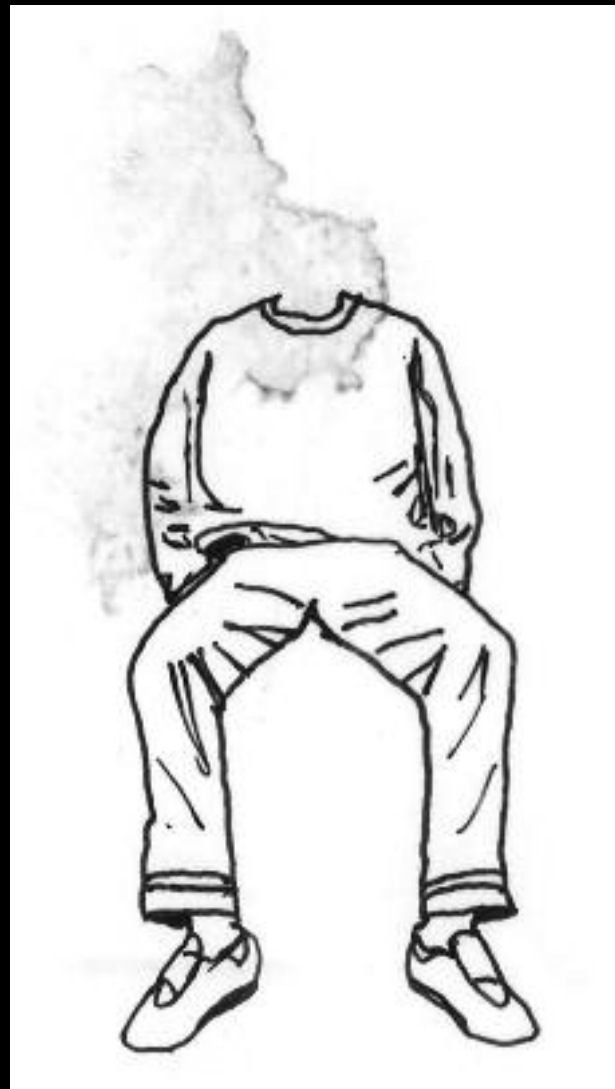


# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

July 2014 No 214



*Special Edition*  
**The Prison and the Public**

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# Editorial Comment

## The Prison and the Public

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**In one sense ‘public’ is a wonderfully flexible word, associated with a rather amorphous, unspecific yet all-embracing body of humanity. The word is democratic and can be used interchangeably with other seemingly unrestricted terms like ‘the people’, ‘citizens’, ‘society’, ‘community’ or even ‘the nation’. Yet in many ways the concept of the ‘public’ is not neutral. It is a politically loaded label. Even if it is not always made explicit, the term ‘the public’ often refers to very specific parts of the whole, implying the inclusion of certain groups and the exclusion of others.**

Because of its leading connotations, ‘public’ is a word that can be used to give force or legitimacy to statements or actions which otherwise would not have it. It can be used as a weapon to convince or persuade. For example ‘public’ or ‘popular support’ is a phrase often to be found in conjunction with justifications for punitive measures against offenders or other ‘outsiders’, to the point where, amongst critical commentators at least, the terms ‘popular’ or ‘populist’ have gained derogatory associations.

In recent years the concept of the ‘public’ has become even more ambiguous through developments in forms of new media and social networking. Online, ‘the public’ becomes more unpredictable, ever more intangible, even harder to locate and identify. In one sense, this could represent a form of subversion of the exclusionary nature of the ‘public’ as it provides a voice to a genuinely wider populace and could therefore be used to challenge, resist or threaten dominant values.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively it could be a vehicle through which to castigate, marginalise and exclude on an even wider scale.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘prison’ on the other hand is a far less nebulous concept. It is solid, extant, persistent and, importantly, written into architectural form. The ‘public’ know that form and have an understanding of its parameters and underpinning philosophies. Yet ‘public’ understandings of this institution are not necessarily

accurate and may be shaped more by powerful (mediated) symbolism than actual experience. For example, in architectural terms, the prison form the public are most familiar with largely relates to the Victorian monolithic radial structure which, although still present on the penal landscape, has been superseded by newer, less architecturally ascetic forms of prison buildings. But these latter structures do not capture the imagination to the same extent. Likewise, in terms of the purpose of imprisonment and the treatment of offenders, public or popular perceptions appear to be strongly influenced by political rhetoric and media representations and to be largely punitive.<sup>3</sup>

Despite its conceptual vagueness, when the concept of ‘the public’ is used in relation to the prison, a clear demarcation is made: the included public (the ‘respectable’, the taxpayer, the ‘law abiding’, the ‘hard working’) are very easily distinguished from the exiled ‘others’ (the criminal, the inadequate, the anti-social outsiders). This conceptual segregation is compounded by the fact that the definition of ‘public’ also denotes that which is open, transparent, expansive and unlimited, clearly the antithesis of the hidden, constrained and exclusionary prison environment.

This is the second of two special editions of the *Prison Service Journal* focused around the segregated relationship between the ‘prison and the public’. The first of these aimed to investigate how the public might become more connected to and informed about the realities of prison life, past and present.<sup>4</sup> Presenting the work of those who had conducted research into the prison, the focus was on exposing the world of the prison to members of the public via methods such as digital archives, archaeology, prison museums and heritage sites.

In this edition we take a different approach to the notion of the prison and the public relationship. Rather than looking ‘inwards’, focusing on how the public might be brought into the world of the prison, the intention here is to look ‘outwards’ and examine the work undertaken within the prison, in order to

1. See Taki & Coretti (Eds, 2013) *Westminster Papers In Communication and Culture*, Vol 9, No.2. [https://www.westminster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/220675/WPCC-vol9-issue2.pdf](https://www.westminster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/220675/WPCC-vol9-issue2.pdf)
2. Solove, D.J. (2007) *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet*, Yale: Yale University Press.
3. See Mason, P (Ed, 2006) *Captured by the Media: Prison Discourse in Popular Culture*, Cullompton, Willan; Monterosso, S (2009) ‘Punitive Criminal Justice Policy in Contemporary Society’, *QUT Law Review*, Vol 9, No 1, <https://lr.law.qut.edu.au/article/view/39> ; Harper, C. & Treadwell, J. (2013) ‘Punitive Payne, Justice Campaigns and Popular Punitivism: Where next for public criminology?’, *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol 52, No.2: p216-222.
4. *Prison Service Journal*, No 210, November 2013.

integrate (ideologically, politically and materially) those citizens who are incarcerated and those who are not.

To achieve this, the articles that follow will challenge the separation of the prison/prisoner and the public on a variety of levels. The concept of 'the public' is critiqued, particularly its definition and management in neo-liberal society which undermines the true interests of citizenship (Corcoran). The ways in which the 'public' are informed (or misinformed) about prisons and prisoners via mediated channels, the impact this has on (punitive) perceptions and the ways in which misleading representations can be challenged, is also examined (Bennett, Swaine Williams and Crowe). The use of the arts in prison as a means of encouraging self-expression and as a form of rehabilitation for prisoners, but also as a method of forging connections and constructive relationships with the non-incarcerated public, is discussed in several papers (Baillie, Crowley,

Forster, Spargo and Priest). Finally, the ways in which prisoners themselves directly reach out to or connect with the 'public' is addressed. For some prisoners, forging a dialogue with the state and social world outside of the prison is part of a broader political struggle (Rossi). But for other prisoners/former prisoners, the divide between 'prisoner' and 'public' is a chasm difficult to traverse and thus the transition from one perceived state to the other is fraught with difficulties (Buck).

This notion of elucidating and restoring the relationship between the 'excluded' prisoner and the 'included' public was the theme of a conference, entitled *The Prison and the Public*, organised by the editors of this edition and held at Edge Hill University in March 2013. The contributions to this edition are drawn from that conference and what follows is a review of the full event.

# Review of 'The Prison and the Public' Conference

Edge Hill University, Wednesday 27 March 2013

*Holly White, Lindsey Ryan, Chris Wadsworth and Phil Williams are based at Edge Hill University.*

**'The Prison and the Public' was a one-day conference held at Edge Hill University and co-organised by the Department of History and English and the Department of Law and Criminology. The over-arching theme of the conference was the relationship, primarily one of separation, between the prison and 'the public'. Delegates included a range of academics, criminal justice practitioners, museum professionals, creative writers and artists and their papers provided criminological, historical and cultural analyses of the prison in terms of its connection to a broader 'public'. This paper will provide an overview of the papers presented in the two-keynote sessions and the eight panels that formed the conference.**

## **Representations and Reality: Prisons from the Inside and Outside — Jamie Bennett**

Jamie Bennett, Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill, Research Associate at the University of Oxford, and Editor of the *Prison Service Journal* presented the opening keynote address. In his paper Bennett examined the representation and perception of prison life. He argued that many media depictions are devoid of social context and thus perpetuate a sense of punitivism by presenting the contemporary prison as violent and full of dangerous 'others', yet the regimes as 'too soft'. Using a range of examples, including ITV's documentary 'HMP Aylesbury' (2013), Bennett argued that television documentaries presented a largely decontextualized representation, which served to perpetuate problematic stereotypes endorsed by the public. Bennett argued that as the prison is struggling for legitimacy, 'its failure is its ultimate success'.

In contrast to negative media representations, Bennett discussed the positive media representation of HMP Grendon. Grendon is unique because of its relationship with the public. The prison holds social days when members of the public (including students, MPs, practitioners and celebrities) are able to interact with 'the prison'. Furthermore, Bennett stated that Grendon stands out from the rest of the prison system, because it is concerned with the prisoner's quality of life and supports therapeutic work that reduces

reoffending on release. Therefore the assumptions that underpin the media representation of Grendon are that it is a model to be replicated and that prisoners can change if they are treated in a therapeutic environment. He stated that such factual stories of 'redemption' challenge public preconceptions. However he went on to problematize this representation, particularly because it ignores the fundamental challenges with the wider prison system and instead suggests that minor changes can 'fix' what are deep-seated problems. Using Grendon as a 'role model' is problematic, he stated, because Grendon is an exception. Additionally, the men at Grendon have specifically volunteered for therapy thus the assumption that the approach can be rolled out to other prisons is unrealistic. 'Positive' media representations of prisoner reform as a matter of individual choice and agency ignore wider structural contexts of race and poverty.

## **Factual and Fictional Representations of Nineteenth-Century Punishment**

The three presentations delivered in this panel examined the impacts of various factual and fictional records of the nineteenth-century criminal justice system, specifically in relation to deterrence and portrayals of similarities between the prison and 'the outside'. Despite clear differences in content, the papers revealed similar themes, in particular the deterrence of crime, contemporary attitudes towards criminality and the shaping of penal policy.

John Wallis, of Liverpool Hope University, presented his paper titled *'Dying Guilty and Penitent: The 'Lesson of the Scaffold' in the Norfolk Chronicle, 1800-1867'*. Wallis examined the media coverage of executions and the testimonies of the accused. He focused specifically on examples of testimonies from prisoners who showed remorse for their actions, admitted their own 'wickedness' and demonstrated the belief that they deserved to die. He argued that the visual spectacle of public executions, accompanied with the apparent regret of the condemned individual, were considered important means of deterrence.

Lindsey Ryan of Edge Hill University presented her paper titled *'The Public and the Preston House of Correction in the 19th Century'*. The paper examined

Preston prison reports and the work of prison chaplain John Clay, specifically focusing on the contemporary concerns about the treatment of prisoners and how the prison evolved as a result of these reports. Ryan argued that prison reports aimed to influence policy and public perception. The prevailing theme was that the public had a distorted image of prison, with some commentators believing that prison life was too lenient and therefore not something to be feared. However the reports highlighted the use of hard labour punishments, such as the treadmill (used for pressing flour) and also discussed the social context of contemporary criminal behaviour, such as alcoholism and lack of education.

In the third paper of the panel, titled *Freedom, the Female Body and the Fictions of Sarah Waters: Neo-Victorian Incarceration*, Mari Hughes-Edwards, of Edge Hill University, examined Waters' fictional work *Affinity* (1999) and explored the neo-Victorian form question of past and present. Hughes-Edwards discussed the significance of Millbank Prison, the largest prison in London during the nineteenth-century, as the setting for *Affinity*, particularly how it represented a symbol of surveillance, within and outside the walls of the prison. Using a Foucauldian analysis, it was argued that the female characters of the book were confined and oppressed by Victorian society and culture to such an extent that leaving Millbank only represented the substitution of one prison for another (ie. the outside world). The prison and the outside world act as a means of both physical and psychological incarceration, reflecting the impact of patriarchy on women in Victorian England. However, Hughes-Edwards argued that Waters simultaneously offers a glimpse of freedom in the form of same sex desire.

### **'Creative Arts and the Prison I'**

The panel consisted of Robin Baillie, a senior outreach officer from the National Galleries of Scotland, Hannah Priest, a researcher at Liverpool John Moores University and the writer in residence at HM YO1 Lancaster Farms, Michael Crowley. The panel examined different forms of creative art as methods for offender rehabilitation. Each panellist discussed aspects of the work they had undertaken and the effects of the work

on offenders. The speakers shared concerns about the lack of 'public' support for offender rehabilitation.

Baillie conducts an outreach programme at HMP Shotts, Scotland, which aims to rehabilitate prisoners through art. During the programme prisoners are encouraged to paint self-portraits. In his paper '*Artist or Offender? Braving the Mirror*', Baillie reflected that prisoners often produced negative portrayals in accordance with their understandings of society's perception of them. Furthermore he explained that prisoners were concerned about society's negative perception of rehabilitation. Baillie stated that some offenders were reluctant to create art for the National Gallery, as they feared being further 'monstered' and

criticised by the media. His paper demonstrated that prisoners' fears were legitimate as the media questioned the project's funding and portrayed it as a 'lesson in graffiti'. However, despite media criticism and prisoners concerns, Baillie argued that the art produced on the programme positively changed public perception and represented a means by which to connect prisoners with 'the public'.

Hannah Priest, of John Moores University, presented a paper (co-authored by Tamsin Spargo) titled '*Free to Write: A Case Study in the Impact of Cultural History Research and Creative Writing Practice*'. They analysed the use of creative writing within the prison as a

means to reform offenders, provide a commentary on the prison system and 're-humanise' offenders in the eyes of 'the public'. Taking a historical perspective, they focused on the *Star of Hope* prisoner forum, a platform for prisoner writings published from 1899 to 1917. However strict editorial policies meant writings were not published if they were critical of the prison regime or if they portrayed prisoners as dangerous, thus the representation of the prison was limited. The panellists suggested that throughout the twentieth century, writing and arts became more accepted as rehabilitation. They concluded their paper after discussing a contemporary creative writing project titled 'Free to Write', which began in 2004 and aims to reduce recidivism and improve 'the public's' perception of punishment and rehabilitation.

'*The Prison, the Public and the Arts*' was the title of Michael Crowley's paper. As part of his role at HM YO1 Lancaster Farms, Crowley encourages offenders to paint, write stories and create poetry as mechanisms of

The prevailing theme was that the public had a distorted image of prison, with some commentators believing that prison life was too lenient and therefore not something to be feared.



reflection. He suggested that creative writing is therapeutic, self-expressive and a means of encouraging self-awareness. He suggested the public's perception of young offenders was inaccurate and that young offenders were concerned with public perceptions. Crowley strongly advocated the use of art for rehabilitation because he believed it was a platform for offenders to communicate their true stories, feelings and understandings. Moreover he stated that the project improved attendance at Young Offender Institution and probation meetings. However he was concerned that the project's funding will cease because all other rehabilitation at Lancaster Farms has been removed.

### **How the prison system fails and misleads the public — Eric Allison**

Eric Allison, prisons correspondent for the *Guardian* Newspaper, a former prisoner and a trustee of the Shannon Trust, a project that promotes literacy amongst prisoners, provided the second keynote of the conference. His paper provided a thought provoking and insightful analysis of some of the failings of the prison, successfully refuting Michael Howard's 1993 claim that 'prison works'.

To illustrate his argument, Allison drew a comparison between the prison system and the National Health Service. He stated that if 60 per cent of patients left the health system more ill than when they entered it, it would not be seen as effective. However, despite high recidivism rates, the prison system is portrayed as 'working'. Drawing further comparisons he argued that if a doctor prescribed all patients the same treatment it would not cure or respond to the patients' individual problems. Similarly the blanket treatment provided by the prison system does not respond to offenders' needs. He criticised 'warehouse prisons' and advocated that prisoners be treated as individuals in smaller units where rehabilitation could be tailored towards the needs of the individual. He demonstrated that the prison fails on many levels: it does not incapacitate (homicides are committed in prison, drugs are dealt and conspiracies are formed) or rehabilitate (recidivism rates are high, particularly among those released from secure training centres with four out of five reoffending). Drawing on his own experiences of custody he argued that prison had not deterred, incapacitated or rehabilitated him, rather it had taught him to commit

He suggested the public's perception of young offenders was inaccurate and that young offenders were concerned with public perceptions.

more harmful crimes. Allison concluded his paper by asking how prison could ever be considered to work when the basic premise of this form of punishment is so fundamentally flawed.

### **Diversity in the Prison Experience**

Paul Gavin, a PhD student at Kingston University, presented the first paper of this panel. His paper, *'The Irish Prisoner Population in England and Wales'* provided an interesting and thought provoking insight into public and prisoner perceptions of Irish prisoners. According to Gavin, Irish Nationals are currently the third highest of all foreign nationals within English and Welsh prisons, although he found some were not born in Ireland but had an affinity to the Irish culture. Gavin found high levels of prejudice and discrimination towards foreign nationals including Irish nationals, both within and outside the prison. He stated that as a result Irish Nationals struggled to obtain work and suitable housing, which resulted in urban poverty and a lack of engagement with 'the public'. Gavin concluded that despite being the focus of discrimination, Irish prisoners retained a strong national identity.

The second paper of the panel titled *'Between Arms and Bars: Debates, Oppositions and New Dividing Lines Among Radical Leftists in Prison at the Beginning of 1980s'* was presented by Federica Rossi, a PhD student of Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique, Paris. The paper analysed divisions between Italian radicals at the start of the 1980s, as a result of political prisoners exchanging information on other radicals, which lead to more than 4000 arrests, for shorter sentences and lesser punishments. Rossi examined prisoners' use of members of 'the public', such as journalists and social scientists, as means to share their stories.

### **The Public, Prisoners and Civic (re) engagement**

The three papers presented in this panel critically analysed the political construction of a dichotomy between prisoners and 'the public'. The papers argued that the concept of 'the public' supports the ideologies of the elite and excludes prisoners and former prisoners. The panel comprised of three speakers from the School of Sociology and Criminology at Keele University: Mary Corcoran a lecturer, and PhD students Andrew Henley and Gill Buck.



The primary concerns of Corcoran's paper titled *'Retrieving the Public from the Public Sphere'*, were the political construction and reshaping of 'the public sphere' and the discourses used to support neoliberal practices, specifically privatisation and the 'contracting-out' of state roles to charitable and for-profit organisations. Corcoran critically analysed the concept of 'the public' and the use of the term in political and penal discourses to gain 'public' support for policies that exclude those that do not act in the interests of the elite, including offenders and prisoners. Mary argued that new right discourses created a caste system where citizens that have 'morals' are at the 'top' and criminalised persons, the 'depraved', are at the 'bottom' and are structurally disqualified from 'the public'. For Corcoran, discourses portrayed offenders and former prisoners as having a denizen status, in order to legitimise the 'hollowing out' of citizenship. The separation causes 'the public' to support the state's violation of offenders' and prisoners' rights.

'A False Dichotomy: Prisoners versus the Law Abiding Public', presented by Andrew Henley, was concerned with the discursive division drawn, in the media, parliamentary speeches and political discourses, between the 'law abiding' and the 'non-law abiding'. He stated that the separation exacerbates social injustice and reproduces the political construction that there is a law-abiding majority who are threatened by a non-law abiding minority. Henley argued the construction of a 'law abiding public' is false. He highlighted that a large portion of the population could be described as 'offenders' because crime is committed routinely on a wide scale. However, despite the fact that offenders can be victims and vice versa, the categories of the law abiding and offenders are presented as mutually exclusive. Henley stated that political discourses are used to strategically position citizens in different categories and are thus tools of punitive populism. They present politicians as protectors of the rights of the 'law abiding' in order to 'legitimise' and gain support for the violation of the rights of the 'non-law abiding'.

Gill Buck presented a paper titled *'Civic Re-Engagements Amongst Former Prisoners'*, which drew on data collected from interviews with ex-offender peer mentors and demonstrated the problematic

segregation of the prison and 'the public'. Buck stated former prisoners struggle to make the transition from prisoner to member of the public, particularly in terms of employment and education, but additionally with regard to social inclusion and restorative opportunities. Buck supported the use of former prisoners as peer mentors and raised considerations about viewing former prisoners as 'experts' with 'privileged knowledge'.

### Prison reform past and present

In her paper *'Talking Justice: Harnessing Public Support for Prison Reform'*, Katy Swaine Williams, Head of Outreach at the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), presented the aims and objectives of the organisation, and particularly focussed upon its aim to liaise with 'the public' to alter the perception of prisons and the nature of offending. PRT strives to reach a wider audience, and to engage, inform, inspire, and equip the public with the facts of prison life. Research into reoffending has revealed that 47 per cent of the people who reoffend have no qualifications. Crucially then, Williams argues, the nature of reoffending is a product of individuals not being properly equipped with the skills they need on the outside world (prisons are punishing but not reforming). The PRT have promoted their objectives via a

multitude of channels, such as newspaper and radio advertisements. They have also bridged the gap with the public by working with educational groups such as the University of the Third Age (U3A) and delivering presentations at conferences.

