do not know when their territory will be invaded and controlled. When meeting Nina, I ask her how often the inspections are conducted. She says that sometimes it can go months between them, other times weeks. “*It’s totally unforeseeable.*”

Due to the spatial and temporal limitations, the interior and objects of a prison cell could be expected to have a greater impact on human senses than a domestic setting would – the physical environment is more enclosed. These spatial, temporal and metaphysical conditions are, after all, the execution of the punishment. In other words, the designed objects and interiors represent and speak the language of punishment however ‘normal’ they may be. As the cognitive scientist Don Norman states, “Basically, if something interacts with us, we interpret that interaction; the more responsive it is to us through its body actions, its language, its taking

of turns, and its general responsiveness, the more we treat it like a social actor. This list applies to everything, human or animal or non-animate" (Norman, 2004). Norman's point is that we feel *design*, but also that design could be intentional. There is a 'formula' for how to design objects with agency, which is well known and developed in industrial design, branding and marketing. And as humans in a social and societal context we define ourselves in relation to others, for example through designed objects that exhibit cultural and economic capital. (Fowler, 1997, Bourdieu and Stierna, 1997) However, prison rules, inmate economy and spatial restrictions become obstacles to inmates' ability to express personal identity. Expressed by Nina when she is not allowed to wear perfume, "*It's a great loss...*"

## Evidence Based Design

The specific qualities of the interior, and furniture especially, are rarely discussed in research and literature on prison design. The lack of studies, and lack of attention to interior design by the prison services is illustrated by scholars in Denmark studying the 'normalized' prison of Eastern Jutland. Brun Petersen states that, "It is interesting that, contrary to the Prison Service's high ambitions that the architecture would help 'reform' and 're-socialize' the criminal subjects, no such ambitions were attached to the level of furniture, which, it could be inferred, is seen as having little consequence for the social life of the prison." (Petersen, 2013).

The prisoner's list of losses as an outcome of experiencing prison is extensive. Among them are: loss of power, anonymization, isolation, desocialization, loss of objects, loss of sexuality, loss of relationships, loss of care, and physical and psychological deprivation (Hammerlin, 2010a). Is it possible that design of the physical environment can mitigate these losses? It is well known in the field of Evidence Based Design (EBD) that what is seen, felt and experienced affects levels of stress and impacts the ability to heal (Ulrich, 1991, Ulrich, 1984). However, there appears to be a discrepancy between the fields of architecture and interior design for prisons, and for healthcare. Whereas the latter has developed an evidence-based approach to the link between the built environment and design and health, the former focuses on concepts of security and rationality, as stated by Sommer, Hammerlin and Wener. (Sommer, 1976, Sommer, 1969, Hammerlin, 2010a, Wener, 2012)

The field/method of EBD, which is described as, "The process of basing decisions about the built environment on credible research to achieve the best

possible outcomes.” (Design, 2016), has not only focused on somatic health care, but also on forensic psychiatric care. Forensic psychiatric care in Sweden has high security obligations in line with high security prisons. The physical environment in these buildings appears to be thought to compensate somewhat for the damage that high security institutions are known to produce. The ‘compensation’ of the interior through designed objects is an issue that produces much public interest and moral discussion. The newly built forensic hospitals and specifically the prisons in Scandinavia have been described by the media to be “luxurious” (Gentleman, 2012), adding to a populist debate on the distribution of public resources. However, current research indicates that the physical environment does have a positive impact on the care provided and patient wellbeing. Research states that this type of physical environment, described as “a healing environment” (M. Schweitzer et al., 2004), can shorten the length of hospital stay, reduce drug use, lower stress and create a safer and calmer milieu. (Ulrich et al., 2012, Lundin, 2015). The results of research within the field of EBD, and specifically that of forensic psychiatric care, may be relevant for jails and prisons as well.

## **‘Sketch and Talk’, Method Development**

‘Sketch and Talk’ is a qualitative method being developed by the author in a tentative iterative process in real-time-space interpersonal situations. The method is based on semi-structured interviews with simultaneous hand sketching of the discussed interior. Sketching in real-time has proven itself as a mediator between the respondent and the researcher as it smoothens the somewhat odd discussion about specific details of the interior and how they are experienced. Focusing on an interior detail makes neither the researcher nor the respondent the center of attention.

Understanding space through pen and paper is an activity that raises the level of consciousness to the spatial orientation and relationship between humans, objects and their surroundings. “Sketching helps the designer to find unintended consequences...” (Cross, 2007) Simple tools such as a sketchbook and a pen are not only common designer’s tools, but also well suited for high security environments. Moreover, sketching is an openly transparent visible process. However, since the notes and sketches do not document in detail

every word said, they require post-interview interpretation. In relation to digital recordings, it is less accurate. It is important to bear in mind that it is a method under development and in no way claims to be superior to other methods.

'Sketch and Talk' facilitates zooming in on physical details essential to the inmate and can exclude surrounding visual clutter. These details, and the narratives they convey, play a significant role in finding phenomena. A drawn image, with care not to denote personal marks of identification, can show the interviewee's body in relation to the interior, thus contributing to a better understanding of potential design problems, as well as portraying the interview situation.

The analysis of the material has followed a thematic approach where the text and sketches as a whole have been studied repeatedly to find significant recurring phenomena. The researcher's pre-understanding of certain phenomena bound to the design of the cell are essential for the interpretation. It is not possible to leave this out of consideration, nor would it be desirable. However, there must be an awareness and an acknowledgement of how it colors the analysis and in situ choices.

## Ethical Considerations

Inmates are a vulnerable group without a strong voice in society. To conduct research in closed environments therefore requires the inmates' consent and a dignified, respectful and reflective approach of not doing harm. By discussing and highlighting power relations inherent in the physical environment, the inmate and the researcher can acknowledge the lack of balance and recognize socio-spatial inequalities. The situation calls for caution and there is no reason not to see that, "[...]the invasion of a persona is an intrusion into a person's self-boundaries" (Sommer, 1969). With as few as three respondents the empirical material in this article cannot be said to represent inmates as a general group. Therefore, it is important to see the narratives as *personal* reflections where repeated phenomena, as well as the instrumental, theoretical, technical and structural aspects that are revealed, are indicative findings.

For the following 'Sketch-Talks' it was decided not to specify the prison compound. Information on why the respondent was incarcerated has also

been left out. In addition, the inmates' names have no correlation to their actual names.

## 'Sketching and Talking' Nina's, Susan's, and Gunilla's Experience of the Cell

The following Sketch-Talks took place in Spring and Fall 2016. Nina has contributed twice, Susan and Gunilla once. Each meeting lasted 45-75 minutes.

In the texts and sketches the client/prisoner/inmate/subject/respondent/informant is referred to as *inmate*. This term was suggested by Nina who preferred to use it herself. The author has thus decided to follow her suggestion for the article as a whole.

All writing in italics is a combination of transcription and subjective observations. Dialogue in quotations is directly transcribed notes from data. Speech not quoted refers to expository observations by the author, referred to as 'I'. The dialogue is based on observations, notes and memories from the meeting. In the three following meetings 'the author' switches to the pronoun 'I', to emphasize the face to face situation with the respondent, as well as the subjective experience.

*The following 'Sketch-Talk', Meeting Nina, was the first of four meetings. It displays a fumbling start but ends with a collaborative examination of the corner of a mattress.*

### Meeting Nina

*O (staff) and I walk through the corridor. We stop in front of Nina's cell, O knocks on the door. Nina shouts through the steel door that we could open it. Nina is sitting on her bed, an empty chair is placed by its foot, an invitation to sit down. Despite the gesture I become insecure where to place myself in the narrow room. O is still standing in the corridor holding the heavy door. I believe security aspects make O undecided as to whether or not to leave Nina and myself alone. Visitors in the cells is an unusual situation. O leaves and Nina asks me to sit down. I am still a bit uncomfortable as to where to sit since the chair will give me a higher seated position than Nina's, reflecting our inequalities in the present situation. I ask again if it's ok, Nina replies that it is. I sit down and explain why I was a reluctant to take the chair. Nina says that she doesn't think this was an issue at all.*

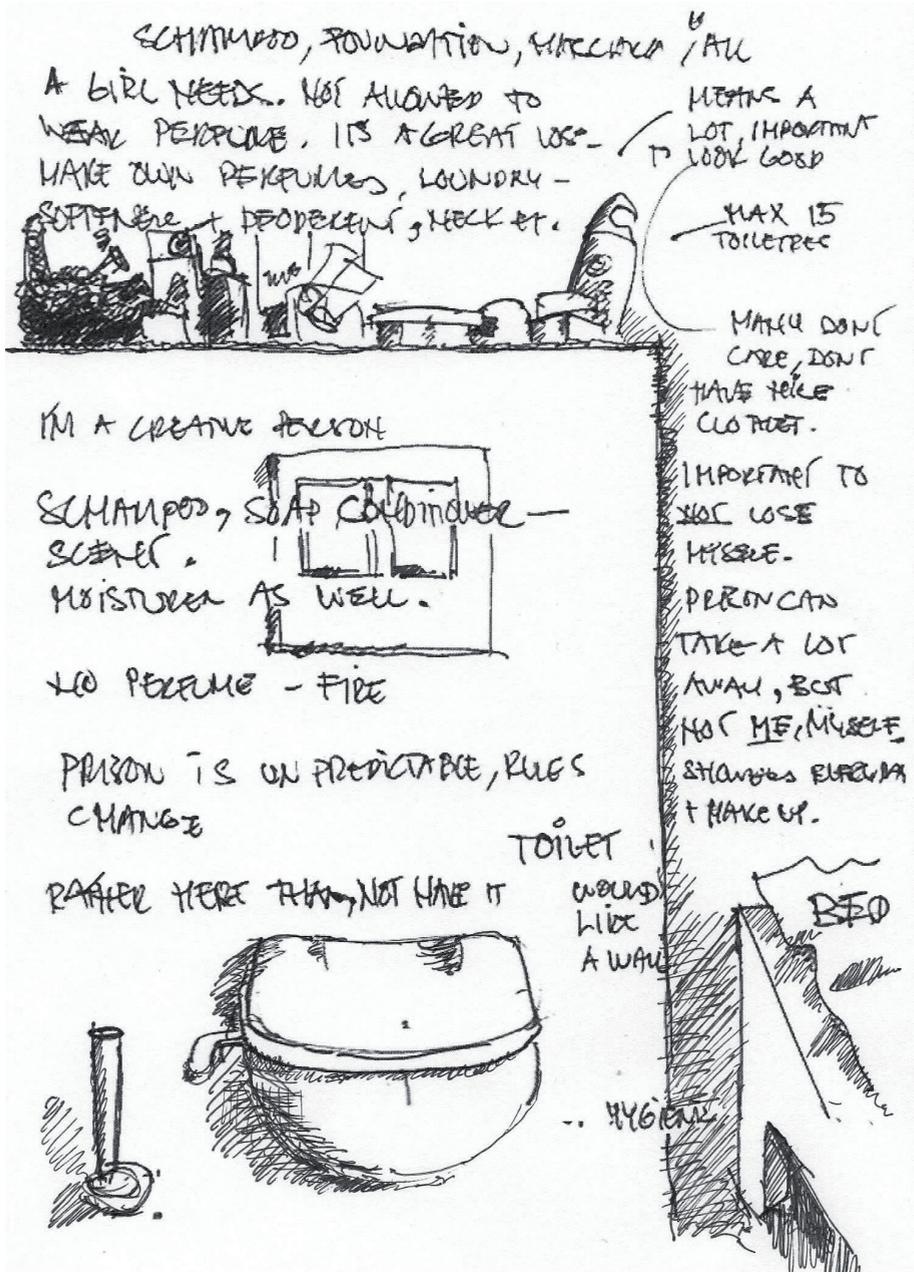


Fig. 8.1 Nina's toilet. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

From my seated position I have Nina to the right. Facing me is the toilet, which is literally in the room. Because of its odd placement I ask Nina if she would prefer to have the toilet outside the room in the corridor, or not have it at all? Nina would rather have it in the room, though she would like to have a wall or some kind of divider between the toilet and the bed. She says, "It's unhygienic as it is now."