Biographer Tessa West delivered a detailed an informative abstract of her work on the life of John Howard in her paper *'John Howard Prison Reformer'*. Focusing on his early life West suggested that witnessing the poor conditions in which prisoners were kept was the catalyst for Howard to start visiting prisons across the UK and Europe. As a result of his exploratory work, Howard was commissioned by the House of Commons to compile a report on the conditions of prisons throughout the country. Despite his interests in prisons, Howard did not have a clear opinion on crime. He was cautious about prison staff and emphasised the importance of them being

Mary argued that new right discourses created a caste system where citizens that have 'morals' are at the 'top' and criminalised persons, the 'depraved', are at the 'bottom' and are structurally disqualified from 'the public'.

'morally upstanding'. West stressed the importance of Howard's work by outlining that his views influenced prison reforms after his death.

of power while being sympathetic to those that have suffered.

### **Bridging the Gap to the Public**

The first paper of this session was titled *'Bridging the Gap: Giving Public Voice to Prisoners and Former Prisoners through Research Activism'*. It was presented by three academics from the Department of Social and Historical Studies at the University of Westminster: Sacha Darke, Andy Aresti and David Manlow. The paper introduced the growing British convict criminology movement and its key features. The movement aims to challenge the separation between 'criminals' and 'experts' and prioritise the prisoner voice as the 'authentic' 'view from below'. It intends to achieve this by: encouraging prisoners and former prisoners to engage with academic study by supporting former prisoners to mentor current prisoners and by conducting collaborative research with prisoners and former prisoners. The overarching aim of convict criminology is to challenge the separation between prisoners and 'the public', by facilitating the involvement of prisoners in criminology. However the speakers highlighted the obstacles former prisoners face in terms of conducting research, particularly denial of access to the prison.

Alana Barton and Alyson Brown, of Edge Hill University, presented the second paper of the session, titled *'Prison Tourism: the Search for Ethical Authenticity'*. The paper focused on the history of 'prison tourism', and issues of authenticity and representation. The speakers stated that tourist interest in prisons is not a new phenomenon. Well-known prisons like Dartmoor have always stirred curiosity amongst the public. But tourist interest raises particular issues. The speakers noted that potentially it could serve as an instrument of penal populism, which encourages the public to support severe punishment where 'justice is seen to be done'. Barton and Brown criticised the focus that prison museums place on prisoner violence, such as riots, whilst silencing stories of prisoners as victims of sexual violence, prison officer violence and self-harm. The speakers argued that dark tourism could be authentic and ethical if it was carried out in a way that provides a political context and an understanding

The overarching aim of convict criminology is to challenge the separation between prisoners and 'the public', by facilitating the involvement of prisoners in criminology.

### **Creative Arts and the Prison II**

The Creative Arts and the Prison II presented a series of papers to reflect the innovative ways creative arts have been used to bring the prison to 'the public'. The first paper, *'Challenging Perceptions of Value'*, was presented by PhD student Rachel Forster from Leeds University and Liz Knight from Leeds Museum and Discovery Centre. Their study involved taking a number of museum objects into the prison for the prisoners to appreciate and study. The aim was to encourage them to reflect on the idea of value. Prisoners were reluctant to be involved initially, for fear of how the other prisoners would react towards them. Although they had several challenges to overcome, the greatest hurdle was the negative perceptions of those involved in the project.

Sue Pritchard, from the Victoria and Albert museum, in her paper *'Creativity and Confinement: Narrating the HMP Wandsworth Quilt'* discussed a project where the museum worked with prisoners in HMP Wandsworth. The project involved the prisoners drawing on their experiences of prison to design individual hexagonal fabric patches, which reflected the floor plan of the prison. The

patches were sewn together to make the Wandsworth Quilt. Pritchard believed it was a positive experience for prisoners providing them with a sense of control over their selves and their environment, and feelings of purpose and pride. She suggested that the project has reduced conflict amongst prisoners.

The final paper of the panel titled *'Inside-Outside' Discussion of Prison Workshop and the Documentary 'Rasu g.6'*, was presented by artist Anja Westerfroelke, and feminist activist M-Françoise Stewart-Ebel. The paper discussed art workshops for prisoners in an old empty prison that had previously been a church in Vilnius, Lithuania. Using artefacts from the old prison, the prisoners created art and used the site to develop a shared experience between the prison and 'the public'.

### **The Contemporary Prison**

This session analysed the representations of the contemporary prison. The panel consisted of John

Griffiths, from the Independence Initiative Drug Rehabilitation Project in Liverpool, Ian Marsh, a principal lecturer in Criminology at Liverpool Hope University and Helen O'Keefe, assistant head of Primary and Early Years Education at Edge Hill University. The three speakers were concerned with the ways in which portrayals of prisons inform 'the public' perspective, which in turn impact upon policies and practices.

John Griffiths' paper was titled '*Criminal Justice and Drug Interactions: A Public-Private Affair*'. The paper was concerned with the influence of the media, and lack of influence of research, on prison policy and reforms, in particular privatisation. Griffiths drew on the example of the privatisation of probation to argue that although research has demonstrated probation provided by the private sector is less effective in terms of rehabilitation, the media has largely supported the movement and subsequently the public have not challenged it. Griffiths argued that the government intentionally portray the prison negatively in order to gain support for punitive and cost-cutting reforms.

In his paper titled '*The Media Representation of Prisons: Holiday Camps or Boot Camps?*' Ian Marsh stated that the secrecy surrounding the prison means that the public's main source of information about prison is the media. He suggested this was problematic because of the contradictory media portrayal of the prison as both a holiday camp and a dangerous, violent place. He suggested that the media representation prevented positive reform and supported neoliberal interests. Marsh supported Griffiths' view that the prison system was represented negatively in order to gain support for reforms that reduce costs.

Helen O'Keefe's paper was titled '*The Face of Prison in Primary Schools — the Children of Male*

*Prisoners and their Schools*'. This paper focussed on the impact of prison portrayals on the treatment of children with imprisoned parents. O'Keefe found that some schools literally denied having pupils with imprisoned parents whilst others did not know if they had any such pupils, and if they did, they rarely knew the number of pupils concerned. O'Keefe found that nationwide only two schools trained staff to respond to children and families with an imprisoned parent and many schools blamed poor resourcing for their lack of knowledge and their failure to engage with the issue. O'Keefe concluded that the majority of schools failed to support families with a parent in prison and that such families feared stigmatisation and discrimination by the school.

To conclude, the conference amalgamated a broad scope of issues presented by academics, practitioners and artists concerned with the central theme of the relationship between the prison and 'the public'. Papers explored the variety of means through which the prison is connected to 'the public' but also critiqued the segregation of the two spheres. Many papers championed the use of art as both a means of rehabilitation and connection between the prison and 'the public'. A common concern of delegates was the way in which representation, mainly in the media, of the prison and prisoners is used as an instrument of punitive populism. This was connected to a critique of media and political discourses that construct a separation between 'the public' and the prison. Delegates appealed for the narratives of segregation to be challenged and support for initiatives that ensure greater connection between the 'public' and the prison.

# Chapter and Verse:

## The Role of Creating Writing in Reducing Re-offending

**Michael Crowley** was Writer in Residence HM YOI Lancaster Farms (2007-2013) and is author of *Behind the Lines: creative writing with offenders and those at risk* (Waterside Press, 2012).

*People benefit because it's a way to unlock hidden emotion. It's a way of being understood. It's a way of getting out of this world and into another where anything can happen. I've tried to write from a victim of crime perspective, and the truth is, I've never thought like this before. I've never even bothered about people I don't know. I've always thought, if I don't know someone, why should I care? Writing from their perspective makes me think about their lives.'*

Michael, (Prisoner) HMYOI Lancaster Farms<sup>1</sup>

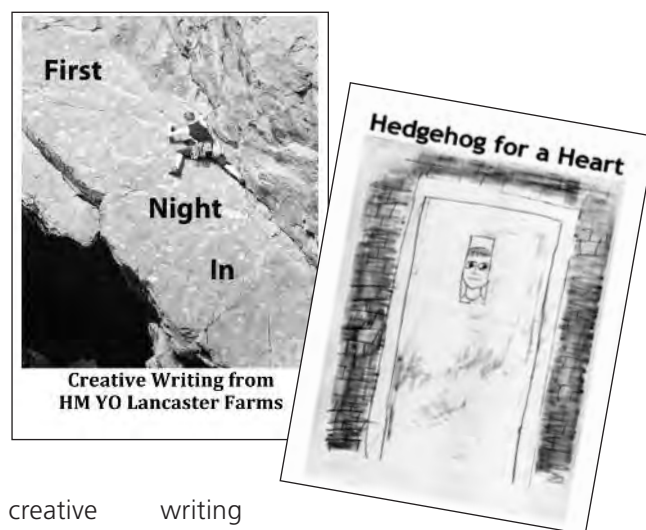
I was writer in residence at HM YOI Lancaster Farms for over six years; before that I worked in youth theatre, before that I was a youth justice worker in Greater Manchester for seven years, before that I worked in an open YOI. This is an article about getting people in custody to write, and about writing with them and what that teaches us both. It is about how creative writing can be used as a means not just for self-expression, improved literacy and concentration, but also for assessment, for developing moral reasoning and empathy, for tackling pro criminal thinking; as a means for a number of interventions and as an intervention itself.

That creative writing can play a part in the process of desistance I believe is now widely accepted in prisons and probation.<sup>2</sup> What is less well established is a closer scrutiny of the methods involved, the deliberate development of a practice of *applied creative writing*, an examination of what works and what doesn't.

*You cannot be a writer and a thug. To describe how someone may be feeling in a situation shows you have empathy or an understanding of how actions affect other people, you are sensitive. I think writing really helps to make people more compassionate and thoughtful.*

Jack, HMYOI Lancaster Farms

In my six years at Lancaster Farms I worked with a lot of young male prisoners (lads) and produced a lot of



creative writing anthologies; memoir, fiction, poetry and book reviews. We also wrote short plays together for stage and radio, performed them and even took on a few scenes from *Othello* and *Macbeth*. Always there was an underlying moral purpose and if it wasn't expressed in the writing or drama session, it was because I believed it was self-evident enough to occur to the lads anyway. To be interested in a prisoner's writing without any regard to how the process might change their thinking and behaviour to me seems pointless. This meant discussing crimes, grave crimes in detail; writing and rewriting about them; the planning and motivation; the commission of the offence; the aftermath on all concerned; their meaning. It is remarkable how little opportunity or requirement there is upon prisoners to discuss the significance of what they have done, particularly in a young offender institution. In my experience writing or text based work is all too marginal in the rehabilitation of offenders. Whilst written work isn't for everyone on community orders or in custody, it can certainly be employed for more people than are currently engaged or have the opportunity to take part. Neither is it an occupation that merely indulges the person who has satisfied themselves through crime. It can be a more exacting and detailed means of asking people to face up to what they have done, as well as a means to spell out a path for the future.

1. All quotes of prisoners' writing from Crowley, M. (2012) *Behind the Lines: creative writing with offenders and those at risk* Hampshire, Waterside Press.
2. See particularly Albertson, K. E (2014) 'Realising the agency, empathy and reflexive capacities that contribute to desistance narratives', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, Special Edition: Arts in Prison (February 2014). Also Arts Alliance report Bilby C, Caulfield L, Ridley L 2012 *Re imagining Futures: exploring arts interventions and the process of desistance* [www.artsalliance.org](http://www.artsalliance.org).



Tom's Life

By Tom

*I laugh in the face of the police*

I admit it. I've done wrong

*Who gives a fuck about life?*

Keep your head up. There's more to life. Just give it time.

*I will carry on doing what I'm doing now.*

You can get a job. It won't be a good job. Working in a shoe factory or making socks. It's a job.

*I wish I was never born*

Life gets better in time. Give it time. It gets better.

*I run riot around this school*

Education helps me out in life.

*I live with my mum and that's it. I don't even respect her.*

I got two letters off her on Saturday.

*My dad threw me across the room*

He won't be able to do that now

*I buzz off my area because we kick off every day and fight every day*

It's a bad area to grow up in. When I get out, I'm moving away.

It is never difficult finding prisoners who want to write. From the first morning I walked onto a wing (What do you do boss?) until my final day, I was never able to meet all the requests or read all the work handed to me. One or two inmates appeared to believe that writing was the purpose of their imprisonment. That doesn't mean that the dominant ethic within prison fosters or even tolerates individual expression. The job of the prisoner in a YOI is to be enduringly on guard from oneself. Lads are bullied for writing; some demanded my confidence and some left their cells with manuscripts tucked down their pants. Not surprisingly it was the prisoners who were serving the most time that were the most open and productive. The trouble though, at least with much of the unsolicited prison writing, is that it tends to portray either sentimental conversions or a reaffirmation of the code, though some it has to be said is testament to a quarrying for solutions.

*That's all I ever want off people: their car. I appreciate cars. I understand them. I see the reason why every drop of sweat that has hit the ground during the engineering of a car has done so. I love cars. The way they look, the way*

*they smell, the way they sound, the way they feel, the way they drive, even the way they hurt when they are abused. It's almost as if they talk to me. I take care of them, look after them, drive them the way they like to be driven, wash them when they are dirty and sad, fix them when they are broke and mad. I can understand why people think I'm crazy. They are right, cars don't have feelings, you can't make a car happy. What was I thinking? Some people call it an obsession, some people call it an illness. Most illnesses have a cure. I think the only person who can cure this is me and I'm far from a doctor.*

Michael, HMYOI Lancaster Farms

To help prisoners to write well and to write thoughtfully, we need not just rapport and discussion, but writing exercises. Tailor made tools to initiate and to develop writing. *Tom's Life* is a response to an exercise Letters to Myself. I began developing exercises when I was a YOT officer and continued when I was working in theatre. I hoarded them whilst working at Lancaster Farms. I will often begin with someone with a warm up exercise such as *Today My Hand*<sup>3</sup> and *Once My Hand*, which requires people to think about five physical actions from the present and the past.

#### Today My Hand

- Draw around a hand. In each finger write a sentence concerning an action; ordinary or otherwise, beginning *today my hand...*
- Connect a feeling and a thought to each action. It may be an unrelated thought.
- Repeat the exercise using *once my hand, one day my hand will, another's hand once...*

*today my hand wanted something else to do. I felt bored.*  
*once my hand put money in a charity box.*  
*once my hand held shopping for my mother-*  
*once my hand pulled a trigger.*

*Today my hand turned on the TV, made my bed, wrote an exam. It did these things in prison, for stealing from cars. In the future my hand will cook for my family, will work and clean and write.*

Liam, HMYOI Lancaster Farms

3. An exercise adapted from playwright Noel Greig. See Greig, Noel (2005) *Playwriting a practical guide* London, Routledge.

It's an exercise that exposes the limitations of life in custody. When applied to an offence, it centres on the physical nature of what has been done; slows it down, cuts to the bone in Anglo Saxon English from out of the cover of abstract Latinate terms such as *assault*. It's much the same with walking. The prison has a 'regime' and it includes movement. Deviation in any direction is not an option. Most lads cope with jail. Some cope a lot better in jail than they do on The Out. Many argue that things are working out for them. They felt sorry for me on my residency income — prison is fine and they would have a few years left in them yet. Listing the places they walk to and the tasks their hands perform is one way of passing the penny that they might drop one day.<sup>4</sup>

#### Body Self Exercise

Draw around your feet. Let one foot represent the past and the other the present. Write down the places you have been; the key moments that have weighed each foot down and put a spring in its step.

- What's made the foot strong, what's made it hurt?
- Draw a future foot. Fill it with things you want and believe you can get. How will that foot walk in five years' time?

Like most of the rest of us, most prisoners begin by writing memoir. In the context of criminality this is at the same time potentially both problematic and useful. You could be feeding an ego in desperate need of a diet, but also beginning to put it in its place. Last year I decided to put together an anthology entitled *Why Are You in Jail?* When I began to ask the question, some inmates talked about the last offence, the failed appointments that led to recall; others talked about domestic violence, parent's drug addiction, or parents dying and their memoirs often covered the surface of years. The choice of instrument suggested itself.

#### Why Are You In Jail?

- Think of a particular day connected to why you ended up in jail. It does not have to be about your crime.
- Think of a particular hour within that day. A time; less than an hour. Where were you, who else was there, what was happening?
- Imagine you are back there. Write what is happening in the present tense. Start with your age.

*I am seven. I am very worried and confused. I haven't been told why or where we are going. I know I am going to Wales on a train. Looking across at my mother her face is all bruised and looking very upset and scared. My older*

*brother isn't that bothered. I think he thinks we're just going on a holiday. I don't think this is a holiday. I am seven but I know some of the pieces. I know my mum is unhappy because my dad is a violent person and has been violent to my mum and she's scared and now she is so scared that we have to run away from the violence. When we arrive in Bangor my mum gets a postcard and sends it to my auntie to let her know where we are. A couple of days later my dad finds the post card and finds us. On the way back home me and my brother are in the back seat of the car and every time me or my brother say something my dad yells 'shut the fuck up.'*

James, H M YOI Lancaster Farms

Conversely instead of starting from an event one might begin memoir work by beginning with an emotion.

#### Emotion into Memoir

- Write a list of seven different emotions.
- Choose one.
- Think of a time when it was dominant.
- When, where, who was there?

And with a new writer it will often take a combination of exercises to form the basis of a piece.

#### Remembering the Senses

- Write the five senses down the side of the paper.
- Write a response to each of the senses, as in, *I remember...*
- *I remember the colour of..., I remember the smell of..., I don't remember the sound of..., I remember the taste of..., You will remember..., They will remember the sound of...*

The two exercises above, as well as the *Today my Hand* warm-up exercise formed the basis of a poem by a lad.

#### Two Sides

*I remember the royal blue seats and the deep brown wood  
the perfume of the woman who handcuffed me  
while I stood  
in the court. My hands sweating.*

*I remember the rustle of paper above the silence  
the taste of the tasteless tea, the ink leaking*

4. The Body Self exercise has been adapted with kind permission from an exercise by poet and fellow writer in residence Pat Winslow.

off the indictment onto my hands.

I don't remember the judge's speech after the verdict.

I saw tears in the jury's faces.

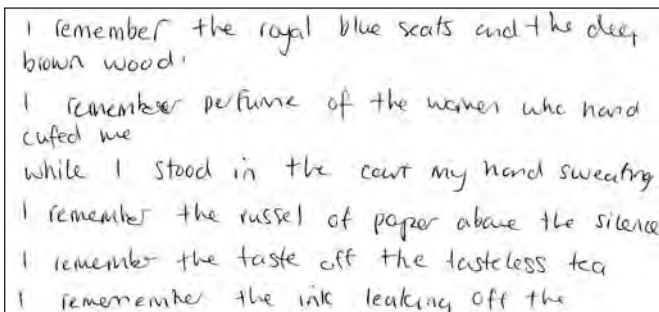
They will remember me asking them why they were crying when they had just found us guilty.

You were going to sacrifice your freedom for me I told you not to.

We will remember the smiles on the police officers' faces the handshakes and the claps, after the verdict.

Today my hand turned on a television. It wanted something else to do. I felt bored.

Once it put money in a charity box held shopping for my mother, pulled a trigger.



I remember the royal blue seats and the deep brown wood.  
I remember perfume of the woman who hand cuffed me  
while I stood in the court my hand sweating  
I remember the rustle of paper above the silence  
I remember the taste of the tasteless tea  
I remember the ink leaking off the

Of course the title *Two Sides* is the wrong one. It's only one side and it doesn't begin to look at why he was in court in the first place. All the same I liked its sparseness and put it in the next anthology of prisoner's writing. It convinced him he should be off the wing and in education: a start possibly. I'd met the lad once before, when he was thirteen. He had been convicted of a burglary and I was trying to set up a restorative meeting with the victim but it proved too risky. Seven years later he was beginning a long sentence for gang related crime. I met a lot of former YOT clients in Lancaster Farms. Boys I knew at ten and eleven had grown into young men, grown into prison cells.

How can memoir work be rehabilitative? Fundamentally, 'it is the placing of the person, not the treatment or criminal justice professional, at the heart of the process.'<sup>5</sup> Most of the lads I worked with had never taken the time to think through their backgrounds, the emotional topography of their lives. Helping them to articulate what happened to them and what they had done was empowering. Disempowerment, all corrupting powerlessness, was always rearing its head in the prison and in the journey to its gates.

I felt like the lowest of the low, the bottom of the pile. When I look back at what I've done I regret doing it. It wasn't just the bike. It was the anger inside of me. A lot of bad things happened to me as a kid. Violence. A lot of crime around me. I started joining in with it when I was eleven. It made me angry because I wanted a good upbringing. A normal one. With no violence. To live a good life like my mates had. I was jealous. I wanted what they had. I was jealous of everything. I need to make my life a better life.

Darren, HM YOI Lancaster Farms

In writing a narrative about oneself you begin to put yourself at a distance, if you want anyone to read it, you have to plot a cause and effect to the events. But not everyone who writes a memoir wants others to read it. Lads would fill exercise books with their unhappy life stories and then hand it to me with no wish for it to be published or returned. There is a therapeutic writing exercise where participants are invited to write a letter to the cause of their suffering and then place it in a sealed envelope and leave it somewhere. I was a walking envelope for six years.