Several bottles and jars are placed on top of the protruding wall behind the toilet. I ask Nina what they are, and if it would be ok to sketch them? "It's shampoo, foundation and mascara. All a girl needs," Nina replies.

She tells me that they are not allowed to wear perfume. "It's a great loss, so we make our own, I'm a creative person," Nina says and smiles. Nina and the other women wear fabric softener, instead of perfume. I ask how come they aren't allowed to keep perfume. Nina says, "It's because of the risk of fire". However, Nina isn't really sure about this regulation but says, "Prison is an unpredictable place, rules change. It's important to not lose myself. Prison can take away a lot, but not me".

To keep "herself" Nina showers, wears nice clothes, and puts on makeup every day. She says, "Many of the other girls don't care about how they look".

Nina tells me she prefers to sit on the bed when she reads or writes, but wishes it was a sofa bed, that would make a difference. Nina: "It is important within four walls to make a home. A sofa bed would make it cozier. It would make a difference between day and night, a bed makes it too easy to sleep".

We talk more about the interior objects adjacent to the bed: the desk and the notice board. Nina says that she would like a larger notice board, the small notice board above the bed is full of images of her kids, family and cars. The desk is big and good for storage, but she never uses it.

I ask Nina if she has any objects that are more important to her than others. Nina replies by describing important activities such as writing and her new hobby: coloring books. Otherwise she reads. She doesn't watch much TV. The reading and coloring book is to 'escape reality'. Nina says, "Time flies, I forget to smoke and I forget to eat".

Four months later Nina and I meet again. It's easy to connect from where we left off last time. Nina lets me know that she has lost some weight, she is into spinning now. Nina has moved across the corridor to a cell with more light. The cell where we met last time is disliked by the inmates due to its size and darkness. Inmates are entitled to move to a better cell as soon as something comes along, according to Nina.

She invites me to sit on the bed as she has placed herself at its head. I accept and sit down, I lean my back against a pillow, against the wall. We chitchat and

sum up from last time. This cell has a widespread view of the surroundings, and the toilet is not placed by end of the bed, instead it's placed on the opposite side of the bed next to the wardrobe.

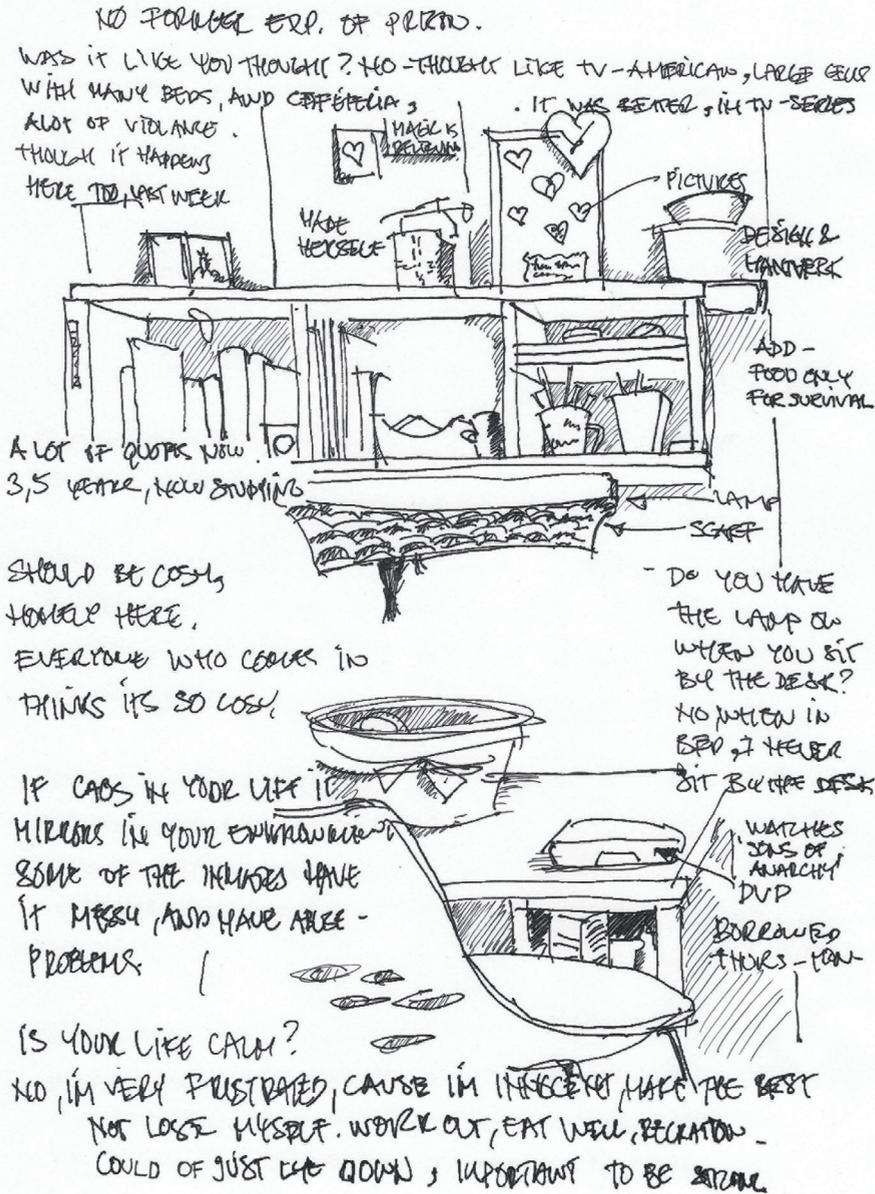


Fig. 8.2 Nina's desk. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

*Nina shows me how she has decorated and made her cell as nice as possible. She says that “it should be cozy and homey, everyone who comes in thinks that it’s cozy”.*

*I ask Nina if prison is what she had anticipated before becoming an inmate. “No, I thought it would be like American TV-series; large cells with many beds and a canteen. This (prison) is better than in the TV-series. There is a lot of violence in them, though it happens here too, last week.”*

*Nina has wrapped a patterned scarf in brown and yellow colors around the lamp above the desk. Otherwise the light disturbs her when she is on the bed. I ask, “Do you have the lamp on when you sit by the desk?”. “No, when in bed, I never sit by the desk,” Nina replies. The scarf is there to tone down the light, just like the paper that covers the bedside lamp.*

*Nina emphasizes how important it is to her to keep the room tidy and make it cozy. If you have chaos in your life it is mirrored in your environment, some inmates have messy cells, due to their abuse problems, Nina tells me.*

*‘Is your life calm?’ I ask Nina. “No, I’m very frustrated, since I’m innocent. I do the best not to lose myself. Work out, eat well, and recreation. Could have just lain down, it’s important to be strong,” Nina replies.*

*I bring up how I recently read an article that stated that prisons are built for men by men, and I ask Nina her opinion. Nina says that she wishes they had a female doctor at the prison. “When you need to see a gynecologist you are sent outside the prison. It would be easier if it was the same person, a female doctor. This is a Nazi prison. It’s restraining, no perfume, and only fifteen hygiene products. We are girls, may only shop for 500 a month. Unnecessarily strict.” Nina continues by saying that the type of work they do here is restricting; either sewing, making cards, or ceramics. “Only because you are a woman. It’s an old-fashioned prison, stuck in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” Nina states. “Men’s prisons are more lenient, it’s very ‘boxy’ thinking here,” says Nina. “Prison isn’t for pussies. You have to be tough. Strong women can be very mean to each other.”*

*I ask Nina (again) if she does anything to create a difference between day and night and Nina replies, “Make the bed, arrange the pillows, can’t do more than that. Within these four walls, this is my home. I want to forget I’m in prison, so it’s important to make it my home here. To find comfort every day in a place where I don’t want to be. When I dim the lights etc. I escape reality. Everything is to escape reality”.*

*I ask Nina if it’s ok to sketch the lamp above the bed with her sitting there. Nina says it’s ok. To achieve a better angle for sketching I take the chair and move it closer to the door. I ask her, “How come you want to talk, to be interviewed? Nina*

answers directly, "Contribute to knowledge, important to research how people have it. You draw, you ask about personal matters of how it is here. It's important for others to know".

From previous interviews with inmates, and patients in psychiatric care, I have found that back problems are a common cause of physical pain. I ask Nina if she has similar problems. She says that she has a broken back and that her bed is bad. Nina takes painkillers. I ask her what she would need to get better sleep. "A better mattress, with down. It's all plastic, it gets moist and hot," Nina says. Nina and I start to examine the mattress and remove the sheets from the corner by end of the bed. For better comfort Nina has placed a folded duvet between the sheet and the mattress. It provides a little bit of air between the sheet and the mattress to soak up moisture which is produced as a result of the plastic mattress cover, made from strong thick fire-retardant vinyl. Along its side the mattress has a zipper. The zipper fasteners are locked with a cable tie so that tampering can be detected when the cell is inspected. I ask Nina how often the inspections are conducted. She says that sometimes it can go months between them, other times weeks. "It's totally unforeseeable."