Getting people to look realistically at their own narrative enables them to better imagine and appreciate the narrative of those they have harmed. In youth justice we would ask children who had offended how they imagined their victim felt, before they were scarcely able to express or comprehend how they themselves felt about what they'd done. The database required snap assessments on *emotional intelligence* and *victim empathy*, that and much else on the basis of one meeting. Commonly an absence of contrition or even the ability to express contrition assumed an absence of empathy. There was also I thought an implication that these notions are static. Exploratory autobiographical writing is not just about oneself. In the context of criminal justice it is about self-examination, but it is also the basis of thinking long and hard about oneself in relation to others. Paradoxically it is essential in preparing people for and reflecting upon a restorative justice process.

Not everyone wants to write about themselves. For some people, the last thing they want to excavate is their own life. I unlocked the cell door of one lad who had been sentenced the previous week, he swung off his bunk: *I don't want to write anything about crime, anything to do with gangs*. He wrote a short story set in the Manchester rag trade. It amazed other gang members and lads on the

5. Albertson K E (Op. Cit.).



wing, who unlike him aren't serving fifteen years. There is freedom and fun in fictional characters, whatever happens to them. Perhaps rather crudely I have exercises on creating characters from the outside in and the inside out. *Working from Image; Working from Objects; Character as Trait; Character as Motive.*

#### Someone like You

Think of a face that is familiar to you. It could be from the present or the past, but it has to be someone to whom you have never spoken and know virtually nothing about; you just know the face. Draw the face, *with your eyes shut*. Spend a few minutes on this, imagining you have a close up camera. Think about the eyes and teeth, their hair. What do they tell you about this person's life? Now build a biography of the individual: Give them a name; write down three facts about their parents. Who in their life are they closest to? When they were young (maybe they still are) what did they want to be? Who was the first person they ever kissed?

Improving the ability of participants to imagine the emotional and psychological experiences of other people is the most important work that can be done with offenders. This can be approached both through fictional and real lives, indeed one may usefully lead to the other. Character and empathy work is fundamental to effective offence focused and victim awareness interventions. Although restorative conferencing is now accepted practice in the community, it is still an exceptional event in custody. Face to face meetings are often understandably undesired by the victim, or otherwise impractical. As a necessary substitute, practitioners sometimes employ role play: hot seating the offender as victim or asking the offender to write to the victim whom they cannot meet. Thus rehabilitative work involves looking at the world from inside someone else's skin; often real, sometimes imaginary. As such, drama practice that explores different perspectives is not uncommon in criminal justice work. For example there is the excellent work of Geese Theatre and Theatre in Prisons and Probation, but there is clearly also a place for employing writing exercises to help participants articulate the consequences of their behaviour. As such I had a role to play on Lancaster Farms victim awareness course, helping inmates build character profiles of people that had been burgled. Having spoken to hundreds of burglars over fifteen years of working with offenders, it has always struck me how many attempted to read the premises, to work out something of their victims' lives from the possessions and surroundings. So I designed some writing exercises around imagery encounters using dialogue.

#### Who Wasn't There?

Ask the participant to describe in detail, a house or premises they have burgled.

Ask them to envisage who lived or worked there and to create at least one realistic character. Then to write the scene where they were burgling the property in conversation with the victim who is demanding that they justify what they are doing.

*Excerpt*  
By Ryan

**David** They said my alarm would go off if someone did that.

**Brian** Not if you cut the power. Now shut up.

**David** Don't tell me to shut up in my own house. What are you doing?

**Brian** What does it look like I'm doing?

**David** How can you behave like this?

**Brian** I don't think about that stuff. I need money, can't get a job, this is the only way. Stop asking me questions...

Ryan said the exercise was the hardest thing he'd been asked to do since being sent to prison.

#### Who's to Say?

Ask the participant to consider the commission of a crime and to write the internal dialogue as they work through what they are about to do. Then to write the dialogue that *opposes* committing the crime; as if it was also their point of view. Then to write the dialogue from the victim's point of view; before and after the event.

*(Excerpt from an exercise)*  
by Liam

A bungalow a patio  
Double glazing double garage  
Big garden, I've seen  
The children's trampoline

*Burglary is a stupid thing*

I'm only fifteen

And I buzz when I do a graft.

*Does this feel right to you?*

It doesn't feel like anything to me  
Go in through the back door  
Go up some steps go down some  
Go for the car keys

The money the jewellery  
*It's not your property*  
*It's not your stuff to touch*

A TV and a laptop  
 It soon will be  
*There's a family photo*  
*Playing football on a beach*  
*Wedding pictures on the wall*

They're insured aren't they?  
 Job done for another day  
**Why us?**

*Your freedom threatens me*  
*My fear is you have a key to here*  
*You moan down the phone*  
*My sleeping tablets are scared they'll*  
*All be eaten.*

Can't wait to make it up to you

To broaden vocabulary I gave away dozens of dictionaries and thesauruses. Someone's response to new language can be an indicator to a preparedness to change on a more fundamental level. Lads who want to speak differently want to be thought of as different. Asking someone to look at how they use language in differing contexts is an important part of the new narrative. Then for prisoners to see their work published in anthologies doesn't just raise esteem, more importantly it challenges the existing esteem with one based on something else. Widely circulated anthologies in a prison can challenge the prevailing ethic with one that employs and cries out for a deeper sensibility.

The desistance process is divided by criminologists into primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance is about stopping offending and secondary about taking on a non-offending lifestyle. My experience has been that it is lads who are at least at the stage of primary desistance who are the most receptive to writing creatively. But then they are most open to interventions generally. Often they are pursuing open conditions or are sure the forthcoming release will be the last time. They were lads who sought me out or who were referred by another agency such as National Offender Management Service or Society of Voluntary Associates (a mentoring programme). There are obvious advantages to receiving referrals: one gets some background information and there is a receptive reader at hand but 'good lads' don't always make for productive writers, in memoir or any other form. Sometimes the lad for whom the segregation block is a familiar refuge, who is not even at the stage of primary desistance, will make a very engaged writer.

My final lengthy project was with a prisoner who was notoriously problematic for both staff and other prisoners yet who wrote, largely under his own steam, a fairly lengthy short story that became a popular publication in the jail. The story bordered on the pro-criminal and consequently had a limited run but the writer, who finished the piece whilst in segregation, had an implacable sense of narrative. He knew instinctively how to create expectation then subvert it. The plot lines were all his, my role was largely confined to diction, punctuation and typing. Good storytelling is not the dominion of the law abiding and I believe it is worth cultivating for the sake of the seeds that are planted. Instead of writing with a prisoner I would sit and read

Perhaps the strength of writing as an intervention is that it is difficult to fake.

*'It's different from Offending Behaviour Courses, because this is not a course — it is a moral discussion. The Offender Behaviour Courses — you get to know what you need to say to get them to tick the box, whereas here, you have to be honest and genuine — you can't hide here.'*<sup>6</sup>

Writing is also the one thing in life where we get to cross out the mistakes and start again. When we speak or when we act we cannot. It is an act of communication and expression that demands forethought. Furthermore it requires the considered use and exploration of language. This is important in prison, important in desistance. Prisons and prisoners have their own vernacular. It's often harsh, sometimes inventive but generally poor fare. Vocabulary shrinks in prison to suit the confinement. Eloquence is taken as weakness and what few words are used are compressed before they're out. Pro-criminal language is a cloak of malice; emotionally one sided and amongst men increasingly misogynistic. My experience over the last six years is that many of the relationships in the lives of the young man are in crisis, but particularly those with women. What writing can do is ask the lad to begin to see it through her eyes. The poem below is the product of an exercise of shuffling nouns and verbs to find surprising combinations and using two voices, one is the imagined voice of a girlfriend. As is often the case the poem is the product of much useful discussion and imagining.

*Letter to Natalie*  
 Daniel

Another night and another day  
 The exercise yard is lazy and peaceful  
 My television hammers my brain cells  
 Medication touches my bloodstream  
 Soon I'll be dancing out the gates back to you

6. Albertson K E (Op. Cit.).

with them, reading aloud, a page each at a time. The text was then discussed. *Do they get it, where's it going, is it convincing?* It should be very basic critical reading whilst remaining an enjoyable experience that they will come back to. They were texts that obviously or implicitly raised moral questions and choices of action, which most literature does, and I mostly reached for Steinbeck and the short stories of Raymond Carver. The publishers Barrington Stoke produce short easy to read fiction that works well.

First changes in lads, in all of us perhaps, are subtle and unconscious. Instrumental change proscribed by the individual themselves to say, find work, stop drinking, comes later, overlaps and is incremental. I am very sceptical about self-proclaimed overnight change in anyone, especially offenders. The louder it is heralded the less likely it will arrive. Personal growth, particularly when circumstances and background are unfavourable, is a war of attrition. In six years I never met a prisoner who I felt would ever be a writer but I did work with a number whose work was published beyond the prison and for whom writing was a ladder to other things, mostly further education. I stayed away from asking prisoners to produce magazine journalism. I understand what it can do, but it is not my field, there are always piles of *Inside*

*Times* toppling off tables and more than anything I wanted lads to write emotionally, for themselves, for others.

Where now for this work? In 2012 Waterside Press published my text book, *Behind the Lines, creative writing with offenders and those at risk* which has around eighty writing exercises specifically designed to support change in offenders. It is my ambition and my belief that creative writing can be integral to reducing reoffending work. My experience as a writer in a prison and as a criminal justice worker confirms that there is much to do. I hope to be continuing my work and researching more closely its impact on a specific cohort of prisoners. More widely I think there needs to be a continued move from both writers and other artists working in custody and from prisons and agencies to develop this work. Writers and other artists need to actively share reducing reoffending objectives, to be willing to challenge offenders more and accommodate less. From the prison's point of view, there is a background and foreground of financial restraint and perhaps it is the contracted agencies such as substance misuse, mentoring, mental health, education etc. that could be called upon to fund writers who could support their work.

# Free to Write:

## A Case Study in the Impact of Cultural History Research and Creative Writing Practice

*Dr Tamsin Spargo and Hannah Priest are based at Liverpool John Moores University.*

**This study introduces a recent research and writing project called 'Free to Write' and situates it within a long tradition of exploring the role that creative writing can play in prisons and for ex-offenders. Grounded in a combination of the research of cultural historians and of creative writers at Liverpool John Moores University, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded 'Free to Write' project ran from 2004-2007 and explored the potential of creative writing in prisons, and in probation hostels, to reduce recidivism. After this initial stage, it continued with further research being carried out into the work of other creative writing organizations across the UK, and their roles in the provision of creative writing practice in prisons. An anthology comprising two essays by cultural historians, one essay offering a snapshot of creative writing practice in prisons, and a series of creative pieces was published and disseminated to institutions and groups, for use and to offer feedback, in 2013.**

The experience of the 'Free to Write' team suggests, and this article will argue, that collaborative, cross-disciplinary research and practices in the academy may fruitfully support work in the prison service and raises questions about how creative writers and prison service practitioners may work together to raise the profile in the public arena of effective writing in prisons. Historical and current research reveals the ways in which creative writing provision relates (and has always related) to evolving public policy, particularly as regards recidivism and reoffending, but also rehabilitation and public perceptions of punishment.

The *Free to Write* anthology includes a series of pieces written by individuals currently within the prison system or recently on release. These pieces — poems and prose on a variety of topics — are at the heart of the project, revealing the writers' mental and emotional journeys, observed by researchers and tutors, from considering their past and present to envisaging a different future. This pattern, not shared by all, but common to many, suggests that writing is a valuable

way of encouraging prisoners to develop new ways of responding to their situations and environment. The editors of the anthology decided not to identify the individual writers by full name, but rather to use first names and institutions. While many writers seek recognition for their efforts, to be identified in this volume might have unintended consequences for prisoners in the future, or, indeed, for anyone affected by their crimes; it may also have ramifications for an individual writer's future rehabilitation. The team's discussion of the issue of anonymity was informed by the research carried out by cultural historians and stands as one example here of how the dialogue between cultural history and creative practice has informed this project. The issue of anonymity was one which was considered by the leaders of another project championing writing in prisons and the research of one of the 'Free to Write' team revealed their fascinating, and embattled, history which raises questions still pertinent today.

In 1908, a poem was submitted to the *Star of Hope*, a newspaper written, printed, and published for and by prisoners in the New York State prison system. The poem was a scathing commentary on conditions in the Dannemora State Hospital, an institution for men who had been certified insane as prisoners, and was signed 'Mountain Bughouse 216'.<sup>1</sup> The poem was not accepted for publication and it is not hard to see why. *The Star of Hope* had achieved international coverage as an example of positive behaviour and achievement by prisoners at a time when the majority of headlines, except in liberal-leaning newspapers, focused on the negative or sensational. In the Australian *Daily News* in 1904, a story about the journal suggested that it could only have been started in 'such a strenuous country as America' and noted not only the range and standard of the contributions but also that a number of prisoners involved had found work in newspapers since leaving prison.

The founding and success of the journal seem, in retrospect, a considerable achievement, especially when it is still customary today for those involved in

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1. 'Mountain Bughouse 216' was Oliver Curtis Perry, whose life is the subject of Spargo, T. (2004) *Wanted Man: The Forgotten story of an American Outlaw* London: Bloomsbury, based on research in the archives of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century New York State correctional system.

writing schemes in prisons to feel the need to justify their work.<sup>2</sup> At the start of the twentieth century, campaigns in the United States, and in New York State, for prison reform — on the basis of the possibility of rehabilitation for at least some prisoners, rather than containment and punishment for all — were gradually gaining ground. *The Star of Hope* had been founded in 1899 in a rare act of co-operation between two often opposed groups in the penal world: the Warden (Omar Van Leuven Sage) and a reformist campaigner (Maud Ballington Booth).<sup>3</sup>

Many Wardens in this period were conservative, maintaining traditional practices designed to contain and control convicts, and suspicious of the campaigners who were arguing that the closed worlds of the prisons degraded and debased prisoners and keepers alike. Sage, in contrast, espoused some of the ideas of the Progressive Movement within the penal system which attempted to use rational, scientific principles to engage prisoners in productive, improving activities.<sup>4</sup> This progressive rationalism differed from the Christian underpinning of Ballington Booth's reformist mission but both shared a conviction that rehabilitation was a fundamental role of the prison system and that practical, creative activity was key to that process. The imperative to foster rehabilitation and so reduce recidivism could now be seen as a shared goal for conservatives and liberals alike, an ethos that informed the 'Free to Write' project which hoped, and hopes, to bypass unhelpful assumptions about 'soft options' mitigating rather than building on the justice system's punitive elements.

In the *Star of Hope*, which included writing by, and was distributed to, inmates first from Sing Sing alone, and later from the other major adult prisons of Auburn, Clinton and the Eastern New York Reformatory, prisoners could express and exchange views. It is hard, at this distance, to grasp how radical a departure from the normal regime which isolated and silenced inmates this was. But as debates within the paper itself showed, its writers needed to be careful about the impression

they gave.<sup>5</sup> If prisoners were to be promoted as rational and thoughtful, capable of either redemption or reform, there were evidently limits to the type of writing, to the subjects and tone that could be included. Mountain Bughouse 216's submission exceeded those limits. In selecting creative pieces for *Free to Write* a hundred years later the editors were not faced with any 'difficult' material in these terms, but the question of censorship was ever-present in a volume intended for a readership including prison service professionals, tutors, ex-offenders and policy makers.

Earlier in 1908, on 18 July, the *Star of Hope* had published a poem by the same prisoner under his prison identification, 'Dannemora State Hospital 216'.<sup>6</sup> 'Independence Day' was a stirring call to support the nation's fighting men, written in the form of an

. . . both shared a conviction that rehabilitation was a fundamental role of the prison system and that practical, creative activity was key to that process.

acrostic, with the first letters of each line spelling out 'JULY FOURTH NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHT'. It was a poem that aligned the prisoner with values of courage and patriotism and connected them with the need for social justice, making it an ideal example of the impression reformers wanted to give: as the poem's opening lines declare 'Justice sails on every breeze/Under our soldiers' flag.'<sup>7</sup> In common with other contributions to the paper, it invited readers outside the

system to see those within it as sharing a belief in common virtues and values, whatever mistakes had been made in the past, and as deserving to have those principles demonstrated within the prison system as well as in wider society.

*The Star of Hope* is rightly acknowledged as a significant early example of prisoners' writing having a positive impact on debates outside and inside the prison system about the benefits of practical, creative activity.<sup>8</sup> But as a public document it does not give us access to how the *process* of writing may help a prisoner. In some of the archival research that informed the 'Free to Write' project, the case of Mountain Bughouse 216 proved unexpectedly revealing.

2. *The Daily News* (Perth, Western Australia), 16 December 1904.

3. The title of the paper was a tribute to Maud Ballington Booth, an English-born evangelical campaigner who had started a religious League of Hope among prisoners there in 1896 and whose belief in rehabilitation was summarised in her 1903 book *After Prison — What?* (New York: H. Revell). For an account of Booth's place in reform debates see Myrick, A. (2004) 'Escape from the Carceral: Writing by American Prisoners, 1895-1916', *Surveillance & Society* 2.1, 93-109.

4. *New York Times*, April 21, 1899. On Warden Sage and the reforms of the period, see McLennan, R.M. (2008) *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 224-248.

5. See Myrick, 'Escape from the Carceral', 106.

6. The journal would not accept anonymous contributions but published only the writer's prison number.

7. *Star of Hope* (Sing Sing, New York State), 18 July, 1908 (copy in Perry's Dannemora State Hospital file).

8. See Myrick, 'Escape from the Carceral', 105, and McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 224.



Inmate 216 at the Dannemora State Hospital was far removed from the ideal of the rational prisoner demonstrating a capacity for rehabilitation. After a childhood marked by poverty and neglect, Oliver Perry had been abused in his first institution, the Western House of Refuge, where he was confined for stealing a suit to sell to pay for lodgings. As an adult he worked on the railroads, where he sustained a serious head injury that cost him his job, and was eventually sentenced to nearly 50 years hard labour for a headline-grabbing single-handed train robbery. On the run and awaiting trial he became a celebrity figure in the press, exploiting public suspicion of detectives as well as interest in the romantic anti-hero image he cultivated. Once in Auburn, and subject to the sustained use of sensory deprivation in the punishment block (which was still in operation and exposed in 1912 by Thomas Mott Osborne, reformer and later Sing Sing Warden), Perry's mental health collapsed. After rallying enough to organise a mass outbreak from his first State Hospital and to publicise the need for prison reform, he was declared sane but returned to Auburn. There, after another spell in the punishment block, he eventually blinded himself and was sent to the Dannemora State Hospital within the grounds of Clinton prison, known as 'Little Siberia'. This double isolation was, predictably, described by one newspaper as 'his living tomb'.<sup>9</sup>

Perry died there after serving 38 years of his sentence, 35 blind and nearly 30 on intermittent hunger strike, being force-fed through the nose and refusing to wear prison clothing. His was, in any terms, a troubled and tragic life. But it is the place of writing in his life that intrigued members of the 'Free to Write' team as they explored the possibilities of creative writing in prison.

Perry was first encouraged to write poetry, rather than protest letters, in the 1890s by a Christian-reformist friend and supporter. Some were published in newspapers with positive editorial comments, but after his self-blinding Perry's image in the press swiftly changed. His story continued to appear, intermittently,

in the newspapers until his death but the persuasive, rational prisoner mutated into the raving madman as stories about him moved from the front page to the brief and curious items sections. Perry's own attitude to writing also changed. Initially his letters and poems were clearly intended to attract publicity and sympathy, to protest about conditions. In his later years, Perry, aided by sighted prisoners, still composed and dictated letters to officials and reformers, although most were intercepted by the prison authorities, who also

regularly confiscated his poetry. He also wrote poems and narratives that explored his past and imagined a future. It is impossible to 'diagnose' Perry's mental condition but in his later writings and in correspondence about them, it is possible to see a more reflective understanding of his past and of a possible life beyond the prison. His files reveal that the process of writing had a positive impact not on his *public* standing, or on his campaign for better conditions, but on his ability to imagine a life beyond both his prison and the attitudes, significantly including his own, that had contributed to his crimes. Perry's condition meant that he would never be released, and his refusal, or inability to conform to the publicly acceptable model of the reformable prisoner, justified his necessary exclusion from *The Star of Hope* in 1908. But his written record suggests that even the most apparently 'hopeless' case might respond to

His files reveal that the process of writing had a positive impact not on his *public* standing, or on his campaign for better conditions, but on his ability to imagine a life beyond both his prison and the attitudes, significantly including his own, that had contributed to his crimes.

the process of writing.

Over a hundred years later the examples of *The Star of Hope* and of the apparently hopeless case of Oliver Perry might seem to be simply historical curiosities, but both raise questions that are still being debated today. This research, together with that of other cultural historians, suggested historical evidence for the value of writing in prisons and the challenge of making a public case for such work, and they reinforced the experience of creative writers who had been, individually and as part of national initiatives and networks, working as Writers in Residence at a number of institutions. Through their dialogue a cross-disciplinary project emerged to explore the impact of

9. *Utica Saturday Globe*, February 1917.

creative writing in prisons and probation service facilities.

The final stage of this project is an anthology, and this publication returns us, in many ways, to the questions relating to prisoners' writing raised by *The Star of Hope* at the beginning of the twentieth century. As in the case of the earlier publication, the *Free to Write* anthology addressed issues about prisoner welfare and rehabilitation, but also about public perceptions of prison life and prisoners' writing.