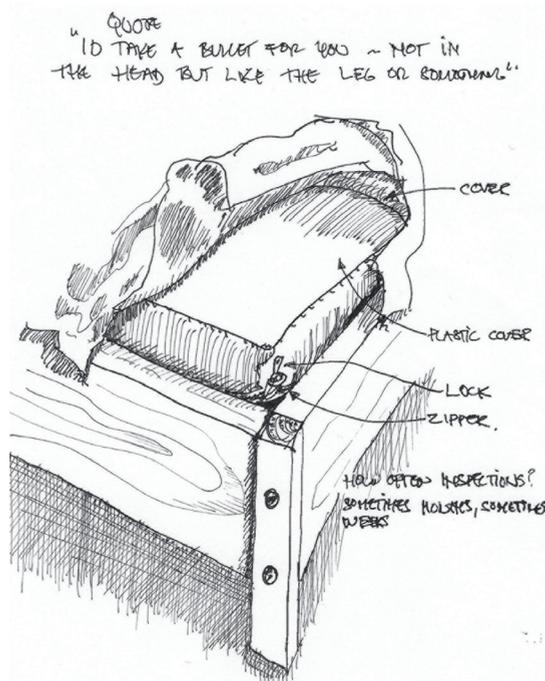


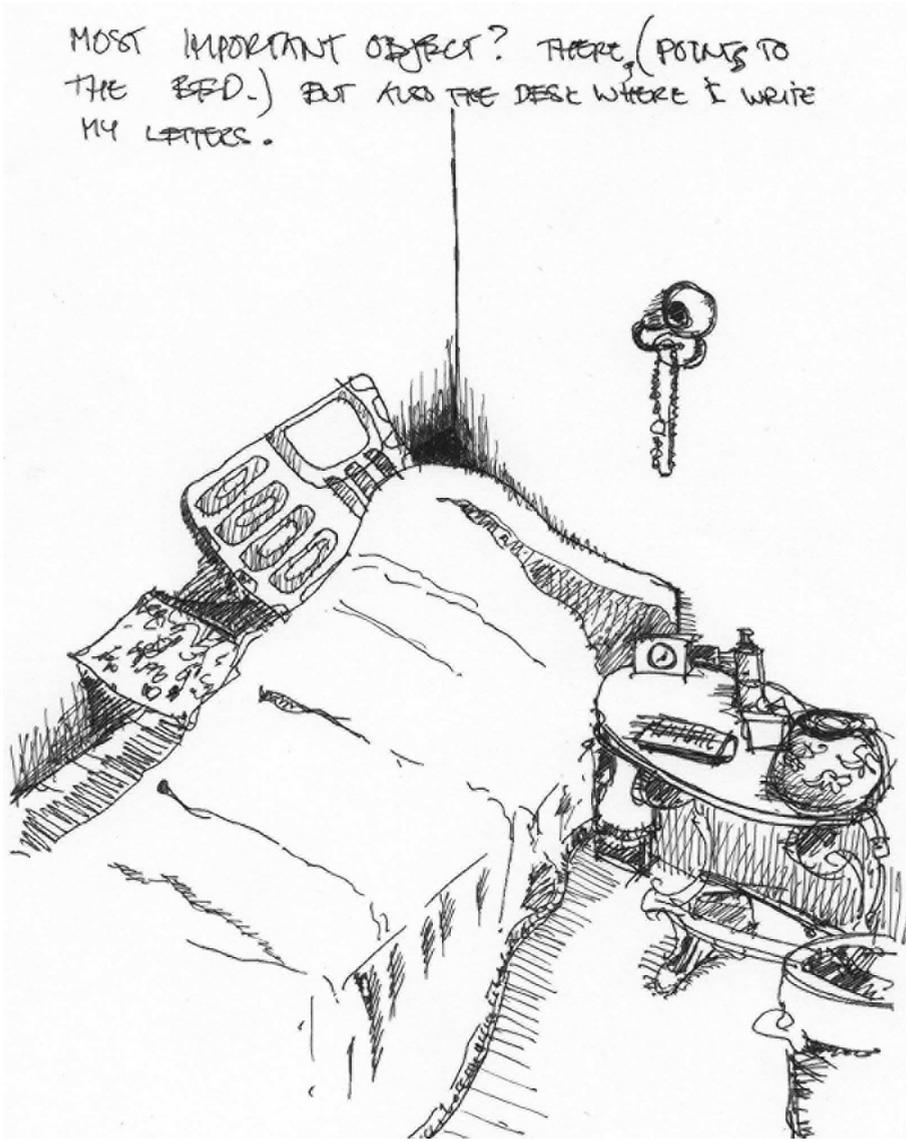
Fig. 8.3 Nina's mattress. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

### *A Short Reflection on Nina's Narrative*

Nina is one of few inmates I have met so far who defines prison as her home. Nina's reasoning for this definition is, as she says, to "escape reality". This may be understood as a metaphysical transformation of space, where Nina uses physical objects (the bed, the desk), space (the bed frame's boundary) and light (dimmed lights) to create borders which shut out what physically represents the prison and point to her losses: social, emotional and material (the prisoners list of losses). (Hammerlin, 2010a) Nina uses the bed as the center of her personal space. This space, however, must be subordinate to the design of the bed and the surrounding setting. Through the bed Nina creates meaning for the prison environment surrounding her. There is a dichotomy, however, present in the dialectic relationship – Nina simultaneously engages in a production of repressive space that produces pain in her body. It can therefore be asked how 'personal' this space can be, and if it is possible to 'escape reality' within prison if architecture and design repeatedly draw attention to its penal ideology. "Architecture articulates experiences of being-in-the-world and strengthens our sense of reality and self; it does not make inhabitable worlds of mere fabrication and fantasy. (Pallasmaa, 2005)"

### **Meeting Susan**

*Susan and I meet in the prison's low security ward located outside the prison's fences. Susan kindly disengages from her textile work to make time for the meeting. First we sit down in the visiting room, Susan in an armchair and I on a worn black couch, probably from the 1990's. We talk through the subject of the meeting and Susan signs the participant information form. After this is done we move to her room. Susan suggests that we sit down on a couple of chairs right away. In between the chairs there is a small table. We face the entrance door and the recessed sleeping niche is to the left. A warming flow of afternoon light shines through the large windows behind us.*



**Fig. 8.4** Susan's bed. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

*In comparison to Nina's cell, Susan's room is large enough to keep a sufficient distance between us, which I feel eliminates the risk of intrusion into personal space. Nina and I discuss how distance is an important issue in relation to inmates that have experienced violence.*

*In the evenings Susan and a small group of inmates meet in her room to socialize and drink tea, it is one of the few rooms that can offer enough space. Susan doesn't normally receive visitors from outside the prison to her room. When family visit they either spend time in an apartment on the prison premises or in a visiting room. The children, a toddler and kids up to teenagers, visit as often as possible. However, the demand for the visiting room on weekends is intense and sometimes it is not possible to receive visitors.*

*Susan and I talk about the design of the first cell she stayed in. It was small and narrow, obviously not suited for a person who suffers from claustrophobia, caused, among other things, by traumatic war memories from her home country, she tells me. When she came to prison she spent a year of sleepless nights when she sat in front of the window to escape reality, imagining herself being 'out there' as a way to stand the pain. She couldn't lie down on the bed, if she did so she felt a strong force holding her down, as if someone was choking her. The important thing was to be able to have a view, even though she wished the bars in front of the window weren't there. I ask Susan, "Would it have been different if you could have looked out of the window from the bed?" "Yes, but the beds were fixed," Susan replies. "But it's different here, in this ward."*

*I sketch Susan's bed, the pillows and the side table. Susan tells me that the bed in the corner of her current room cannot be moved due to fire safety regulations. Susan says that she "Tries to make this room 'me', but without family it's not possible." The side table and the three pillows are the only interior objects she owns. I ask her to tell me about the different objects on the table. The tall bottle is a bottle of lotion, something Susan tells me that she has always used. How she would manage without lotion was the first thing her daughter asked her, but other inmates gave Susan lotion for her hands. When I ask Susan for her most important object she points to the bed. But, she also says that the desk is as important. That's where she writes her letters.*

*Susan tells me she has started to play the piano. The electric piano has been lent to her while she takes piano lessons. "I love music," Susan says. She mainly listens to traditional music from her home country but also to Mariah Carey and Passenger. "Whatever problem I have I listen to music."*

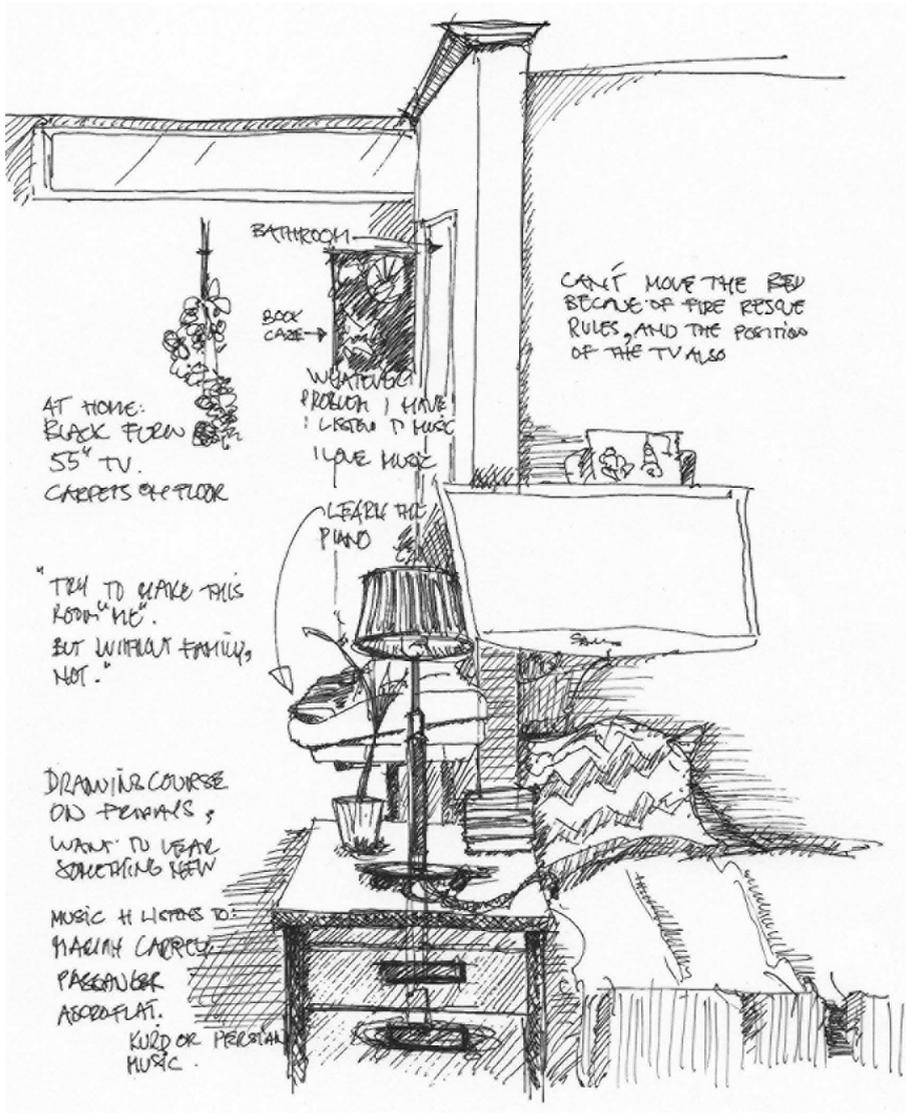


Fig. 8.5 Susan's chest of drawers. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

I thank Susan for sharing her experience and go to find the officer who accompanies me around the prison. She is occupied by a telephone conversation. I sit down outside the office and look through my sketches. I realize that the sketch of the piano behind the lamp lacks a background. When the officer comes out I ask if we can ask Susan for another five minutes. Sewing is a job she gets paid for, though it is no problem for her to take me back to the room.

*We pass another group of women who are sewing. Their enlarged eyes reveal the oddity of a man 'from the outside' walking through the corridor.*

*I thank Susan again for her time. The officer and I go back to the locked wards. We are in a bit of a rush since I have asked to interview one of the women in an older part of the prison before I leave. Later, the officer is kind enough to drive me back to the train station, which gives me more time to talk and sketch when meeting Gunilla, the next inmate. But first a short reflection on Susan's narrative.*

### ***A Short Reflection on Susan's Narrative***

A couple of weeks after I met Susan I attended a talk by Zygmunt Bauman. On the subject of hope he stated that it is "the ability to imagine an elsewhere".<sup>1</sup> It made me think of Susan's sleepless nights when she was imagining being "out there", elsewhere. Susan made me understand that she had brought heavy traumatic experiences with her when she was incarcerated. Due to the static design of the cell, her recent memories of violence were relived, when she told me that "*She couldn't lie down on the bed, if she did so she felt a strong force holding her down, as if someone was choking her.*"

Susan's personal narrative raises the question of how the physical environment should be designed so as not to trigger trauma. Can design mitigate emotional pain, or at least not reinforce it? What type of knowledge, and what type of design is needed? "In general, elements are more likely to be negative distractions if they are imposed on patients without the possibility of personal choice or control" (Ulrich, 1991). Apparently design of the physical environment can create problems instead of solving them. In Susan's case her pain became amplified, but could it have been eased through positive distractions? What Ulrich describes from studies of healthcare should be reasonable for the prison environment as well, which is also formed by healthcare architects: "We contend that the design of the prison environment is crucial to its operation and to the rehabilitative impact it might have on inmates, and hence to its ability to promote rather than demote the mental health of all those who engage with it" (Mazuch and Stephen, 2005).