As suggested, early twentieth-century prison reformers viewed 'productive, improving activities' as being a cornerstone of rehabilitation; the creation of *The Star of Hope*, a forum in which prisoners were able to share writing (often with a view to exploring and expressing a desire for personal reform) reveals a belief that writing itself might be one such 'productive, improving activity'. Moreover, as we move through the twentieth century, we see writing, and the arts in general, becoming viewed as, not just a possible activity, but a *unique* opportunity for productive and improving activity. In 1962, Arthur Koestler founded an award scheme for prisoner writing and artwork. Originally planned as an award for essay writing, the Koestler awards were intended to reward creative, productive activity. Himself a former political prisoner, Koestler was a firm believer in the positive impact of mental stimulation on a prisoner's wellbeing and rehabilitation.<sup>10</sup> Moving closer to the present project, Michael Crowley — one of the writers-in-residence who submitted work to the *Free to Write* anthology on behalf of prisoners — argues that 'for rehabilitative purposes, it is important that prisoners are presented with the opportunity to paint, dance and especially write'.<sup>11</sup>

In developing the anthology, researchers from the 'Free to Write' team interviewed numerous people currently working with creative writing within the prison system, including Writers in Residence, prison librarians and Education Officers. Though each person described individual experiences and opinions concerning the role of creative writing in prisons, some common ground emerged. The questions of hope,

ambition, self-esteem and 'rehumanisation' were frequently discussed, and these are specifically and directly related to the issues of individual reform and rehabilitation.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, creative writing is often posited as a peculiarly potent medium through which these questions can be addressed, offering, as it does, space for imagining possible futures, examining self and self-identity, and exploring levels of empathy. The creative section of the anthology, which includes a commentary by Adam Creed, draws attention to this potency and its significance to an individual journey from 'beginning' to 'a world beyond'.

Nevertheless, writing can also offer a forum of communication between prisoners, beyond everyday interactions, fulfilling an educative purpose which is, again, linked to reform and rehabilitation. Like the early twentieth-century *Star of Hope*, many creative writing projects today focus on the significance of prisoner writing for other prisoners. Publication of work is often disseminated first and foremost within the prison system. A number of projects have sought to use prisoners' writing as a means of helping new or young prisoners come to terms with the reality of their circumstances, with life-writing, poetry and prose being used as tools for providing advice and mentoring. Internal prisoner-authored newspapers — like, for example, *Roast*, the newspaper

run by inmates at HM YOI Glen Parva during Gareth Creer's writer-residency — can be valuable sources of practical information, encouragement, sympathy and solidarity. By drawing on both the traditions identified by cultural historians and the 'best practice' noted by creative writers, the 'Free to Write' project was able to position the final anthology alongside other examples of prisoner writing and, as such, recognise the importance of its free availability to prison libraries throughout the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, the project research — both historical and practice-based — revealed another set of concerns that arise when dealing with creative writing by prisoners. As the research into *The Star of Hope* demonstrated, this early (and radical) journal was originally intended to be written for and by prisoners.

Himself a former political prisoner, Koestler was a firm believer in the positive impact of mental stimulation on a prisoner's wellbeing and rehabilitation.

10. We are grateful to Tim Robertson, Chief Executive of the Koestler Trust, for his valuable assistance with regards to Arthur Koestler's work and legacy. See also Scammell, M. (2009) *Koestler: The Indispensable Intellectual* London: Faber and Faber.  
11. Crowley, M. (2012) 'Editor's Note', in *Time of Death: Fiction, Poetry and Memoir From HM YOI Lancaster Farms*, 1.  
12. See Priest, H. (2013) 'Free to Write: Prison Voices', in Creer, G., Priest, H. and Spargo, T. (eds) *Free to Write: Prison Voices Past and Present*, Liverpool: Headland.



However, the case of Mountain Bughouse 216 reveals the journal's other, more public-facing, role. The assumption that the journal would be read by individuals outside the prison walls links *The Star of Hope*, again, to the work of the Koestler awards scheme, as well as to that of the Writers in Prisons Network and other contemporary organisations. Prisoners' art (and writing in particular) is often collected, displayed and disseminated to an audience outside the prison system, and its function in this respect is also significant.

Publication of prisoners' work to a wider audience outside the prison walls fulfils a number of purposes. For example, creative writing by prisoners can and is used with young people at risk of offending, serving as life lessons from individuals whose authority and voice are, perhaps, more likely to be taken seriously. In a broader context, prisoners' writing can be used to 'rehumanise' offenders in the eyes of the general public. It has been argued by a number of organisations, not least the Koestler Trust, that this 'rehumanisation' can play an important role in shaping and informing public views (and, potentially, public policy) on punishment and rehabilitation. In recent years — or, perhaps more accurately, in recent discourse building on a foundation laid after the abolition of hanging — this question of rehabilitation and its role in the prevention of reoffending has been at the forefront of debates about offender education and arts projects in the UK.

The idea that prisoner writing can shape and inform public perception and policy returns us to the historical examples of *The Star of Hope* and Mountain Bughouse 216, as well as resonating with contemporary practice and theory. Throughout the history of prison writing — which is also the history of prisons — memoirs and life-writing have been used as tools of reform. Or, if not reform *per se*, public

education about the reality and conditions of prisons. As can be seen in the story of Oliver Perry, poetry and letter writing have long been utilised by prisoners determined to bring their circumstances to the attention of a wider audience and, in some cases, to attempt to effect change. Prisoner writing is also offered as a means through which society's views of imprisonment can be confronted and, potentially, changed. In 1995 Clive Hopwood of the (now) Writers in Prisons Network wrote of the need to address public perceptions of prisoners, and the role that creative writing might play in this: 'perhaps if we listened a little more to what they have to say [...] we might understand a little better and judge more wisely'.<sup>13</sup> This aspect of creative writing, and of the arts generally, as a tool of radical commentary and potential systemic reform, is one that might bear further scrutiny in contemporary debate. *The Star of Hope*, and the various prisoner writing projects that have followed it, remind us that writing can be (and is frequently) utilised as a tool for change — be it in terms of the individual prisoner or of public perceptions — but also as a means of engagement with public policy. Again, the 'Free to Write' project sought to engage with this discourse, and the researchers felt that it was important that the anthology be made available to academics, practitioners and members of the public *outside* the prison walls, just as it was circulated within those walls.

This article has offered the interdisciplinary work of the 'Free to Write' project as a case study in the dialogues that are on-going between cultural historians and creative writers. As well as presenting some insights into the project itself, we have also indicated some of the ways in which collaboration between academic and practice-based researchers might be used to explore the role of prisoners' writing for the prison and the public.

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13. Hopwood, C. (1995) 'Foreword', in *All Men are Equalish: The View From Inside Prison (HMP Swansea)* Clwyd: I\*D Books, 7.

# Talking Justice:

## Building vocal public support for prison reform

*Katy Swaine Williams led the Prison Reform Trust's outreach programme from 2011 to December 2013, supported by the Monument Trust and aimed at bringing prison reform to a wider audience, inspiring and supporting others to take action. Janet Crowe is deputy director at the Prison Reform Trust and has ongoing responsibility for the charity's work with the public.*

### Introduction

**This article explores why working with the public has always been key to the Prison Reform Trust and why it is now as important as ever to build vocal public support for prison reform.**

The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity whose aim is to work with others to create a just, humane and effective prison system in the UK. Its underlying aims are to reduce unnecessary imprisonment and promote community solutions to crime, and to improve treatment and conditions for prisoners and their families. The charity's work is based on evidence from research, public opinion polling and testimony from the 5,000 prisoners and their families contacting its advice service each year. Working in partnership is key to the charity's work with the public.

### The context

#### Over-use of imprisonment

Prison numbers have exploded since the early 1990s, leading to high levels of overcrowding which persist to this day. The pressing social needs of many people in custody (mental health problems, learning disabilities, lack of skills and qualifications, care history to name a few<sup>1</sup>) have led some to describe prison as a 'warehouse' of our social problems.<sup>2</sup>

All but a handful of people who spend time in prison will return to live in the community. Nearly 47 per cent of adults and 72.3 per cent of children (under 18s) are proven to reoffend within a year of leaving custody.<sup>3</sup> Prison sentences of less than one year have a particularly poor record of reducing reoffending, with 58.5 per cent of adults proven to reoffend within a year

of their release.<sup>4</sup> Government research has found that community sentences are nearly seven per cent more effective than these short prison sentences at reducing reoffending.<sup>5</sup>

These poor results come at a high economic cost. The average annual overall cost of a prison place in England and Wales for the financial year 2011-12 was £37,648.<sup>6</sup> The cost of a high intensity two-year community order, containing 80 hours of unpaid work and mandatory accredited programmes, has been calculated at £4,200. Shorter community sentences cost much less.<sup>7</sup>

### The government's approach

The Ministry of Justice must make dramatic budget savings by 2016 and is at the same time committed to a 'rehabilitation revolution'. Yet, despite evidence of the relative effectiveness and fractional cost of community sentencing, the government has rejected calls to reduce reliance on short prison sentences for less serious offending in favour of increased investment in effective community options. Instead, current efforts appear to be focused on saving costs by creating ever larger prisons, even though they have been found to be less safe and less effective than smaller, local prisons.<sup>8</sup>

One interpretation of this policy approach is that the government believes punitive public attitudes demand the use of prison even for comparatively petty offences.

### The Prison Reform Trust's view

The Prison Reform Trust, allied charities and civic society groups together with many who manage and work in the justice system, believe that the government

1. For recent statistics see: Prison Reform Trust (2013) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile Autumn 2013, London: Prison Reform Trust.

2. Colin Moses, former Chairman, Prison Governors' Association. Talking Justice, London: Prison Reform Trust (2011).

3. Tables 18a and 18b, Ministry of Justice (2013) Proven reoffending quarterly October 2010 – September 2011, London: Ministry of Justice.

4. Ibid, Table 19a.

5. Table A1, Ministry of Justice (2013) 2013 Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis, London: Ministry of Justice.

6. Table 1, Ministry of Justice (2012) Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison, National Offender Management Service Annual Report and Accounts 2011-12: Management Information Addendum, London: Ministry of Justice.

7. National Audit Office (2010) Managing offenders on short custodial sentences, London: The Stationery Office.

8. Prison Reform Trust (2008) Titan Prisons: A gigantic mistake, London: Prison Reform Trust.

should make a concerted effort to reduce reliance on short prison sentences, as well as reining in overall inflation in sentence lengths. Instead it should put its money and its rhetorical weight behind effective community sentencing options and look far beyond the criminal justice system to find solutions to crime and disorder. Recent research suggests that public opinion is closer to that view than politicians appear to think. However, it may be that public support needs to be louder and clearer in order to break through the opposing rhetoric, often expressed in sensational media headlines.

## Building vocal public support for prison reform

### The state of public opinion

A People's Justice poll commissioned by the Prison Reform Trust in 1982, the year after the charity was founded, demonstrated public support for what was then known as community service. A 2011 survey similarly found that *'while the public may 'talk tough' in response to opinion polls which ask whether sentencing is harsh enough, when considering specific criminal cases and individual circumstances, there is considerable support for mitigating punishments'*.<sup>9</sup> Recent surveys conducted for the Prison Reform Trust have indicated strong public support for opportunities for people who have committed offences such as theft and vandalism to do unpaid work in the community as part of their sentence, and for drug treatment, mental health care and intensive supervision of community orders to prevent such offences being repeated.<sup>10</sup>

A 2006 ICM poll of 1,000 victims of crime commissioned by the Prison Reform Trust and Victim Support showed that almost two-thirds did not believe that prison works to reduce non-violent crime.<sup>11</sup> Research published in 2012 by Make Justice Work and Victim Support concludes that, like the general public, victims are broadly open to the use of community

sentences but have doubts as to how effective they are in practice.<sup>12</sup> The research findings suggested that raising awareness and confronting misplaced perceptions about community sentences would lead to higher levels of public support for them.<sup>13</sup> This is backed by the results of surveys conducted under the Prison Reform Trust's recent outreach programme.

### The Prison Reform Trust's work to build public support

*'...the more one learns about conditions and practices in Britain's prisons, the more convinced one becomes of the urgent need for change...*

*'If we can persuade the British public... then the battle is part won.'*

Sir Monty Finniston,  
Founding Chairman,  
Prison Reform Trust, 1981

... it should put its money and its rhetorical weight behind effective community sentencing options and look far beyond the criminal justice system to find solutions to crime and disorder.

The Prison Reform Trust was founded on the belief that people should know what is happening in their own penal system, and this remains at the core of the charity's values. Public support also has a unique power to achieve reform, whether through financial support for reform organisations, or vocal public support expressed in ways that influence decision makers.

The Prison Reform Trust fulfils its commitment to working with the public by disseminating

factual information on what is happening within the system, researching and publicising public opinion and acting as an independent advocate for change.

The Prison Reform Trust is perhaps best known for its regular, informative publications, produced for a wide range of supporters, policy makers and practitioners — first in the Prison Report (from 1987) and more recently in the Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, as well as monthly e-newsletters and, since 2013, the 'Prison: The Facts' app.

The charity makes positive use of press comment and broadcast aimed at promoting sensible messages

9. Roberts, J. and Hough, M. (2011) Custody or community? Exploring the boundaries of public punitiveness in England and Wales, *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 11(2) pp181-197, Norwich: Page Bros.
10. Prison Reform Trust (2011) Public want offenders to make amends briefing paper, London: Prison Reform Trust; Prison Reform Trust (2012) Public back community and health solutions to cutting crime – press release 18/12/12, London: Prison Reform Trust.
11. Prison Reform Trust (2006) SmartJustice briefing: Crime victims say jail doesn't work, London: Prison Reform Trust.
12. Victim Support and Make Justice Work (2012) Out in the Open: what victims really think about community sentencing, London: Victim Support and Make Justice Work.
13. Ibid.

about prison reform to a wider audience, and responding to the many criminal justice news stories with a measured, evidence-based approach. In this way, the charity's messages can be heard by millions of people each month via print and broadcast media.

Many of the Prison Reform Trust's successes over the years have been achieved without seeking the support of public opinion. However, where it has been possible to demonstrate public support, this has had a powerful impact. Three major programmes of work over the last 12 years have added to the charity's learning about working with the public.

### **SmartJustice (2002-2008)**

The Prison Reform Trust established SmartJustice in 2002, supported by the Network for Social Change and the Big Lottery Fund, in order to draw attention to and reduce the number of, people serving short prison sentences. Activities included extensive national and regional media work, publishing opinion surveys, participating in local and regional events, using creative publicity and e-campaigning.

SmartJustice succeeded in framing the debate on criminal justice in an accessible, innovative way and in taking these messages to the general public and media. It garnered cross-party support and created an active alliance of supporters. Amongst the programme's key achievements were the building of alliances with national and regional organisations, including civic society bodies such as the National Council of Women and Soroptimists International, and helping to secure the 2008 resolution by the National Federation of Women's Institutes (the NFWI) to end the inappropriate imprisonment of people with mental health problems.<sup>14</sup> This laid the foundation for the current Care not Custody campaign led jointly by the Prison Reform Trust and the NFWI and with a broad coalition of support (see below).

### **Out of Trouble (2007-12)**

2007 saw the start of the Prison Reform Trust's five-year Out of Trouble programme, supported by The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. The programme made a major, independently evaluated

contribution to a 42 per cent reduction in the number of children in custody from 2007 to 2012. Focusing on the decision to imprison — who makes the decision and who or what in turn influences the main decision makers — the team found particular success in developing relationships with key civil servants, working locally and nationally, and using research to throw new light on areas of common practice and uncover information.<sup>15</sup> Working closely with the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education and the Treasury, the Prison Reform Trust was able to inform national decision making.

At the same time the Out of Trouble team's initiative to determine what factors were driving up child custody was welcomed by local authorities with the highest child prison numbers all of whom succeeded in dropping below the national average by planned earlier intervention to support children and families in trouble and better coordination of existing services.

The Prison Reform Trust's high media profile helped to bolster the programme's effectiveness. However, the Out of Trouble team found that making e-campaigning work required considerable staff and resources and concluded that, however desirable it is in the long term to shift public opinion, penal reforms can be achieved

without it by working largely behind the scenes to achieve change.<sup>16</sup>

... where it has been possible to demonstrate public support, this has had a powerful impact.

### **Outreach programme (2010-13)**

Supported by the Monument Trust, the Prison Reform Trust invested in a programme of outreach work from 2010 to 2013 to inform public debate and support others to get involved through volunteering or pressing for reform.

**We wanted to reach a wider audience with engaging, high quality materials about the prison system**

We established new and closer working relationships with civic society organisations with a combined reach of about 1.7m people, including the Soroptimists UK, the National Council of Women and the University of the Third Age (U3A). The Soroptimists

14. Prison Reform Trust (2008) SmartJustice North East final report, Durham: Prison Reform Trust.

15. Prison Reform Trust (2012) Reducing child and youth imprisonment: learning from the Out of Trouble programme, London: Prison Reform Trust.

16. Ibid.

adopted a national campaign to reduce women's imprisonment and the National Council of Women made a resolution to call on the Government to reform women's justice. The U3A collaborated with the Prison Reform Trust to develop and disseminate discussion tools about prison reform. We collaborated with new partners with large social media networks such as Mumsnet, and benefited from ongoing partnership with the NFWI.

Thanks to these relationships and using the Internet and social media, the Prison Reform Trust is now regularly able to reach tens of thousands of people across the UK with information and opportunities to support prison reform. The charity has also been able to extend its reach at local level throughout the UK, including through local events and media coverage.

We produced new materials about prison reform in a variety of formats during the outreach programme, including film and audio material. The resources are aimed at building support for prison reform by using firsthand accounts by people with direct experience of the system and setting the context using official data and independent research. They also give guidance on how to get involved in making the system better, including through voluntary work. Some resources were produced with, and for, specific audiences. For example:

#### ❑ **Short films and audio material**

Short films and audio material containing testimony of men, women and children with convictions, policy makers and practitioners, posted on YouTube and the Prison Reform Trust website, and played at meetings and events.

#### ❑ **Targeted action packs**

We collaborated with the NFWI and the Soroptimists UK to produce tailored resources to support their campaigns:

- The Care not Custody action pack was disseminated to over 6,000 branches of the NFWI, setting out the achievements of their campaign to date seeking appropriate treatment for people with mental health needs and learning disabilities in the criminal justice system, and providing a toolkit for further action by WI members
- The Soroptimists' Action Pack was a tailored resource to support the Soroptimists' campaign to reduce women's imprisonment, disseminated to all 246 clubs UK-wide. A follow up report detailing clubs' activities and achievements will be published in 2014. This will provide a unique map of services for women as well as highlighting current gaps in provision.

#### ❑ **Talking Justice resources**

Two new resources aimed at the general public were produced and widely disseminated:

- Produced with the U3A, 'Where Do You Stand?' is a set of discussion tools aimed at non-experts aged 16 and above who are looking for authoritative and engaging material on which to base discussions in schools and community groups about prison and community sentencing in England and Wales. It includes activities based on facts and figures, firsthand accounts, photographs and films as well as a 'before and after' attitudes survey
- 'What Can I Do?' is a comprehensive, widely distributed guide to volunteering in the criminal justice system and pressing for reform, produced by the Prison Reform Trust with Pact. The guide provides the basis for one of the 'Where Do You Stand?' activities, focusing on how participants might take their interest further by taking action.

Following initial electronic and postal dissemination and a launch event in Manchester attended by representatives of the U3A, Pact, Victim Support, the Magistrates' Association, the Soroptimists UK, Action for Prisoners' Families and others, the Prison Reform Trust embarked on a programme of local Talking Justice meetings across England and Wales, to get people talking and getting involved in improving outcomes in the criminal justice system. The charity has been invited to present Talking Justice and its outreach programme in general to the NCW, the Magistrates' Association and Manchester Students Union debating society and further talks are planned throughout 2014. From January 2011 to December 2013 the charity reached well over 630,000 people with these materials and a range of other publications produced in the same period. This is in addition to routine media work by the charity's senior staff, reaching approximately eighteen and a half million people in January 2014 through printed press alone and an extraordinary 124,446,396 via web and wires!

By improving the Prison Reform Trust website and increasing social media activity, the charity achieved a 39 per cent increase in unique website visitors from 2011/12 to 2012/13 (to over 84,500), and a 27 per cent increase in page views per year (to over 400,000). Since launching a Twitter feed in January 2011, the Prison Reform Trust has built an audience of over 7,000 Twitter followers. The charity has gained over 500 Facebook 'likes' since launching an active profile in July 2012. Live streaming the charity's 2012 lecture attended by over 400 people more than doubled the event's audience.



**We wanted to support others to take action in line with our strategic aims, adding strength to work to effect reform**

A key part of the outreach programme was to build on the success of SmartJustice by developing new and closer working relationships with civic society organisations and to support them to take action. We also wanted to continue experimenting with e-campaigning, partly in order to develop more ways for the Prison Reform Trust's supporters to get actively involved in its work, thereby strengthening and sustaining their support and making the most of their influence to help achieve reform.

These two strands of work produced tangible results. As a result of being approached by the Prison Reform Trust and with the charity's ongoing support, all the civic society organisations we worked with during the programme have taken action, achieving some real change in the justice system.

**NFWI — Care not Custody**

The NFWI's 'Care not Custody' initiative was inspired by the tragic death by suicide of a schizophrenic young man in Manchester prison, the son of a WI member. Since then the Prison Reform Trust has worked in partnership with the NFWI to effect change in the justice and health system.

In 2011 the then Secretaries of State for Justice, Kenneth Clarke, and for Health, Andrew Lansley, acknowledged that they were influenced by the NFWI to make a joint commitment with the Department of Health to invest £50m to begin implementing mental health and learning disability liaison and diversion services across England. A further £25 million has recently been invested to extend pilot services but the original commitment to full roll out of liaison and diversion services has slipped from 2014 to 2017. The ongoing joint leadership by the NFWI and the Prison Reform Trust of the Care not Custody coalition which they convened is helping to maintain pressure on the government to ensure this promise is kept.