Gunilla, the last inmate I met, illuminates another big issue, apart from mental health: How will the prison services handle the growing population of aging inmates?

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1 The quote was noted by the author at Zygmunt Bauman's lecture *Evil in Search of Identity*, Gothenburg City Theatre seminar series 'Identity', October 8 2016.

## Meeting Gunilla

Gunilla has been at this prison for a few years now. She says, "Things take time. You got to learn the three T's." She refers to a slow juridical system. Gunilla tells me that she is writing a book on, "What goes on in this prison". She says that if she talked about it, it would be censored by the prison, though, she adds, "What I have in my head they can't control".

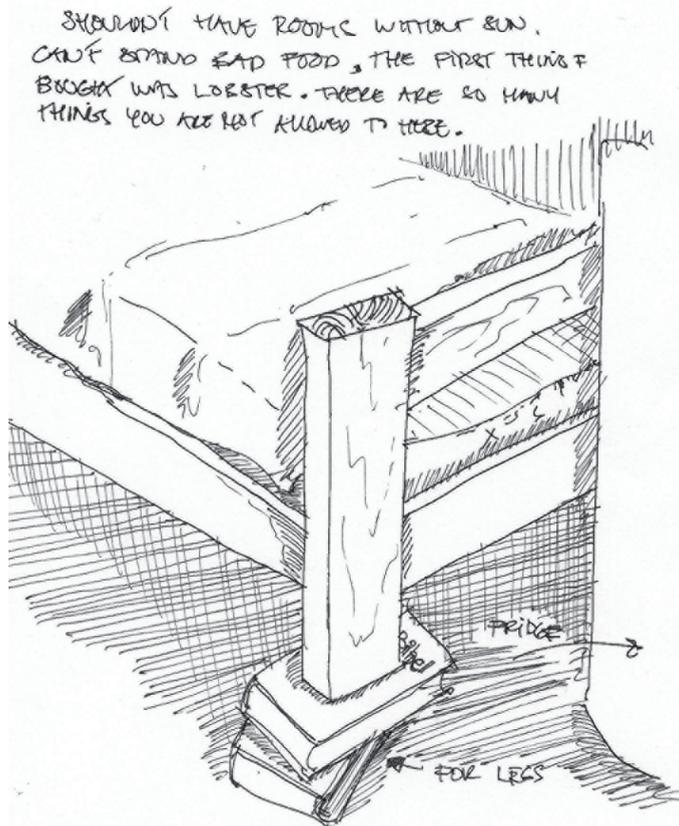
Gunilla says that her room is the worst one in this ward, and that such a room should not be allowed. There are cameras outside her window for surveillance of the yard, but they also register the goings on in her room. Therefore, she has one of two curtains closed. The room is dark and narrow, without much natural light, completely different from Susan's room. I sit down at the far end of the room and Gunilla sits on her bed. There is no other way to arrange it. I need to rest my feet on the edge of her bed to be able to sketch, Gunilla says it is ok when I ask her.



Fig. 8.6 Gunilla's bedside table. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

I ask Gunilla how she experiences her age, 60+, in prison. “It’s ok to be my age here,” she replies. “I have a hot water bottle. This room is cold, damp and smelly. It smells of urine from the sink.”

I ask Gunilla what she misses having in her room. There are several things: a book case, an electric kettle, an easychair, and she would like other curtains. “These curtains are horrible,” she says. With no desk or easychair, like she has seen that the men in a more modern prison have, Gunilla sits on her bed with three pillows behind her back. This is her reading and writing position. On her lap she holds her writing pad on a piece of masonite. Even though the room is cramped and narrow, Gunilla thinks she could fit an easychair by the window. She also misses being able to shower before she has visitors during the weekend. Since the cell isn’t opened until 10.10 she doesn’t have enough time to shower. There are so many rules that aren’t written down she says. “You can ask the same question to ten different officers and you get ten different answers.”



**Fig. 8.7** Gunilla’s bed with bibles. Sketch by the author; no reuse without permission.

*Due to illness Gunilla needs to have her feet in a high position when lying in bed. Since the prison couldn't help her to make the end of the bed higher, she decided to take care of it herself. A couple of bibles under each leg solved the problem.*

*When I am done with the sketch and ready to leave Gunilla asks me if it will be possible to read what I'm writing when it's published. I say that it will be in an open access publication on the internet so that anybody can read it. "Not here," Gunilla replies with a smile.<sup>2</sup>*

### ***A Short Reflection on Gunilla's Narrative***

Gunilla solved a design problem that most likely would have had a different solution outside the prison. Possibly she would not have used bibles, but an adjustable bed. The increasing amount of aging prisoners is an outcome of demographics and politics. This is, and will be, a challenge for prisons to develop and implement supportive interior design. In Sweden the awareness of these future needs appears to be low. In a newspaper article in *Svenska Dagbladet* a representative for *Kriminalvården* (The Prison and Probation Service) states that there are no considerations being made for the increasing number of elderly inmates. The rooms for this group "[...] are as they are, neither good nor bad from a health perspective." (2011)

## **Discussion**

### **Reflections on Nina's, Susan's and Gunilla's Narratives**

In the meetings with Nina, Susan and Gunilla we talked about the interiors and specifically the furniture. The three women spend vast amounts of time in their beds and this has emerged as a recurring piece of furniture with narratives of different phenomena. This is not to say that other details, objects and so forth of the interior are of less importance, or convey less important phenomena. However, the bed stands out, not only through its disciplinary power and its control of the body in the space of the prison cell, but also as a place of departure for metaphysical journeys. It holds and releases at the same time – it holds for surveillance and corporal damage, and it releases Nina's journeys to "elsewhere". This "distribution of space" (Foucault, 1975) and the micro

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2 The inmates have no access to internet.

application of distributed space is dependent on the design and positioning of the bed. If it were not positioned in line with decades of prison cell design, its disciplinary power would be lost.

## The Bed – A Multifunctional Space

In present-day society the bed has become both a workplace and multifunctional space. Social connections and physical needs can be maintained through networked electronics that bring the world to the bed. The architecture historian Beatriz Colomina highlights this phenomenon:

What is the nature of this new interior which we have decided collectively to check ourselves into? What is the architecture of this prison in which night and day, work and play, are no longer differentiated and we are permanently under surveillance, even as we sleep in the control booth? New media turns us all into inmates, constantly under surveillance, even as we celebrate endless connectivity. (Colomina et al., 2014)

Colomina's metaphor of the domestic prison becomes somewhat ironic in relation to Nina's, Susan's and Gunilla's contexts. None of them have access to computers or internet, a huge difference to society outside prison and damaging for social relations. Nevertheless, considering all types of activities carried out within the physical space of the bed in the prison cell, the bed can be seen as an involuntary prison within the prison itself. At the same time the bed becomes a universe to experience the world *from*. It becomes a space-time medium for escaping reality. It becomes a space where "*Time flies. I forget to eat, and smoke,*" as Nina puts it.

Furthermore it is interesting to see how both Colomina and Nina refer to the bed as a place where "[...] night and day, work and play, are no longer differentiated [...]" (Colomina et al., 2014). This ambiguous state of being, in which time of day is not provided by the physical environment, is enhanced by the static environment's inability to reflect goings on outside. The prison cell thus becomes notably disconnected from the circadian rhythm. Consequently, Nina also becomes disconnected, "*A sofa bed would make a difference between day and night, a bed makes it too easy to sleep.*" Nina's suggestion, which would give her a sofa to dwell on during daytime, is not farfetched at all. Would not a symbolic and simple makeover in the morning and evening create the difference Nina seeks?

Inmates and patients<sup>3</sup> have asserted that bed design causes them back pain. That loss of comfort affects the body is nothing new to inmates in institutions regulated by security, which Goffman stated already 55 year ago, "There are certain bodily comforts significant to the individual that tend to be lost upon entrance into a total institution - for example, a soft bed or quietness at night. Loss of this set of comforts is apt to reflect a loss of self-determination, too [...]". (Goffman, 1961) Most importantly, quality sleep is necessary for human beings' health. (Smith et al., 2016, Rod et al., 2011). "Sleep is one of the most important sources for regeneration of the body [...]. Disturbed sleep can therefore be of consequence for immediate and long term health." Lancel et. al. (2012) suggest that there is a correlation between sleep deprivation and aggression, "[...] the limited number of studies showing that adequate treatment of sleep problems reduces daytime aggression support the hypothesis that sleep problems are, in fact, a risk factor for aggression". In this perspective Nina's idea of a sofabed is a brilliant solution to a real problem. Why are sofa-beds not standard equipment for most prison cells?

It may be asked why the design of the prison cell has not been influenced by similar spaces that hold numerous ingenious design solutions? Sailboats, pod hotels, and train compartments all have smart and cost effective solutions for space that transform and correspond to the circadian rhythm. It is a tricky task though; these spaces contain interior design objects that can be hazardous in a prison environment. The tension between designing for security/safety *or* comfort/function is not purely an ideological issue – it has two sides, suicide and violence are realities in prisons and carceral institutions. Furthermore, a prison is a working environment and must, as such, support staff in their tasks and create a safe work environment. Unfortunately traditional sofabeds and many of the design solutions found in the above examples have mechanical parts and hidden compartments, which may involve a risk of self-harm, suicide or contraband. (New York State Office of Mental Health, 2015, Hunt and Sine, 2016) Nevertheless, the tendency to design prison space predominantly for the worst case scenario will deprive inmates of autonomy and may create violence instead (Ulrich et al., 2012, Hammerlin, 2000, Sommer, 1974).

Smart and flexible interior designs that are up to date with contemporary human activities should be included in prisons. Why not let the design of the

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3 Field work by the author at psychiatric hospitals in Sweden

cell support the ‘keeping of the self’ rather than threatening to ‘lose it’, as Nina expresses. It should be possible to seek novel ideas for designs that can bring new and better conditions for inmates and staff and still hold relevant demands for security. Outdated cell designs that are based on economy, rationality, penal ideological principles and entrenched traditions need to be challenged. How does bad design align with ‘humane’ rehabilitation and care ideology? Improved quality of life through improved quality of sleep is nothing but a winning formula for all stakeholders.

## Future Possibilities

Further design studies are suggested, which can contribute alternative designs for prison cells including (multi-)functional solutions to real problems. These designs need to deal with security/safety aspects and relate to the reality of all aspects of prisons. Nevertheless, it is critical to evaluate if, and how, security/safety enforces corporal punishment and penal ideologies at the expense of comfort and quality of sleep for inmates. Further design studies on the interior of prisons can also turn to the theory of socio-material studies, the concept of time-space and carceral geography, which may open up novel levels of understanding interior design and raise questions as to how the design of space and marking of time interrelate, questions that are explicitly brought up by Nina and Susan. Continued exploration and further development of ‘Sketch and Talk’ is an ongoing process to gain better understanding of the lived experience of interior design in prisons and similar institutions.

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