Amongst others Coalition members include the Prison Governors and Prison Officers Associations, the Police Federation of England and Wales Royal Colleges of Nursing and Psychiatrists, the Law Society and Bar

Council and many mental health and penal affairs charities.

**Soroptimists UK and National Council of Women — Reforming women's justice**

We held the first two e-campaigns on the main Prison Reform Trust website in 2011 and 2012, promoted via the networks of the charity's partners. Here we encouraged people to write to their MPs in support of new legislation to secure women's justice reforms. This took the form of a proposed amendment first to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill and then, in a slightly altered form, to the Crime and Courts Bill. The campaigns were supported by over 58 NCW members as well as many Soroptimists and others who wrote to their MPs. Together with the work of our Chair, Lord Woolf, in Parliament, this helped to secure a published government strategy on women's justice (June 2013) and a government amendment to the Offender Rehabilitation Bill that provides a first legislative foothold for rehabilitation services in the community that take account of the particular needs of women.

**What we learned**

The Prison Reform Trust's fact-based, partnership approach provides a strong and credible foundation on which to base effective communication with the public and other audiences. However, the organisation is not simply a neutral provider of information. Its communications are founded on values and aims which are not necessarily shared by all those who have the power to help achieve the changes the charity is looking for. This means the Prison Reform Trust must continually examine how it communicates with audiences who have different perspectives and motivations. Some of the challenges we encountered in the outreach programme included developing the charity's voice for non-specialist audiences and communicating nuanced messages effectively in different forums.

Regular joint work with partners like Victim Support adds important balance to the Prison Reform Trust's work. Too often the popular press in particular try to create an unhelpful divide between those who

As a result of being approached by the Prison Reform Trust and with the charity's ongoing support, all the civic society organisations we worked with during the programme have taken action, achieving some real change in the justice system.

work with victims and those who work with offenders when the shared aim is to reduce crime and distress and ensure fewer victims in future. It has also been valuable to engage with a range of audiences in order to ground the charity's messages in the real world and be persuasive. It helps that the Prison Reform Trust acts as a 'critical friend' to the prison service and many of the team have worked in, or managed, justice services and consequently understand that there are no easy answers when working with people in difficulty.

The organisation is still learning how to use Internet discussion forums and social media effectively to raise awareness and engage in constructive debate. Experimenting through collaboration with Mumsnet on a discussion thread, and working closely with the Soroptimists, has helped the Prison Reform Trust to refine its messages about reforming women's justice, including developing 'mythbusting' information.

Regular media work extends the Prison Reform Trust's reach and the charity is learning to reach out further using film and social media. The work with the NFWI, the Soroptimists and the NCW, in combination with the use of the Internet and social media, has had significant results. Relationships with civic society organisations have allowed the Prison Reform Trust to make the most of its resources by communicating with networks of people who are already engaged in their local communities. There is considerably more potential to achieve change by working in this way to inform and support civic society groups.

Involving individual members of the public actively and effectively in justice reform on a regular basis is an area of continuing development for the Prison Reform Trust. Carefully targeted e-campaigns, conducted in partnership with civic society organisations, have helped the charity to achieve change. Developing this work further will require dedicated staff resources and closer integration into the charity's regular strategic planning.

## Conclusions

There is much that can be achieved without changing public opinion or demonstrating that there is public support for reform, as seen in the Out of Trouble programme. However, vocal public support can have tangible results. It remains a longer-term aim of the Prison Reform Trust to work with its partners towards achieving cultural change at a national level, to 'mainstream' prison reform.

The Prison Reform Trust's vision is for decision makers to be operating in an environment in which mainstream public opinion is widely understood to be strongly in favour of sensible criminal justice reform. Until this goal is achieved, most policy makers will continue to feel constrained by perceptions of hostile public opinion and fears of negative headlines, distorting policy development and severely limiting progress towards a more just, humane and effective prison system.



# Challenging Perceptions:

## Considering the Value of Public Opinion

*Rachel Forster is based at University of Leeds and Liz Knight works at Leeds Museum and Discovery Centre.*

**What's it Worth? Value Inside was a collaborative project between the University of Leeds and Leeds Museums and Galleries, funded through the Art and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). It was developed to research whether providing prisoners with access to museum objects and participating in work inspired by them could contribute to levels of subjective wellbeing. The theme of the project was 'What makes something valuable?' as it was believed this would encourage the participants to challenge their existing perceptions of value and look beyond the obvious monetary value of things. However, what became clear throughout the process of planning and delivering the project was that there was the potential to make an impact on a far wider audience than just the prisoner participants. By using the project to challenge the stereotypical views held about the purpose of both prisons and museums the idea of using the institution of the museum to provide a lens for the public to view the work delivered in prisons arose. As creative work delivered in prisons is often hidden for fear of how it will be portrayed by the media and perceived by the public, could presenting it in the museum environment encourage people to challenge their existing preconceptions and allow a more open debate around the potential of rehabilitation in prisons to take place?**

The first section of this article will review existing literature from both the criminal justice sector and the museum sector as a means of highlighting areas of crossover between the two fields and the potential value that could be gained from collaborative relationships between prisons and museums. Using examples from the *What's It Worth? Value Inside* project the second section of this article will aim to

demonstrate how the perception of what the public will think made a powerful impact on the decisions and behaviours of those that were involved in the research.

Previous research suggests that the public generally know very little about life inside prison and that the main source of information from which they base their opinions is the media.<sup>1</sup> If the majority of information provided by the media is negative the concern is that this will reduce the level of confidence the public has in the criminal justice system and ultimately threaten the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of the public.<sup>2</sup> If as Andrew Coyle suggests research indicates that levels of imprisonment owe more to public opinion and political decisions than to rates of crime, the value of exploring new ways of providing the public with a realistic idea of the nature of prisons could be of great significance.<sup>3</sup> Although Anne Reuss acknowledges there is evidence that many good and positive things do currently take place in prisons, these are very rarely reported on or talked about on a broad enough social platform to spark any wider changes to policy or political opinion.<sup>4</sup> If the media cannot provide such a platform for discussion other potential forums need to be explored, one of which could be museums.

An increasing amount of research is currently being proposed and carried out to explore the different ways museums can be seen to benefit society and work successfully as agents of social change.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies around the social responsibility of museums proposes that in the twenty-first century ethical museums should be places that encourage active citizenship by developing a relationship of trust between themselves and the public they serve.<sup>6</sup> By recognising the ever shifting identities of their staff and visitors ethical museums should strive to create a more just society by engaging with themes of work that challenge

1. Roberts, J. V. and M. Hough (2005). 'The State of the Prisons: Exploring Public Knowledge and Opinion.' *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 44(3): 286-306. Feilzer, M. (2009). 'The Importance of Telling a Good Story: An Experiment in Public Criminology.' *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 48(5): 472-484.
2. Feilzer, M. (2009). 'The Importance of Telling a Good Story: An Experiment in Public Criminology.' *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 48(5): 472-484.
3. Coyle, A. (2005). *Understanding Prisons: Key Issues in Policy and Practice*. Berkshire, Open University Press.
4. Reuss, A. (2003). 'Taking a Long Hard Look at Imprisonment.' *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 42(5): 426-436.
5. Sandell, R. (2003). 'Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change.' *Museum and Society* 1(1): 45-62. Silverman, L. H. (2010). *The Social Work of Museums*. London, Routledge.
6. Besterman, T. (2011). *Museum Ethics. A Companion to Museum Studies*. S. Macdonald. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell. Lynch, B. T. (2011). *Collaboration, Contestation, and Creative Conflict: on the Efficacy of Museum/Community Partnerships. The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics*. J. Marstine. London, Routledge. Marstine, J., Ed. (2011). *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics — Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum*. Oxon, Routledge.

traditional values and orthodoxies, in order to provide a forum for visitors and staff to think through the difficult issues facing society.<sup>7</sup> As Janet Marstine suggests one way for museums to achieve this aspiration is to forge collaborative relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders and be willing to assume the risks associated with taking novel standpoints which would suggest a level of openness about such collaborations to the public.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of a museum and a prison as collaborative partners is not as strange or new a concept as it may first appear. According to Bennett if we look to the original intention behind why museums and prisons were established clear similarities can be found. This can be seen from the idea that they both target behaviours or beliefs seen by the government as in need of transformation, and encourage people to alter these to be more in line with those behaviours deemed as being acceptable.<sup>9</sup> In this sense museums and prisons are at opposing ends of the same spectrum. If museums aim to subtly coerce people into changes in behaviour then a prison can be viewed as the next step when that fails. Recent research by Charlotte Bilby *et al* can be seen to support this idea and suggests that the positive feeling achieved through participation in arts based interventions can contribute to a sense of community cohesion and a feeling of achievement, both of which can be linked to secondary desistance from crime.<sup>10</sup>

### What's it Worth? Value Inside

The Discovery Centre Museum is unlike other museums and consequently perfectly placed to provide an alternative lens through which the public can view the *What's it Worth? Value Inside* project. The Museum is one of nine sites that make up the Leeds Museum Service and is the main site responsible for conserving and storing the objects not on display at the other sites. In addition it is also responsible for developing community engagement and research into the collections. Unlike the other museums in the service the

majority of the exhibits at the Discovery Centre display objects from the collections alongside work created by different community groups as part of the outreach work delivered. Visits to the Discovery Centre are by appointment only and often include a tour of the building which consists of the storage facility for the main collections, as well as the displays of the community project work. One of these is now the Cabinet of Curiosity which was built in HMP Wakefield as part of the project and contains the artefacts created by the prisoner participants during the project. As the cabinet was donated to the Discovery Centre at the end of the project it too is now part of the museum's collection of objects creating a lasting legacy for the prisoner participants to feel proud of.

For the museum service this project was an opportunity to engage with a new community that is traditionally closed to museums, as well the rest of society. It was hoped it would provide an opportunity to explore the potential impact museums can make on prisoner wellbeing and how such engagement could inform future museum community engagement practice.

The first encounter with the concept of public perception arose while attempting to put together a collection of museum objects that could be used to represent the theme of value during the project. At this point it became clear that some of the curatorial staff at the museum were initially reluctant to suggest objects from their collection to be included. Some cited their perception was that taking the objects into a high security prison posed too great a risk to the objects and that their reluctance for the inclusion of certain objects was to protect them from harm. For other staff it was more about their personal opinion as a member of the public, based on what they had heard in the press, rather than their professional opinion as a museum curator. Their perception was that such people did not necessarily deserve access to these objects, and that engaging with prisoners might reflect badly on the museum service in the eyes of the existing and established museum audience.

The idea of a museum and a prison as collaborative partners is not as strange or new a concept as it may first appear.

7. Besterman, T. (2011). *Museum Ethics. A Companion to Museum Studies*. S. Macdonald. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell. Lynch, B. T. (2011). Collaboration, Contestation, and Creative Conflict: on the Efficacy of Museum/Community Partnerships. *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics*. J. Marstine. London, Routledge.
8. Marstine, J., Ed. (2011). *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics — Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum*. Oxon, Routledge.
9. Bennett, T. (1995). *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London, Routledge.
10. Bilby, C., Parkes, R. & Ridley, L. 2013. *Re-imagining Futures: Exploring Arts Interventions and the Process of Desistance*. London: Arts Alliance.

Even when curators were keen to be involved in the project and suggest objects for inclusion there was still evidence of some areas of public perception that required challenging. One of the curators was under the impression that the prisoners would only be interested in objects that related to prison, as though they would never have had any concept of life outside, almost as if all they had ever been in life was a prisoner. In general, the museum staff were initially confused by some of my choices of museum objects, particularly the World War one postcard. I selected this object as I thought the prisoners would value the skill of the needlework, as I was aware of the Fine Cell Work undertaken by some prisoners. I also thought they would make a connection between the soldier trying to keep in touch with his family and their own efforts to maintain family relationships from within prison.<sup>11</sup> For the museum staff this object was not one instantly thought of when working with groups of men, particularly not those perceived as being hardened criminals. The museum Education Officer who participated in a number of sessions during the project, was particularly shocked at the strong affiliation felt by some of the participants to the postcard, most notably when it was voted as one of their favourite objects during the object handling sessions delivered by the group to others in the education department. Several other objects that were popular amongst the prisoners during these sessions, and the reasons behind their popularity seemed to surprise the museum staff when they were fed back after the project.

The most interesting example of this can be seen in the popularity of the honey bees which received 5 votes during the group object handling sessions. By spending time researching current issues regarding the decline of bees and the contributions bees can be seen to make to us as a society, the prisoner that chose to champion them was able to find information that served as a 'hook' to spark interest and discussion from the people he was presenting to. The feedback received from the prisoners explaining their reasons for choosing the bees as their favourite object surprised many of the museum staff however, one quote in particular challenged any stereotypical views they might have held.

*All the objects symbolised important aspects of life, but the bees suggest something of our*

In general, the museum staff were initially confused by some of my choices of museum objects, particularly the World War one postcard.

*responsibilities towards future generations.*  
(Prisoner Participant)

The focus on the future, and the level of awareness of the needs of other people were both areas that the museum staff had not considered prisoners in a high security prison would be concerned about.

The most popular object with the prisoners was the broken verge escapement watch which received eight votes. I selected this object as I hoped the prisoners would explore the idea of whether an object still has value if it can no longer fulfil its original purpose. Interestingly, many of the prisoners saw it as an advantage that the watch was broken as it allowed them to see the detail and aesthetic quality of the mechanism inside, which would otherwise have been hidden from them. An area of focus with the watch was the name engraved on it. There was much discussion about whether this would be the name of the maker or the owner however, what this level of personalisation created was an appreciation of the skills required of the maker to produce such an item.

*I liked the intricate design on the back of the timepiece, plus the way the mechanism on the back is also on display. (Prisoner quote)*

The museum staff were generally surprised at the focus on the aesthetic qualities of the watch as an object and impressed that the comments received made little mention of the object being broken.

The concept of what the public may think also made an impact on the prisoner participants themselves at several points during the project. As a result of existing damage from years of use within education sessions at the museum, the ancient Egyptian Shabti unfortunately broke while being unwrapped by one of the prisoners. The collective sense of horror that ran through the group made it clear just how much the opportunity to participate in the project meant to the individuals and fear at the potential for this incident to ruin future engagement with the museum. Interestingly they had two main concerns as a result of this incident. The first was whether I would 'get in trouble' with the museum and as a consequence cancel the rest of the project. The second concern was how the museum, and consequently the public, would perceive the object

11. FineCellWork. (2013). 'Stitching a Future.' Retrieved 15/10/2013, from [http://www.finecellwork.co.uk/about\\_us/mission\\_and\\_vision](http://www.finecellwork.co.uk/about_us/mission_and_vision).

getting broken, as they did not want the museum staff to think they had not valued the objects or appreciated the opportunity to have access to them.

During the process of writing the information panel to accompany the final cabinet, a discussion ensued about how much emphasis should be placed on the fact that the work was created by serving prisoners. Some of the participants wanted to play on the fact and go along with several stereotypes such as including bars across the text and changing the name of the project to something 'more prison sounding', in order to play to people's fascination with the hidden world of prison as portrayed by the press. Other participants strongly objected to this idea and felt it undermined the whole concept behind the project. They wanted to avoid mentioning prison at all, and have the work viewed and valued by the public in the same way as any other community project would be.

The one area all the participants were in agreement on was the sense of pride felt at having their work displayed in the museum. This was reflected in comments made in the diaries they kept, as well as in the focus group evaluation at the end of the project, where the feedback from one participant was;

*I have to say that the cabinet has to be the high point of the project. To see your work displayed and knowing that it's going to be somewhere near, in our local museum that is just amazing. To know that somebody may actually, like, appreciate your work. (Participant quote)*

This also raised the idea of the degree of trust the participants were placing in the museum in terms of putting their work up for public scrutiny and believing that it would be presented in a positive light. This was also reflected in the diary entries of several participants.

*Hopefully the exhibiting of the cabinet of curiosity and the catalogue will go well, generate interest and change a few ideas about the kind of thing prisoners get up to and are capable of learning/ achieving. (Participant quote)*

This idea seemed to stem from the acknowledgement of the amount of trust the museum were placing in them, as prisoners, by allowing them to have access to the museum objects, particularly the more delicate and fragile ones. In many ways this

should hopefully alleviate the concerns any museum staff may have about future projects.

When the cabinet was finally exhibited in the museum, the project was presented as a case study rather than as an exhibition, as this ensured more information could be given about why the project had taken place and the potential value that could be gained from it. The museum was proud of the collaboration with the prison so wanted to celebrate the success of the project and share it openly with the public rather than hide it for fear of a negative reception. In many ways it is this confidence in presenting the work that has inspired so much positive interest from those who have seen it. From the initial feedback the museum has received regarding the cabinet the overall reaction seems to be a sense of shock followed by a great deal of intrigue. Shock first of all that the museum would actively seek to deliver

outreach in a high security prison, followed by disbelief that the cabinet itself could have been built by prisoners at HMP Wakefield. Overall where people have had something to say about the cabinet or the project it has been to ask questions rather than pass any sort of negative comment. As a result of this positive reception, the decision has been made to create a page on the museum's website to share additional information about the project as a more in

depth case study, to hopefully answer some of the questions raised already and signpost the project to others using the website. This will also provide a platform to share with the public how the findings from the research are being disseminated and received in both the criminal justice sector and the museum studies world.

In addition to the display of the cabinet the prisoner-made artefacts that directly link to the museum objects have been integrated into the museum collection, by being added as 'derived items'. This means that the prison project adds to the existing interpretation available for the objects and becomes part of the individual museum object's story. Consequently, whenever that particular museum object is searched for in the future by a member of the public, the What's it Worth project will be highlighted. This will hopefully help to create a lasting legacy for the project outside the timescale for the research itself.

From the outset it has always been the museum's intention that this project would pave the way for a longer term relationship to be developed between themselves and the prison, so that future research into

The one area all the participants were in agreement on was the sense of pride felt at having their work displayed in the museum.



potential social benefits can be continued. Therefore, it has always been the plan to feedback the public's opinions of the project to the prisoners that participated and the wider population in HMP Wakefield. As more feedback is gathered and collated, a display will be developed in the forthcoming months and taken into the prison to highlight the positive way the work has been received. This brings the project full circle back to the original aim of the research which was to explore the effect on levels of subjective wellbeing of prisoners who had access to museum objects and activities inspired by them. It also highlights a cycle that can be developed through using the museum as a lens to critically analyse and acknowledge positive work being achieved in prisons, and to propose changes and improvements that can be made in the future. If receiving feedback from the public can motivate prisoners to engage further with activities delivered by the museum, can feeding this back to the public through the museum provide the public with a feeling that they can make an impact on how their local museum engages with the prison community, and more

directly on the prisoners who participate in the work? Additionally, can the empowering effect strengthen the collaborative relationship between the prison and museum and promote an environment where all parties actively work towards positive prison reforms.

### Conclusion

Overall the project can be seen as an example of working towards an area of secondary desistance from crime, by establishing a clear link to the community for the prisoners who participated.<sup>12</sup> However, if through discussion alone the various stereotypes about prison held by the museum staff were broken down and dispelled, there would appear to be strong evidence to suggest the potential for the same to be true for the wider museum public. By using the display of the artefacts in the museum to inspire a forum where questions can be asked and answered about prison, a more open and honest debate may be possible in the wider public arena.



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12. Bilby, C., R. Parkes, et al. (2013). *Re-imagining Futures: Exploring Arts Interventions and the Process of Desistance*. London, Arts Alliance.



# Repression and Revolution: Representations of Criminal Justice and Prisons in Recent Documentaries

*Dr Jamie Bennett is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.*

How do members of the general public create a view of prisons and imprisonment? What resources do they draw upon in order to produce and sustain their image of incarceration? It has been argued that our view of reality is drawn from a combination of personal experiences, the experience of intimate and influential others that are shared with us, information from institutions including the state and political machinery, and also from popular culture.<sup>1</sup> As most people have little direct contact with prisons but popular culture is saturated with images of crime and punishment,<sup>2</sup> it is argued that the public rely to a greater extent on media representation in order to form their image of imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> As Ray Surette has described:

*[P]eople use knowledge they obtain from the media to construct a picture of the world, an image of reality on which they base their actions. This process, sometimes called 'the social construction of reality', is particularly important in the realm of crime, justice, and the media.<sup>4</sup>*

In more straightforward terms, Professor David Wilson has suggested that:

*ultimately when we present an image of prison we shape the public's expectation about what prison is like, and what happens inside, of who prisoners are and what they have done.<sup>5</sup>*

Just as the role of prisons in society is contested, so this is reflected in media representations, which may play a range of roles including: encouraging regressive

and punitive responses, being concerned with order and the maintenance of social systems, promoting reform, or presenting a more radical critique.

In relation to order, commentators have seen media organizations as a tool of social control, acting in conformity with political and economic institutions.<sup>6</sup> Representations of crime, it has been argued, have been used in order to generate a climate of fear so as to soften people up for political and economic marketing.<sup>7</sup> For many writers and commentators, media representations largely reinforce existing, conventional penal policy and social power structures. For example, Ray Surette has argued that:

*In essence, [media] supplies a large amount of information about specific crimes and conveys the impression that criminals threaten the social system and its institutions, but it provides little explicit system wide information to help the public to evaluate or comprehend the factual descriptive information provided about individual crimes and cases... These messages translate into support for law-and-order policies and existing criminal justice agencies.<sup>8</sup>*

Others have gone even further in order to argue that the representation of prison in the media is often much worse than the reality, or focuses disproportionately on the most serious crimes and this functions to prepare viewers for a decline in prison standards and an increase in the use of imprisonment.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, it has been suggested that the media may play a reform function. It has been described that fictional depictions of prisons shape views by providing

1. Surette, R. (1998) *Prologue: Some Unpopular Thoughts about Popular Crime* in Bailey, F.Y. & Hale, D.C. (eds) *Popular Culture, Crime, and Justice* Belmont: West/Wadsworth.
2. Rafter, N. and Brown, M. (2011) *Criminology goes to the movies: Crime theory and popular culture* New York: New York University Press.
3. Surette, R. (1997) *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice* 2nd Edition Belmont: West/Wadsworth.
4. Ibid p. 1.
5. Wilson, D. (2003) *Lights, Camera, Action in Prison Report* No. 60 p.27-9, p.28.
6. Chomsky, N. (1991) *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* New York: Seven Stories.
7. Lee, M. (2007) *Inventing fear of crime: Criminology and the politics of anxiety* Cullompton: Willan.
8. Surette (1997) see n.3 p. 70 and 82.
9. See Wilson (2003) see n. 5 and Nellis, M. (2005) *Future punishment in American science fiction films* in Mason, P. (ed) *Captured by the media: Prison discourse in popular culture* Cullompton: Willan p.210-228.

an insight into a world that the general public know little about and have little direct experience of, they provide a benchmark for acceptable treatment of prisoners, translate academic and political concerns into digestible narratives, expose perspectives that are often at odds with media and official descriptions, and create empathy with prisoners and prison staff.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, popular culture is an important resource for challenging received wisdoms and encouraging reflection and engagement with debate.

Whilst there is a growing body of work discussing fictional representations of prisons in film and television, in this article I will focus on two recent examples of documentary representations in the UK and USA: *Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury* (2013), a popular fly on the wall documentary and *The House I Live in* (2012), a feature length documentary which offers a critique of America's war on drugs. Documentaries about prisons have been less extensively covered in academic literature than feature films and TV, but it is argued that they should not be underestimated in their influence and the way that they reflect prison discourse in popular culture.

At this stage it is worth noting that documentaries in general tend to be seen as offering a degree of authenticity and objective truth by capturing reality. Such 'truth claims' are fundamental to both the appeal and the influence of documentaries. However, these claims are contested.<sup>11</sup> Documentary and non-fiction forms in general are creative enterprises. The selection of subject matter, who and what is recorded and how that is then arranged into narrative form are all selections that interpret and modify the subject matter, introducing the subjective influence of the author. Documentary forms do not therefore offer truth but instead a creative representation of reality.

This article will explore documentary representations of criminal justice and imprisonment that offer contrasting perspectives. This will be used in order to reveal the potential of popular culture to offer

a forum for public discourse about criminal justice, but also highlight the limitations of operating within a system of production and distribution that is tied to social power structures.

### Disorder and order: Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury

The hit documentary series *Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury*, two fifty minute films broadcast on ITV1 during February 2013, attracted an audience of around six million.<sup>12</sup> This was the latest in the *Her Majesty's Prison* series which has included films on the women's prison Holloway and the two large local prisons at Wandsworth and Manchester. The films purported to offer close up, fly-on-the-wall style documentaries charting the daily life of prison institutions.

*Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury* had a particular focus on violence and disorder. Prisoners were filmed involved in a hostage incident, smashing cells, undertaking dirty protests and self-harming. This was also accompanied by CCTV footage of historical incidents of violence. Prisoners were filmed talking in a macho way about violence, gang conflict and the need for self-preservation. This Boschian, dystopian vision of prison life was summed up by one prisoner who shouted as he walked past a camera: 'welcome to Hell'. The voiceovers reinforce

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this view describing the prisoners as murderers, rapists and drug dealers, who are 'the most dangerous and disruptive 18-21 year olds in the country'. Many of the staff comments used also confirmed this image of prisoners, with one describing that prisoners have 'morals and principles [that] are completely different'. The young prisoners are depicted as 'feral',<sup>13</sup> out of control, a volatile risk to everyone that they come into contact with. They are represented as exactly the people who should be excluded from society. They do not share the values of 'law abiding' citizens. Through the foregrounding of violence, the film consciously and consistently engages in a process of constructing

10. Wilson, D. and O'Sullivan, S. (2004) *Images of Incarceration: Representations of Prison in Film and Television Drama* Winchester: Waterside Press.

11. Winston, B. (2008) *Claiming the real II: Documentary: Grierson and beyond* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

12. See <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/feb/19/tv-ratings-her-majestys-prison> accessed on 29 October 2013.

13. Sim, J. (2009) *Punishment and prisons: Power and the carceral state* London: Sage

prisoners as 'others' or 'some form of 'folk devil' upon whom the ills of society can be hung'.<sup>14</sup>

The popular media clamoured in the way one might expect. For example under the headline 'HMP houses animals', *The Sun* reported that 'Viewers have voiced concerns over ITV's Her Majesty's Prison — Aylesbury, calling for 'out of control' inmates to never be released'.<sup>15</sup> The report went on to record social media commentary about 'animals [that] cannot be rehabilitated', 'scum bags', and 'hood rats' being held in a jail that was 'too soft'.

It is right to acknowledge that the prison itself has been through a period of problems, with critical inspection reports citing high levels of violence amongst prisoners and poor levels of activity.<sup>16</sup> However, the most recent report noted that the decline in the performance of the prison had been reversed in most areas but that: 'Aylesbury has a grim reputation, perhaps not helped by a recent TV documentary'.<sup>17</sup> The Inspectorate report placed greater context to the incidents of violence, stating:

*Aylesbury held some young men whose behaviour was very challenging and others who were very vulnerable — and plenty who were both. Holding them all safely was a challenge. Most prisoners did feel safe at the time of the inspection, and levels of violence had reduced since the short-follow up inspection and were now comparable with other similar establishments — although that is by no means low enough.*

The Inspection report offers context and perspective, giving a more sober perspective on both individual prisoners and the organisation. This is a balance that the film lacks.

In contrast to how prisoners were represented and perceived, the staff came in for praise in the press, including *The Telegraph*, which contrasted the 'caged,

largely uneducated, physically strong, sometimes psychologically fragile young men' with staff who appeared 'a generally decent bunch, intent on trying to change the inmates' destructively ground in codes of behaviour'.<sup>18</sup> Prison staff are shown attempting to calmly resolve problems, facing up to terrible risks and hidebound by restrictions placed upon them. They are the 'thin blue line' protecting society from the marauding hoards contained within.

The most recent Inspection report was more mixed in its observations of staff. It acknowledged improvements and the generally 'friendly' relationships between staff and prisoners, but did also note that a few staff 'had an indifferent and unhelpful attitude', and that there were some concerns regarding the use of force and disciplinary measures. This cultural tension

is not openly explored in the documentary and instead the staff selected are largely positive and humane. This acts to obscure the challenges that the Inspectorate highlighted whilst also exaggerating the difference between the heroic, decent staff and the feral prisoners.

The documentary strategies and representations of staff and prisoners carry an ideological payload intended to deliver an impact on viewers' perceptions. Richard Sparks has argued that the way prisoners are perceived can create and sustain more punitive approaches in criminal

## The documentary strategies and representations of staff and prisoners carry an ideological payload intended to deliver an impact on viewers' perceptions.

justice:

*Where offenders are viewed as more numerous, more threatening, less corrigible and, perhaps, less akin to ourselves, then priorities accordingly tend to focus on deterrence and secure containment.*<sup>19</sup>

The approach of this documentary is aimed at sustaining and legitimising punitive 'law and order' politics and high levels of imprisonment. It presents an image that detaches violence from individual life

14. Warr, J. (2012) *Afterword* in Crewe, B. and Bennett, J. (eds) *The Prisoner* Abingdon: Routledge p. 142-8.  
15. Available at <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/showbiz/tv/4803609/twitter-outrage-over-violent-prisoners-on-itv-show-her-majestys-prison.html> accessed on 16 October 2013.  
16. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2011) *Report of an unannounced short follow-up inspection of HMYOI Aylesbury 3 – 6 May 2011* London: HMCIP available at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/prison-and-yoi-inspections/aylesbury/aylesbury-2011.pdf> accessed on 27 October 2013.  
17. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2013) *Report of an unannounced inspection of HMYOI Aylesbury 2-12 April 2013* London: HMCIP available at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/prison-and-yoi-inspections/aylesbury/aylesbury-2013.pdf> accessed on 27 October 2013.  
18. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/9878441/Her-Majestys-Prison-Aylesbury-ITV-review.html> accessed on 16 October 2013.  
19. Sparks, R. (2007) *The politics of imprisonment* in Jewkes, Y. (ed) *Handbook on Prisons* Cullompton: Willan p.73-94.

histories, institutional and social context, inviting the viewer to condemn the action without attempt to understand. It also suggests that the right people are in prison and the establishment is keeping the viewer safe from the harm and havoc they would create outside. By taking such an approach it is supporting a case for existing policies and use of imprisonment, excluding alternative voices.

**'A Holocaust in slow motion':  
The House I Live in<sup>20</sup>**

Critical or radical criminology seeks to situate criminal justice and imprisonment in its wider social context, asking questions about its role in power and inequality. Such work often calls attention to the over-representation of the poor and minority ethnic communities in the criminal justice net whilst simultaneously illustrating that harms created by the powerful, such as financial and environmental harms, fall outside the ambit of criminal justice. This school of thought suggests that criminal justice is one of the means through which power structures are created, maintained and legitimised. As a result, those who share these views often call for dramatic change including abolishing imprisonment, whilst also calling for wider social change. *The house I live in* is an example of a film that brings just such a critical perspective into popular culture.

*The house I live in* is a polemical documentary attacking America's 'War on drugs'. It is made by Eugene Jarecki and won a Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival in 2012. It follows on from Jarecki's successful films presenting critical liberal accounts of recent political history (*The trials of Henry Kissinger*, 2002; *Reagan*, 2011), capitalist economics (*Freakonomics*, 2010) and contemporary American foreign policy (*Why we Fight*, 2005).

The main argument of the film is that the 'War on drugs' has been ineffective in reducing drug misuse and has had a devastating impact on communities and criminal justice institutions. The film argues that the impact has fallen particularly heavily on black and minority ethnic communities. The impact is presented as reverberating through generations. It is also

suggested that criminal justice institutions including police, courts and prisons are creaking under the economic and emotional weight of the work. In other words, the film represents a 'crisis of legitimacy'<sup>21</sup> where the system has chronically failed to provide a sense of justice to those who operate it, those who are subject to it and those on whose behalf it is provided.

However, the film goes further in order to reveal how the 'War on drugs' is deeply rooted in structures of power and inequality. The criminalisation of drugs is set in historical context, suggesting that this has been used in the past as a way of problematizing migrant and minority groups in America such as Chinese (opium), Mexicans (marijuana) and the urban black population (crack). These arguments are pushed to their furthest

limit, by suggesting that the targeting of minority populations can be understood as having common features with the process through which communities move towards genocide. In one interview in the film, the creator of *The Wire*, David Simon asserts that 'The drug war is a Holocaust in slow motion'.

The film also argues that the powerful are sustained by the 'War on drugs', politically through punitive populism and economically through wealth created as a result of the commercialisation of criminal justice. The arguments that the film presents are familiar within

critical criminology, concerned as they are with issues of power and inequality. However, the presentation of these arguments in an accessible, popular form is unusual and Jarecki has intentionally crafted a space where such arguments can be articulated and heard by an audience outside of academia.

A number of methods are deployed in the film in order to convey the arguments. These include personal testimonies, expert statements, statistical inter-titles and found footage. The personal testimonies are provided by people caught up in drugs and crime. This includes prisoners, family members, and professionals such as police, a prison manager and a judge. These testimonies perform a function in deconstructing and challenging the conventional justifications for contemporary drug policies. The interviews with prisoners and family members reveal the problems of poverty, family dysfunction and lack of opportunity that

It also suggests  
that the right  
people are in prison  
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establishment is  
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safe from the harm  
and havoc they  
would create  
outside.

20. The analysis of this film was originally published as Bennett, J. (2013) *Film review: The House I live in (2012) in Race and Justice* 3(2) p.159-62.

21. Cavadino, M., Dignan, J. and Mair, G. (2013) *The penal system: An introduction* fifth edition London: Sage p.22.

have shaped their destinies. As a result they humanise these people and reveal the complexity and ambiguity of their circumstances. The interviews with criminal justice professionals serve to reveal the frustrations and futility of their work as they describe the unwinnable nature of the 'War on drugs'. Together, the testimonies offer an account that is presented as a credible challenge to the legitimacy of current American policy and practice.

The factual inter-titles present statistics of immense size, with numbers that are shocking. For example:

*Since 1971 the War on Drugs has cost over \$1 trillion and resulted in more than 45 million arrests... During that time, illegal drug use has remained unchanged.*

And

*Today 2.7 million children in America have a parent behind bars... These children are more likely to be incarcerated during their lifetime than other children.*

These factual titles are situated within personal stories, inviting the viewer to feel the depth of the issues as well as their almost unimaginable scale.

The documentary approaches deployed are used in order to convince and persuade the viewer.

The content of the argument is polemic, drawing upon critical criminology, providing a stage for perspectives that are not prominent in mainstream debate. As a result they are vulnerable to criticism and attack as extreme. The filmic techniques attempt to neutralise such criticisms. By drawing upon multiple perspectives, including criminal justice professionals and experts, the film presents itself as credible and reasonable, repositioning the arguments as accepted by knowledgeable, conventional and mainstream people. The methods deployed also mix both factual material and emotional impact; informing and engaging the viewer. Of course, the film does take a particular perspective: the interviewees are deliberately selected, the facts are carefully chosen and the film advocates rather than investigates. However, the documentary techniques are important in obscuring this and making the material digestible.

## Conclusion

This article has explored two documentary films about crime, criminal justice and prisons. Those films have contrasting aims and ideologies; one reinforcing and legitimating the status quo, whilst the other offers a radical critique. Yet both, as with non-fiction representations generally, make 'truth claims'. Their style, techniques, and subject matter attempt to package them as offering authentic and credible accounts. By deconstructing these films, it is possible to reveal that documentaries do not provide an objective truth but instead are creative treatments of reality, adopting particular perspectives, ideas and values.

It is perhaps not surprising that two such contrasting and competing visions should be produced at the present time. It has been argued that recent years have seen a loosening of the grip of popular punitiveness and the appeal of an ever-expanding prison population. It has been proposed that there are three primary reasons for this.<sup>22</sup> The first is that there is a growing body of evidence that questions the effectiveness of imprisonment and instead suggests that it may be harmful to society as a whole. Second, declining rates of crime, particularly serious violent crime, across developed nations has meant that there is diminishing political capital from tough

rhetoric. Third, the financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent economic crisis has meant that the approaches of the past are no longer affordable. At this moment, therefore the dominant ideas have come to be weakened and there is an opening for an alternative perspective. In this context, *The house I live in* could be seen as a cultural expression of this questioning and its production an indication of the potential for change. In contrast, *Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury* could be described as bolstering the dominant ideas of law and order, maintaining the status quo of large scale imprisonment. These two films illustrate how issues of crime, criminal justice and imprisonment are contested in real time not only in politics, academia and professional practice, but also in popular culture.

The products of popular culture do not simply exist in isolation, but instead interact with viewers and are also distributed through organisations that themselves

Of course, the film does take a particular perspective: the interviewees are deliberately selected, the facts are carefully chosen and the film advocates rather than investigates.

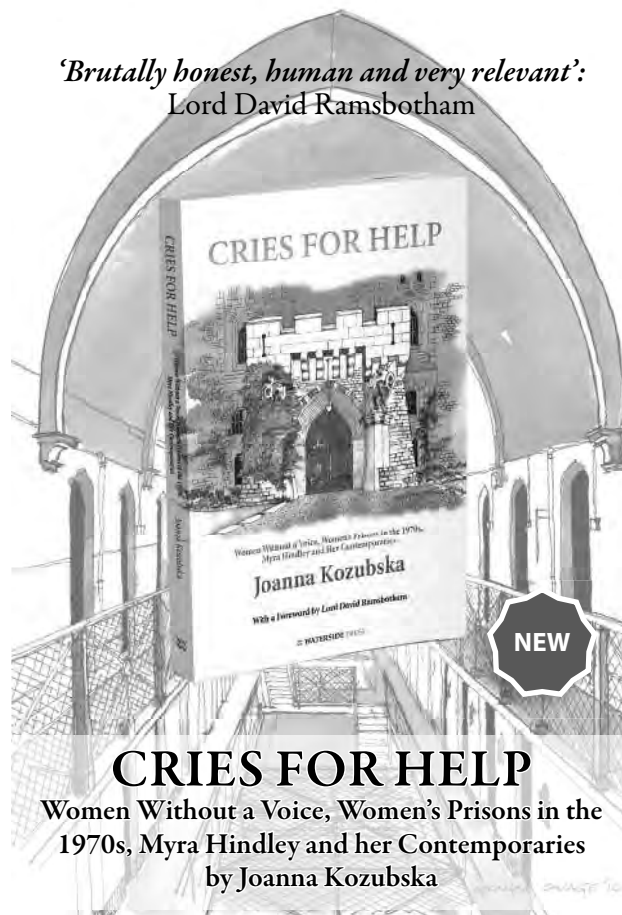
22. Cullen, F., Jonson, C., and Stohr, M. (2014) *The American prison: Imagining a different prison* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



are implicated in wider webs of social power. Viewers exercise some agency, they pick what they watch and that may reflect preconceived ideas and beliefs.<sup>23</sup> They also interpret and engage with the ideas represented. However, the structure of the media is also important. It is worth noting that the more conservative film, *Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury* was broadcast on a mainstream terrestrial television channel, ITV1, to an audience of six million, whilst *The house I live in* could only be seen on a limited theatrical run, on a small digital channel, BBC4, or on DVD or download. This illustrates that the major media channels with instant access to large audiences both promote and reflect dominant values whilst alternative voices are pushed to the margins, often trying to generate an audience through diverse and dispersed outlets. The entangled nature of prisons, the media and social power can be seen in this inter-relationship.

Media representation is essential to understanding the interaction between the prison and the public. The documentary form has a particular resonance for viewers due to the claims it makes for authenticity and truth, even though such claims need to be understood as a function of form whereas the images and ideas presented are in fact creative and selective. The representation of the prison is a means through which the contested role of crime, criminal justice and imprisonment is played out. Popular culture is important in creation and maintenance of the legitimacy of the existing system through the dissemination and propagation of ideas about what the prison is for, who is being detained and why they are there. However, there is also a role for the media in the deconstruction and challenge of dominant ideas, albeit one that is muted and faint, but nonetheless important.

*'Brutally honest, human and very relevant':*  
Lord David Ramsbotham



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23. King, A. and Maruna, S. (2006) *the function of fiction for a punitive public* in Mason, P. (ed) *Captured by the Media: Prison discourse in popular culture* Cullompton: Willan p.16-30.

# How the public sphere was privatized and why civil society could reclaim it

Mary S Corcoran is a Lecturer in Criminology at Keele University.

## Introduction

**Nowadays, one hears a great deal of talk about the need to legitimize the criminal justice system by bringing it closer to the public via programmes which create bridges between 'communities' and 'offenders' as a route to supporting the latter's reintegration to society. Direct participation in criminal justice by citizens represents a positive step in re-socialising justice, it is argued.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it asserts the community's interest in avoiding offender recidivism (reoffending), and holds the police, prison and probation services to account for the large amounts of public money spent on their operations. Yet, the belief that bringing 'law abiding' and 'offending' citizens together will foster mutual recognition or integration rests on unexamined assumptions that social solidarity and interaction among citizens have been unaffected by rising social inequality and successive moral panics about law and order in recent decades.**

There is a particular irony in all of this because, contrary to the nostalgic political visions that are conjured up by the 'Big Society' project, the symbolic and material significance of the public sphere has been undermined by advocates of marketization and the primacy of private interests as the driving forces of 'society'. For example, the self same proponents of the Big Society equally assert that one tier of social organisation, civil society, can *only* be promoted if another tier of social organisation, the welfare state, is demoted.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the apparent inconsistencies in the Big Society/Small State agenda can be reconciled only as part of an ideological project for supporting a preferred version of community comprising the so-called 'law abiding majority', with the goals of radical privatisation of public welfare systems. Such thinking reflects an ideologically preferred, post-Thatcherite vision in which society is best served by a return to what the Conservative MP, Jeremy Hunt, coined as 'collaborative individualism' which is exercised through

the primary social institutions of family, kinship and community. In this ideological world, the operative concept of 'community' is underpinned by assumptions about the inherent benevolence and toleration of citizens, including towards offenders and outsiders, as well as suppositions that social goods such as security and property rights are consensually shared and not subject to conflicting claims between groups.

This short article is part of a longer project for building a case for a renewed theory and practice of civic and local activism that is vested in social democratic principles such as social justice, economic redistribution and the assumption of citizenship rights by disenfranchised groups, including offenders.<sup>3</sup> As such, it is necessarily concerned with relationships between what might be broadly conceived as 'social' and 'criminal' forms of justice. In particular, this paper reflects on the taken-for-granted suppositions in political rhetoric that promoting community activism as a method of reintegrating marginalised groups is self-evidently beneficial and efficacious. As it cannot cover all of the arguments, the following discussion considers ways in which concepts of the 'public sphere' and civil society have been redefined to equate with individual responsibility, property ownership and qualified access to citizenship rights in ways that are consistent with neoliberal ideology. It concludes that acknowledging the barriers restricting communities and publics from mutual recognition is the first step to reclaiming the public sphere in the interests of critical citizenship.

The article firstly explores theories of the public sphere as a communicative space where citizens come together to discover common interests and to participate in public debate, decision-making and social action.<sup>4</sup> Next, it examines how, from the 1980s, Conservative, New Labour and latterly the Coalition governments succumbed to the economic and political dominance of market fundamentalism and contributed to a decline in support for the social state, collective welfare and security for all. Thirdly, it discusses how the interests of the public good became equated with those of the 'free' market, which has

1. Maruna, S. and LeBel, T. (2003) 'Welcome home? Examining the 're-entry court' concept from a strengths-based perspective', *Western Criminology Review* 4, 91-107.
2. Norman, J (2010) *The Big Society: The Anatomy of the New Politics*. Buckingham: University of Buckingham Press.
3. Carrington, K., Ball, M., O'Brien, E., & J. Tauri (eds) (2012) *Crime, Justice and Social Democracy: International Perspectives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
4. Habermas, J. (1992) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Oxford, Polity Press.

strengthened socio-economic barriers and inhibited interaction and recognition among citizens. The concluding discussion makes constructive proposals for putting social inclusiveness, citizenship rights and incorporating the voices of disenfranchised people at the centre of rebuilding just systems of social reintegration.

### Refeudalisation of the public sphere

My starting point is taken from Jurgen Habermas's (1962/1992) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, where he gave theoretical shape to the notion of the Bourgeois Public Sphere as a forum in which 'political participation is enacted through the medium of talk' in modern societies. According to Habermas, the public sphere is given over to the activities of civil society where citizens publicise ('bring to the public') their ideas and engage in deliberative politics about the common good and democracy. Crucially, it fosters an independent civil society which ought to be separate from either states or markets:

*Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory (ibid.).<sup>5</sup>*

Although it is a utopian proposition, Habermas did not claim that the public sphere is an oasis of autonomy and freedom from dominance by political or corporate interests. Rather his thesis was concerned with the contraction of 'critical publicity' from its origins in the Enlightenment to the dominance of corporate influence on the state and the concentrated ownership of the mass media by the mid-20th century. This transformation, characterised as the 'refeudalisation of the public sphere', hastened the decline in democracy to the degree that private interests assumed direct political functions, in the process eroding distinctions between state, markets and civil society.

Habermas advanced his criticism of 'private interests' in relation to mass, mediatized politics, which,

he thought, allowed the manipulation of public discourse and the eventual dominance of elite perspectives. In a similar vein, I apply the concept of 'private interests' to refer to the activities of corporate and non-profit agencies, including community and charitable organisations, who are being actively invited into a penal services marketplace, with consequent implications for eroding their autonomy and critical disposition towards institutionalized injustices.<sup>6</sup> Habermas' study stopped at the 1950s, and therefore his theory does not encompass the altered conditions of the early 21st century. Therefore, the following discussion argues that critical efforts to reclaim the 'public' sphere as an arena of citizen discourse, social action and independence will need to contest the colonisation of the public sphere by private interests since the 1980s.

### Privatised citizenry

The first shift relates to the neoliberal construction of the 'public' and the 'public interest' as coterminous with the private aspirations and consumerist claims to entitlements which may only be legitimately claimed by economically active consumer-citizens. This has entailed securing an ideological consensus with strategic sections of the public in favour of bracketing off welfarist notions of the common good from individual interests.

From the 1980s, much of the capitalist world was captured by a political credo whose tenets refuted the notion of social democracy based on redistributive justice as unsuitable to the conditions of late modernity. Some more fundamentalist versions of neoliberalism, influenced by Friedrich Hayek<sup>7</sup> and the Chicago School economists led by Milton Freidman, postulated that state welfarism was antithetical to individual and civil liberties (and hence inimical to the public interest), because it represented an oppressive statist response to social problems such as crime, poverty and social exclusion. The argument ran that public welfare ought to be legitimately curtailed to fostering the capacity of individuals but welfare should not become a permanent and universal feature, lest it deprive citizens of freedoms to determine their own fortunes. It followed from this logic that public welfare programmes that

Although it is a utopian proposition, Habermas did not claim that the public sphere is an oasis of autonomy and freedom from dominance by political or corporate interests.

5. Fraser, N. (1990) Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. *Social Text*, 25/26, p57.  
6. Corcoran MS. (2011) Dilemmas of Institutionalisation of the Penal Voluntary Sector in England and Wales. *Critical Social Policy* 31: 30-52.  
7. Hayek, F. (1960/2009) *The Constitution of Liberty*. Abingdon, England: Routledge, p227.

pursued equality for the majority were misconceived because such projects stifled individual liberty:

*If government wants not merely to facilitate the attainment of certain standards by individuals but to make certain that everybody attains them it can only do so by depriving individuals of any choice in the matter.*<sup>8</sup>

This view of the inherently disabling effects of state welfarism was seized upon by the New Right, and later the New Labour Blairites, as an opportune pretext for implementing (and talking about implementing) welfare minimalism through 'modernising' the state. Proponents of modernisation proposed that the breakdown of welfare universalism was historically inevitable, ushering in the necessity for a new social contract wherein citizens would undertake greater levels of personal responsibility for their own security and welfare demands. In office, the Conservatives, then Labour and later the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, attacked the public sector as anti-individualistic and restrictive of citizen choice, asserting that welfare states had curbed citizens' material aspirations and created a permanently helpless underclass, thus hastening the decline of Western economic advantage. The challenge was no less than to restructure state economies in ways which were more amenable to global service markets, including security and criminal justice concerns, and remoulding governments' relationships with self-governing, self-reliant active citizens.<sup>9</sup>

### **The conflation of the public sphere with the 'open market'**

One of the cultural side effects of the neoliberal era has been the exposure of almost every area of social and personal life to the morality of the market place. At its essence, marketisation reflects an economic model of social exchange which has become embedded in political agendas for restructuring public services, including criminal justice. The central components of

the marketisation thesis are that individual and organizational behaviours are governed by rational self-interest, financial incentives and utility. Advocates of the market revolution, which number the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and the Confederation of British Industry, share the position that this is not simply about applying economic levers such as fines or competition to reform public services, but a project for instituting deep changes in the values and responsibilities of citizens and all forms of social organisation, whether statutory, charitable or corporate.<sup>10</sup>

The argument that breaking up the public sector monopoly would institute radical changes in criminal justice was initially advanced in the Carter report which held that 'private and voluntary sectors' are catalysts of

modernisation whose energy and innovation would create 'a new approach to... 'break[ing] down the silos of prison and probation and ensur[ing] a better focus on managing offenders'.<sup>11</sup> This proposition was also justified as a shift towards enabling the human resources of the community and voluntary sector and investment capital held by the private sector to be exploited more systematically for social ends. As a consequence, the privatisation of public services is hailed as a democratic achievement which offers greater consumer power to citizens.

Implementing these goals requires that the protective and regulatory state gives way to light touch self-regulation; the welfare state steps back to assume a new role of state as auctioneer of public goods and services; and notions of citizenship based on the social contract secede to those based on consumer citizenship.

### **Philanthrocapitalism**

A sign of recent changes is the way in which the open marketplace has now become a theatre for staging the corporate responsibility of Habermasian private agencies, including profit-making and philanthropic trusts, which seek to legitimate their public-ness in areas hitherto equated with social ownership and control. For example, the surge in

One of the cultural side effects of the neoliberal era has been the exposure of almost every area of social and personal life to the morality of the market place.

8. Ibid. Emphasis added

9. Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

10. ACEVO (2006) *Beating Reoffending: The Third Sector Solution*. London: ACEVO/Rainer Foundation.

11. Carter, Lord Patrick (2003) *Managing Offenders, Reducing Crime*. London: Home Office, foreword.



corporate philanthropy in the aftermath of the banking crisis in 2007-8 represented a conscious attempt by the organised corporate sector to reclaim its public legitimacy and demonstrate its social relevance and responsibility. Six years on, the practical and moral necessity of fusing capital with public welfare is manifested in the logic that having reached levels of irredeemable strain, compounded by the economic crash and its aftermath, non-profit and private sector involvement is all the more necessary to rescue the welfare state. What is now represented as a collective endeavour ('we're all in this together') involves no less than an audacious reshaping of the State from social provider to subcontractor of public services and institutions, alongside a project for rewriting the remaining terms of the welfare contract.

The paradigm shift that is being proposed here can be expressed in terms of a new triangulation in the relationships between the state, the citizen and the market. This is illuminated in the report, *Open Access: Delivering Quality and Value in our Public Services*, which was published by the Confederation of British Industry.<sup>12</sup> That report laid out the business case for putting out £278 billion worth of public services to market competition and concluded that the privatisation of the remaining public sector should be radically expanded and accelerated. Published in September, 2012, the language and findings of the CBI report closely resonated with the government's broader fiscal programme and also predated by a mere four months the outcome of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* consultation which gave the clearest indication to date of the intention to outsource up to two-thirds of the Probation service's caseload. At the time of writing, this schedule has been put back until May 2014, ostensibly on the grounds of ongoing technical issues with payment and commissioning arrangements. However, the delay is more likely to result from the groundswell of criticism as to its complexity and opacity from sources as diverse as the Institute for Government, the Commons' Public Accounts Committee, the Ministry's own research and potential contractors. Yet the foreword of *Open Access*, written by the CBI's Chief

The paradigm shift that is being proposed here can be expressed in terms of a new triangulation in the relationships between the state, the citizen and the market.

Executive, John Cridland, lays out the claim that the transfer of public resources to private interests is ultimately in the public interest:

*The CBI believes that open public service markets, with providers drawn from the public, private and third sectors, can square this circle and lead to an increase in quality, choice and value for money. The case for this agenda has been made more difficult by recent, high profile failings in the private sector. Business has to respond to these public concerns and rebuild trust through sustained behaviour change and consistent delivery of results... Delivering savings '... will require new skills on behalf of government to metamorphose from direct provider into a market manager. It will need a clear vision from the government about the markets in which it is prepared to see an end to the state monopoly of provision.'*<sup>13</sup>

#### **Community and penalty: having it both ways**

The third elision of 'private' and 'public' interest relates to the shifting of the public sphere from a zone where citizens deliberate and act in pursuit of the common good to a collection of private associations and competing interests consistent with the neoliberal imaginary of individual self-enterprise and responsibility. Whilst a full account for this phenomenon is outside the remit of this article, one facet of this shift relates to the privileged civic status that is afforded in political rhetoric and policy to the self-governing, self-reliant, active and giving citizen. It can at least be observed that the rediscovery of the community, firstly by New Labour and then by the Conservative part of the coalition, is entirely consistent with the neoliberal moral economy of citizenship in which volunteers and local interest groups exercise their consumer rights to influence local crime, justice and community safety strategies. Equally, the claim that all citizens are nominally free to participate in civil activism belies the considerable formal and informal disqualifications that are

12. Confederation of British Industry (2013) *Open Access: Delivering quality and value in our public services* (2013) London: Confederation of British Industry. Foreword.

13. Ibid. Emphasis added.



experienced by already marginalised groups who may seek to organize in the public domain. Such groups, for example, may comprise offenders, members of ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay and trans-gender people, travelling or homeless people or street-based sex workers, who have historically experienced discrimination, conflict with the forces of law, or exclusionary campaigns by community activists.

Under the Coalition, the era of experimentalism with alternative community-based disposals has continued, but is rooted in authoritarian and punitive orthodoxies, prison expansion, and the virtual privatisation of the Probation service. Within weeks of the Minister for Justice's announcement in February of his support for raising up to 50,000 volunteers to provide through-the-gate mentoring for every person leaving prison or on parole, Chris Grayling confirmed proposals to construct at least one 'Titan' prison with a capacity for 2,000 prisoners and to extend capacity in several other prisons.<sup>14</sup> By November 2013, the programme for outsourcing public prisons was temporarily interrupted when the Ministry of Justice withdrew contracts for privatising three public prisons following findings of overcharging by the transnational corporation, SERCO, while critical reports of G4S's management of The Wolds prison led to its reversion to public control. Since then, governmental policy continues to be underpinned by parallel, contrary policies which are aimed at funding more community based intervention while *expanding* the prison estate. This conflict in objectives reveals the fallacious equation at the centre of neoliberal reformist arguments: that more alternative programmes based in the community will lead to fewer prison places. Official enthusiasm for penal alternatives will always be conditional on the survival of the prison rather than its withering away from disuse or irrelevance.<sup>15</sup> Consider, for example, that Baroness Corston's recommendation that women's prisons be replaced within 10 years by community-based local residential centres was immediately stripped

out in the New Labour governmental response to her report. The recourse to 'community' has never been seriously conceived of as a route to dismantling the ideological scaffolding which props up the punishment of poverty. Rather, successive governments have recast civil society as an indispensable element in the governance of crime from below. This discourse also rests on the false dichotomy which sacralises the 'community' as benign and caricaturises public prison and probation services as malign. But the big policy idea for transferring the site of custody and monitoring from prisons to the community may do little more than facilitate the transition of offenders from 'penal hell to civic purgatory'.<sup>16</sup>

This conflict in objectives reveals the fallacious equation at the centre of neoliberal reformist arguments: that more alternative programmes based in the community will lead to fewer prison places.

### Reclaiming critical citizenship

In the light of the ideologically and socially divisive nature of the previous developments, how might the role of civil society challenge the nexus of marketised and authoritarian penal interests, rather than be absorbed by it? Is it possible to reconcile the desire to engage citizens in deliberative politics with the claims that 'turning offenders around' can be facilitated through interventionist programmes, even if provided by and within communities? It is reasonable to assume that an obvious starting point for any restorative process would be to facilitate access to better economic prospects, legal

equality, civic participation and opportunities to develop social capital? Yet, civic and legal equality and parity of opportunity have been undermined by the continued hollowing out of the citizenship status of the criminalised under late capitalism. Four decades of growing inequality have laid the foundations for a caste system which is founded on a moral distinction between 'citizens' — whose legal, political and social existence, as well as private relationships and claims to belonging are recognised — and 'denizens',<sup>17</sup> a term conventionally applied to non-citizens residing in a state, but which is increasingly applicable to groups who are structurally disqualified from full citizenship or

14. Independent online (2013) *Grayling ploughs on with plan for 'super jail'*. March 13 2013.

15. Carlen, P. (2012) *Against Rehabilitation*. For Rehabilitative Justice. Eve Saville Memorial Lecture, Congress Hall, London. November 6, 2012.

16. Sim, J. (2013) *Exploring 'the edges of what is possible': Abolitionist activism and neoliberal austerity*. Paper presented to the conference, 'Sites of Confinement', Liverpool John Moores University, March 22 2013.

17. Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Publications.

on whom preconditions are set on acquiring and exercising agency. The denizen status of 'offenders' and former prisoners has been revealed in recent controversies in the UK over the question of the prisoner franchise, as well as restrictions on rights to family life through the dispersal of prisoners away from their place of domicile, strip searching, and other security concerns which take precedence over equality of treatment or habeas corpus. More typically, inclusion takes the narrower form of economic responsabilisation through obligatory participation in occupational and training schemes, often provided by for-profit and voluntary sector contractors, to prepare lawbreakers for entry (often for the first time) into the waged labour force.

This paper has sketched some trends which threaten to restrict the social spaces where critical dialogue between citizens and denizens might occur and where the 'law abiding' might meet the criminal 'other'? However, these are initial points in an ongoing project for identifying alternative and inclusive approaches informed by theories of legal restoration and social and economic reintegration. That process commences with acknowledging the injustices and forms of objectification that are perpetuated, wittingly or unintentionally, in endeavours to 'engage with' criminalised people by examining the profound 'othering' they are subjected to alongside the persistent deferral of legal recognition and the foreclosure of their rights-bearing status.

It may be helpful to identify some activating conditions based on social solidarity, citizenship and rights if civic efforts to reintegrate criminalised persons are to have a substantive basis. Firstly, critical citizenship encourages public discourse which challenges the personification of 'offenders' as primarily socially deficient and as subjects of reformation and intervention. Out of the hundreds of policy documents, academic papers and glossy prospectuses produced by for-profit and charitable providers in recent years extolling the virtues of voluntary sector work with

offenders, only a handful have discussed the integration of offenders or prisoners in terms of their assumption of full citizenship status. Secondly, there is an onus on knowledge producers (such as researchers, advocates, practitioners and policy makers) to highlight (or continue to articulate) the consequences of compliance with instrumental, official valuations of worthy research based on favoured 'evidence-based' policy orientations at the expense of the underlying structure of exclusion through punishment. In the midst of all the detail about what does and doesn't 'work', the deeper story about the impact of the complex material and symbolic disqualifications that apply to criminalised people is lost.

Thirdly, questions as to whether the restoration of rights to individuals with criminal records should be automatic or qualified processes, are complex and significant matters. However, it is necessary to assert that they are not subject to arbitrary tendencies on the part of the political Executive to withhold rights from criminalised persons as an electoral expediency. Moreover, critical citizenship should be making the case for socially inclusive and rights-based interpretations of desistance theory.

A programme of community justice based on economic, legal and political inclusion highlights the *social* basis of integration. It provides civil society actors with an alternative platform to narrow interpretations of desistance theories. The proliferation of programmes that help offenders to become 'self-actualising' and realise their social capital and capacities are subject to capture by the goals of responsible, self-sufficient citizenship. The potential success of desistance as a critical practice will rely on the degree of independence or separation it can establish from neoliberal conceptual frameworks by continuing to emphasise the importance of tackling structural exclusion. Failure to do so will merely reinforce the paradox of reintegration which simultaneously demands from 'ex offenders' that they demonstrate self-governance while denying them capacity to fulfil these imperatives.

# Artist or Offender?:

## Braving the Mirror

*Robin Baillie* is Senior Outreach Officer, National Galleries of Scotland.

### Introduction

**This essay will analyse the impact of creating artwork in prison specifically for public display, by assessing the premises and outcomes of *Mirrors: Prison Portraits*, a self-portrait project which culminated in an exhibition (and film) exhibited at the Scottish National Gallery, 4 November 2010 — 26 March 2011. *Mirrors*, a National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) Communities Outreach Project, was part of Inspiring Change, an academically evaluated initiative led by Motherwell College to measure the rehabilitative potential of arts projects for offenders in five Scottish prisons during 2010.**

By choosing self-portraits as the artistic form for the project the NGS Outreach Team foregrounded issues of seeing and being seen and of disclosing and hiding, central aspects of prison life. By asking the participants to form their own image of themselves for public consumption we gave them the chance to examine their own life experiences by creatively constructing an image, aware that the result would need to communicate with a wide audience. Often, due to the trial process, they were intensely aware of how they were regarded by the media and thus the public, but little used to self-examination.

The audience's reactions to the exhibition and the film provide valuable evidence about this project's ability to change perceptions, and develop a dialogue between those inside and those outside prison. The potential of this dialogue, sparked by its artistic catalyst, merits further discussion assessing the rehabilitative effect of artistic creativity and also its public recognition.

This article explores the positive results of this project, on both prisoners and public (including judges), and the pointers it offers towards developing future artistic initiatives that allow for therapeutic reassessment on both sides.

### Identity at Stake

'Sometimes I just want to start again. I want to be a blank canvas.'

Participant, HMP Shotts.

Quoted in *Mirrors* documentary film.<sup>1</sup>

'Reciprocally, we imagine ourselves as the objects of the point of view of others: society is the 'mirror' in which we regulate our 'countenance and behaviour'.'

Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*:

*The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (2007)<sup>2</sup>

'Who am I?' This simple question is central to the self-portrait. The ability to answer this question also begins to unlock the door to participation in society. Having a sense of a self that can be described, that can be affected by, and that can affect others, is crucial to acting socially. For the majority of those in Scotland's prisons the means to develop that sense of self-empowerment and control over one's life have been severely limited.<sup>3</sup>

The National Galleries of Scotland's *Mirrors: Prison Portraits* project sought to offer offenders the creative means to fashion a self-representation that would increase their feeling of self-worth. Fashioning yourself for others' view is a crucial component of modern life. It imaginatively integrates the individual into the community. What selves are acceptable? Which desires must remain unsatisfied and which actions avoided? The creation of one self-portrait within a pilot arts project may appear to be a limited endeavour, but the singular experience of learning to form an object of value — a work of art — to be shared with others, using oneself as subject-matter, may be profound. This seems especially so for those who have damaged themselves — and who may also have damaged others — and are seeking a positive renewal of their lives.

The history of portraiture has witnessed both the birth of the idea of a unified, unique personality that can be captured as an image, and the disintegration of that idea of an undivided self. The national art collection holds portraits by artists from Allan Ramsay

1. National Galleries of Scotland, *Mirrors (Art Class)*, (2010). Director: Lou McLoughlan.

2. Duncan, Ian (2007) *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 265.

3. Unpublished paper by Mike Nellis, former Emeritus Professor, University of Strathclyde, reveals that 70% of those in Scotland's jails come from the five most deprived Council wards in the country. Presented as part of an Inspiring Change Training Day, Glasgow City Halls, Jan 2010.

to Douglas Gordon that reveal this steady rise of the 'self' and its subsequent fragmentation and dispersal in contemporary society.

The National Galleries of Scotland's outreach officers and commissioned artists aimed to use the national collection of portraits as inspiration to aid the process of the rehabilitation of offenders. We invited those whose identities had been shaped by the designation 'criminal', to begin to rebuild their sense of self. Participants were encouraged to take up the challenge of creating a portrait that reflected themselves and their lives, and their ability to project a positive future.

To define the quality that was necessary to bind the individualised subjects of modernity into a functioning civil society during the Scottish enlightenment of the 18th-century, moral philosopher and economist Adam Smith developed the concept of 'sympathy'. Late 18th and early 19th-century portrait paintings in the national art collection attest to this concept of mutual recognition as they display the emergence of a reflective moral physiognomy at work in the depictions of the faces of the sitters. The viewer is encouraged to judge the moral and civic worth of his fellow citizen. The stoic self-command and propitious self-possession beaming from the heroes of Edinburgh's 'Golden Age' attest to the role of the portrait in confirming social standing and promoting merit.

As participants in the five prisons came up against the weight of their task to redefine themselves through the process of portraiture, those qualities of self-command and sympathy were tested over and over again by those who often spoke of 'never having thought about themselves'. The offenders revealed feelings about themselves which were often centred on their self-confessed lack of self-awareness or, being in an empty space, in glaring opposition to the seemingly composed individuals of the historical portraits staring back at them from National Galleries of Scotland catalogues. Modern society thrives on the development of individuals as self-conscious, instrumental projects. Unfortunately, those from disadvantaged social groups who have frequently suffered from a lack of care, inequality, poverty, poor educational attainment and the ravages of unemployment, drugs and crime, are more likely to feel themselves the victims of circumstances, rather than their master.

## The Five Projects

In HMP Shotts, long-term prisoners probed and discussed a selection of portraits — identifying, for example, the deep loss and sadness in the eyes of the fading, and alcoholic, 'Young Pretender', Prince Charles Edward Stuart, whose royal status is irretrievably lost. We had actually cut-out his eyes and shown them in isolation from the rest of the portrait, before his identity could be assumed, in order to develop the observational acuity of the participants. This interpretative analysis allowed the men to get behind the official masks in these images and to search for an emotional understanding of the sitter. We then asked the men to draw their own eyes whilst wearing masks revealing only this feature of their face.

The fact that a drawn, or painted, image could act as an emotional signpost was an insight about which the men in HMP Shotts took to heart. They now saw themselves as the elusive object of their own concerns, mediated through the process of making a portrait with paint and canvas. They began to realise that the translation of their thoughts and emotions into painted visual clues; imagery, textures, colours and tones, was a creative process that they could manipulate to have an effect on themselves and other viewers of their work. The self-portrait

Participants were encouraged to take up the challenge of creating a portrait that reflected themselves and their lives, and their ability to project a positive future.

allowed them to undertake redemptive work on themselves as an image, an image that at moments they would reject, erase, redo, adapt, struggle over for hours, or subsume in an elaborate metaphor. Metaphors are understandably prevalent in prisoners' artworks, often featuring clocks, labyrinths, masks and symbolic hand-gestures. Prison corridors regularly display figurative images based on prisoners' strong identification with the images of certain poster stars from popular culture, from rapper Tupac Shakur to Ché Guevara.

Creating a self-portrait encouraged the participants to deal directly with how they saw themselves. This seems straightforward, but as the film of the project reveals, in this process lay the possibility of them rehabilitating themselves by experiencing the connection between what they had done and their own image, and the possibility of seeing themselves as someone who could go beyond this action or event, without erasing it (**Figure 1**). As the academic evaluation of the wider Inspiring

Change project confirms, 'There is also evidence that for many ex offenders desistance is about personal redemption, not necessarily in the spiritual sense but rather in the sense of finding a way to 'make good' on a troubled and troubling past by making a positive contribution to families or communities now and in future.'<sup>4</sup> This was why the cathartic experience of knowing that their portraits would be presented to the public in a national gallery was at once, so testing, and subsequently confirming, for them. As the curators of the exhibition we had a fantasy of being able to have a live, webcam relay of the opening night of the exhibition beamed into the prison for the participants to witness at first hand. This didn't happen but we made sure we relayed the visitor feedback and the content of the speeches on the opening night along with other comments by interested parties who had seen the show.

Those participants who did attend the exhibition opening, following release or having been granted leave from their open prison, were moved by the exhibition's reception and were quietly glowing due to their achievements. A young woman, formerly in HMP Greenock, brought her mother along, and both were tearful for most of the evening because they had something to be proud of. Two young lads recently released from HM YOI Polmont attended, having never expected to find themselves on display in an art gallery. They were all there at the end of the night, almost unable to leave, as they probably wanted to remain in contact with the precious, positive confirmation that the event was providing them. I experienced a similarly profound moment at HMP Shotts when on the day before the exhibition's opening we showed the film to those who had taken part in it. I could not look at the faces of the men as they saw themselves revealing their thoughts to director Lou McLoughlan's camera, but as we watched I could hear the deep intakes of breath and the sighs, the majority of the men tearful, motionless and silent at the end. They recognised what they had given to the film and in doing so had probably been braver and more honest in terms of facing themselves than many of us, outside prison, will ever be. The

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providing them.

effect of taking part in the project in developing a positive persona, they subsequently informed us, was immeasurably greater than the effect of the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy courses offered by the Scottish Prison Service.

Once again the project evaluation report proves the benefits of public recognition, 'The public successes of the participants' efforts — in performances and exhibitions before audiences of significant others — opened up new personal and social identities (as artists or performers) that confirmed the possibility and viability of change in one's character and identity... participation in the arts projects seemed to help many prisoners begin to imagine or envision an alternative, appealing, conventional self.'<sup>5</sup> For those taking part the production of a hard-won self-image was a vital catalyst in 'ceasing to see oneself as an offender and finding a more positive identity... successfully peeling off the criminal label that criminal justice systems are so effective at applying.'<sup>6</sup>

For the short-term women offenders in HMP Greenock, gender issues weighed heavily in their identification with the photographic portraits of contemporary American artist Cindy Sherman, and her compatriot Francesca Woodman. Sherman's attempts to reveal the constriction of female gender roles pushed towards the grotesque by the mass-media, were understood by women often at the mercy of undue male influence over their lives. The positive release they experienced from taking control of the construction of their own images is evident in their imaginative self-portraits, and in the feedback they communicated to the *Inspiring Change* evaluation team (**Figure 2**).

Young men in HM Young Offenders' Institution at Polmont often shied away from depicting their own faces and opted to hide behind the logos and labels of consumer goods as a means of identifying themselves (**Figure 3**). Artist Fraser Gray and National Galleries of Scotland outreach officer Richie Cumming encouraged those taking part to project a cut-out, self-portrait avatar into a real-life location where it

4. Anderson, K., Colvin, S., McNeill, F., Nellis, M., Overy, K., Sparks, R. and Tett, L. (2011) *Inspiring Change: Final Project Report of the Evaluation Team*, 32. Glasgow: Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, University of Glasgow.

5. Ibid. p. 63.

6. Ibid. p. 32.





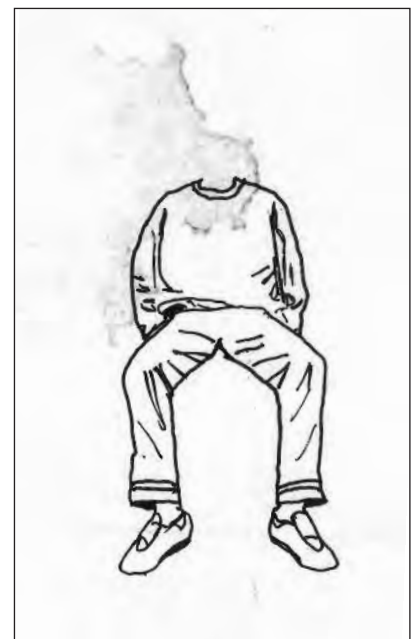
(Figure 2) *Angel*, HMP Greenock, 2010, copyright NGS Craig MacLean and Motherwell College 2010.



(Figure 1) *Doppelganger*, HMP Shotts, 2010 copyright National Galleries of Scotland and Motherwell College 2010.



(Figure 4) *King Dexter HMP Barlinnie*, 2010, copyright NGS, Kevin Reid and Motherwell College 2010.



(Figure 3) *Headless*, HMP YOI Polmont, 2010, copyright NGS, Fraser Gray and Motherwell College 2010.

was then photographed. This re-positioning demanded awareness on the part of the young men about how they would be seen by others, when released back into society.

In HMP Barlinnie artist Kevin Reid moved further from the individualised model of the traditional portrait, and asked the participants to create scenes and stories for a graphic novel. Caustic prints by the Dadaist George Grosz (from the collection of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art), set the tone for a set of drawings and storyboards that speak about the reality of the environments from which these short-term prisoners come. The blight of social deprivation and the ongoing cycles of violent attack and retaliation are the background to the men's ironic yet clear-sighted understanding of their crimes and their position in society (**Figure 4**). They are on record as praising the freedom and responsibility they were given by the artist to speak from where they were actually placed, rather than from a notionally reformed position. As a result, their work hints at the bleak landscape to which they will return on leaving prison. Their book forms a collective portrait,

animated by a reflective awareness of the paths that their own lives have taken in relation to a societal structure that has done them few favours. As such, it asks its readers to share in the need to create a societal solution to the cycle of inherited deprivation to which those in HMP Barlinnie will return.

The directness of the HMP Barlinnie prisoners' accounts of their experiences struck visitors to the *Mirrors* exhibition, as evidenced in the following quote from one visitor:

*...the story of King Dexter and the Rat King (from the HMP Barlinnie graphic novel), a powerful and shocking parable of anger and alienation — a real story of the experience of many prisoners and a refreshing change from our wished for tales of remorse and rehabilitation. Confronting violence, the truth of it, is so vital.*<sup>7</sup>

This brutal retelling of grim realities, in the participants' own patois, was the key to developing their self-confidence, as measured by the academic

7. National Galleries of Scotland, (2011). *Mirrors: Prison Portraits*, Comments from exhibition visitors. p. 31.

evaluation. The HMP Barlinnie comic-artists scored the highest across all nine Inspiring Change art projects due to positive changes in all the prisoners taking part. Artist Kevin Reid, who led this project, allowed the inmates to have control over the publication, with him acting as editor, and this led to them developing a strong self-awareness as to the public's potential perceptions of their stories and images. This handing over of responsibility proved important to altering this group of offenders' perceptions of themselves, proving that the artistic process can function as a suitable training ground for positive decision-making in relation to cause and effect.

If the cycle of deprivation and violence is to be broken then offenders need to be supported in their role as members of their families, establishing stable homes and law-abiding lives. At HMP Open Estate those nearing the end of their sentences were asked to produce photographs of 'Home' whilst on leave. These images reflect the everyday circumstances of normal life, poignantly displaying the men's precious feeling for others and their own hopes for fulfilment. Criminology's theory of 'desistance' — whereby the offender eventually is tied more strongly to children, family and stability, and offending begins to cease — begins to take on an achievable form in these photographs.

Pertinently, re-employment rates for those leaving prison are small and continued support from the authorities is slim. As the participant released back into society at the end of the *Mirrors* documentary film points out, 'You know... they talk about community, but I don't see much evidence of community out here.'<sup>8</sup> This statement is a challenge to us all in the field of community-based arts and as fellow citizens.

The precious subjectivity that empowers individuals to form a definable and productive identity is one of the defining qualities of our society. This sense of reflection and agency has been achieved to some extent by the men and women taking part in the *Mirrors* project. Moreover, participants have stressed the change that has taken place whereby

they have openly discussed personal issues and supported each other as members of a group sharing in the process of creativity and rehabilitation. This is very unusual in the prison situation where privacy is guarded closely.

### Altering Public Perceptions

From the beginning of the project the participants were asked to consider the creation of their portraits in relation to their display in a public exhibition in the Scottish National Gallery, which was planned as the culmination of the project. The possibility of this public visibility of their work both intrigued and worried those taking part. Whilst attracted by the thought of their work being accepted on this level, they also feared it being used to confirm their identities as 'monsters'. They felt this 'monsterring' process had occurred during their court appearances, particularly those whose trials had been covered in the media. This process, whether based on any truth or not, had left the prisoners scarred, struggling with their own perception of themselves as 'bad'. The phrase I remember being used in HMP Shotts by one inmate was 'sometimes I do think I *am* bad, but...'. This negative perception was also an initial factor — but one that could be overturned — in the public response to the works of

. . . participants have stressed the change that has taken place whereby they have openly discussed personal issues and supported each other as members of a group sharing in the process of creativity and rehabilitation.

art on display, as revealed by a visitor's comment that 'there is often a perception that criminals are bad through and through. Young offenders in particular are seen as having no 'inner life', no capacity for self-reflection and change. This exhibition challenges that view. I was also stuck by how little the women looked like criminals, whatever criminals look like!'<sup>9</sup>

This comment reveals the preconceptions that can colour a member of the public's viewing of a portrait of an offender. The long history of quasi-scientific physiognomy and the criminal justice system's reliance on the photographic mug-shot, not forgetting portraiture's own adoption of facial and bodily taxonomy (e.g. Edgar Degas's late nineteenth century studies of prostitutes, ballet dancers and

8. National Galleries of Scotland, *Mirrors (Art Class)*, (2010).

9. National Galleries of Scotland, (2011). *Mirrors: Prison Portraits*, Comments from exhibition visitors. p. 31.

laundresses), has developed strong visual expectations in relation to portraits of prisoners. This is where the power of self-depiction can help to restore faith in the public that people can change, an impulse evidenced by a visitor to the *Mirrors* exhibition who commented, 'My initial reaction is 'Oh, something different', but soon I'm more deeply touched by the honesty — the powerful yearning for freedom, the grief over time lost, opportunities wasted. The question of talent — which some clearly have — seems less important than the question of mercy and forgiveness not only from the society to its outcasts, or the victim to the offender, but also the one stamped 'wrong un' or 'defective', or 'bad' or 'criminal', or the ones wielding the stamps.'<sup>10</sup>

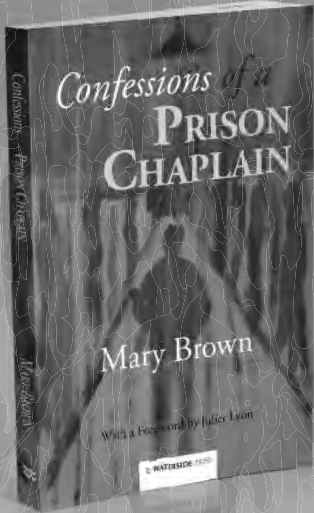
It could be said that the prisoners taking part were prepared to put themselves on trial again, but this time they were responsible for judging themselves. Their anxiety about being on public display once more via their self-portraits was understandable, as they struggled to create an image of themselves that they could share with others. What they achieved can be measured by the reaction of four High Court judges and three Sheriffs at a viewing of the exhibition and the project film.

These judges, including the legal Lord who was responsible for the training of judges in Scotland, spoke of their perceptions of those who passed before them being completely changed by the exhibition and particularly the film in which the participants from HMP Shotts explain the creation of their portraits and their motivations in making these images. They admitted that they had never seen defendants in the light of their own self-understanding and self-assessment. It was a revelation to them to experience the depth of insight and honest introspection on the part of those appearing in the film and immediately threw into perspective the 'narrow, negative powers' that they dispensed in relation to those they sentenced. They found it difficult to reconcile their powers of nugatory correction with the prisoners' revealed need for 'working through' and 'self-examination'. These reactions left us, as organisers of the project, with a sense of surprise that this lack of investigatory depth was the default position within the constraints of the legal system, and with respect for the honesty of these judges who were prepared to share their reactions with us on this subject, as they genuinely questioned themselves and each other on how they could act on what they had seen.

The judicial Lord responsible for training queried himself as to whether the film should be shown to all those being trained for the bench. Sadly this idea was

10. Ibid. p. 30.

*'Engaging, thought-provoking':*  
Juliet Lyon



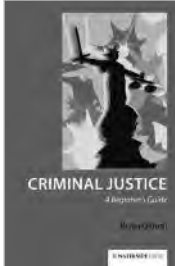
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not followed up, but the strength of the reaction of these judiciary officers to the revelation of the thoughtfulness of the prisoners in the film seemed to us to prove the genuineness of the participants' disclosure of themselves. The judges' new insight into these offenders as distinct personalities, seemed to parallel the portrait-makers' own sense of an ongoing redemptive journey.

Another example of the project's visibility in the public domain, was a visit to the *Mirrors* exhibition by the Head of the Scottish Prison Service, and the Scottish Government's Minister for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, who had welcomed the project from its inception. Their positivity towards the exhibition, confirmed by the findings of the overall Inspiring Change evaluation, reflected the government's intention to develop creative rehabilitation options in Scottish prisons. This aim was put into practice in 2011 via Creative Scotland's Arts and Criminal Justice Funding Stream for arts projects directed at offenders, or those at risk of offending.

Creating portraits, and proudly exhibiting them, has proved to be an extremely powerful mechanism

for those seeking to begin to change their lives. The works of art in this exhibition demanded attention and engagement on that basis alone. Further to this achievement though, is the effect the *Mirrors* exhibition and film has had on the public. Visitors to the exhibition have been overwhelmingly positive towards both the aims of the project and the quality of the work on offer. One expressed this view succinctly, 'I think many people see offenders as people who do not know how to contribute to society other than through crime. This exhibition gives a chance to reconsider and reflect on how important self-expression is to all.'<sup>11</sup> Our evaluation also attests to the willingness of members of the public to encounter the lives and thoughts of those who have ended up in prison, and to join with them in the task of projecting the possibility of a collective solution to the many lives that are wasted in our society.

In the final moments of the film a participant holds up his finally completed portrait and proudly states, 'There is a face there now. At the start I never thought I would ever be able to put a face on it.'

*With acknowledgements and thanks to my colleague NGS Outreach Officer, Richie Cumming and project artists, Lou McLoughlan, Fraser Gray, Kevin Reid, Fin Macrae, Craig MacLean.*

Images from the *Mirrors: Prison Portraits* project can be seen in the PDF of the exhibition catalogue at <http://www.nationalgalleries.org/education/projects/mirrors-prison-portraits>.

The *Mirrors (Art Class)* documentary film of the project is available to view on the same page. The HMP Barlinnie graphic novel, *Don't Judge a Book by its Cover*, is also available as a PDF at [http://www.nationalgalleries.org/media/\\_file/education/barlinnie\\_graphic\\_novel.pdf](http://www.nationalgalleries.org/media/_file/education/barlinnie_graphic_novel.pdf).

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11. Ibid. p. 30.



# Civic re-engagements amongst former prisoners

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## Introduction

Peer mentoring by people with convictions is very much 'in vogue'. There is a tangible appeal to the concept of reformed offenders taking a proactive role in the rehabilitation of others, which fits well with current criminological theories of desistance and indeed with political plans for a 'rehabilitation revolution'. Whilst there is optimism for this approach, however, and indeed some strong practice examples, there are equally some tangible barriers to peer mentoring in the criminal justice system, which reflect a broader tension between punitive and rehabilitative ideals. Mentors and mentees often refer to difficulties in making the transition from prisoner to member of the public, because they feel viewed in terms of their risk defined past, rather than their self-defined present. They also describe barriers to volunteering as peer mentors, and settings where they are allowed to work, but with heavier restrictions than other civic volunteers. Finally however they speak in hopeful terms about the uniqueness of the prisoner experience. Specifically how it may present a privileged form of knowledge, with the potential to encourage autonomy and change in others. Drawing upon data from my PhD project, which is an ethnographic study of 'peer mentoring' by people with convictions this article will explore these three points of dialogue. Data has been collected through interviews with mentors and mentees, direct observations of practice and documentary analysis.

## From Prisoner to Member of the Public

The difficulties experienced in making the transition from 'prisoner' to 'member of the public' are well documented, not least because 'having a criminal record represents a substantial barrier to many types of legal employment'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed many of the respondents to this study perceived that a criminal conviction renders you unemployable:

*I'm not hearing anything, all applications ask if you have convictions, I put: 'will discuss in interview', but I think they see that and just throw it away. (Jen, Mentee, 2012)*

*It is always hanging over you, there's nothing I can do about it... [The form asks]: 'Have you got a criminal record?'... 'Yes, to be discussed at interview' you don't get any further because they think 'oh well, she's a criminal isn't she'. (Gina, Mentee, 2012)*

*My sentence was eight years ago now and still no one will employ me. (Toni, Mentor, 2012)*

Whilst advocates of punishment and deterrence may argue that such informal sanctions are deserved consequences of criminal choices, they nonetheless represent a clear barrier to civic reengagement. Furthermore, the difficulties experienced are not restricted to paid employment:

*On the [college] course I told this woman [about my conviction] and she just looked at me like she'd just stepped in me and it was a horrible feeling. (Eve, Mentee, 2012)*

*I told the head person [of the charity] I've got a conviction, they were fine, but I'm sick of tip toeing round people so I told [my colleagues] and that's when the shit hit the fan, they asked me to stand down. (Cat, Mentor, 2012)*

*I work for a hospice as well and I didn't want to tell them [that I'm a peer mentor] I think they have this impression that all the really bad criminals get together and... it's just not like that. (Janet, Mentor, 2013)*

These three women were all engaged heavily in charitable voluntary work, yet here too, all had experienced forms of exclusion or fear of exclusion. There was also evidence of barriers when volunteers were seeking formal training for their work:

1. Visher, C.A., Winterfield, L. and Coggeshall, M.B. (2005) Ex-offender employment programs and recidivism: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 1(3), pp. 295-316: p.296.



*Four of our women were selected and signed up for the local college's Health and Social Care course, but after being reassured they wouldn't have to do it [the standard criminal history check] as they were all off site, they backtracked and all applications with a criminal record are now on hold (Mentoring Coordinator, 2013)*

Despite the barriers experienced and perceived here however, there remains a strong idealist policy discourse that prisoners can be reintegrated into the public fold once they have repaid their debt to society. There is potentially a fracture occurring therefore between our stated rehabilitation ideals and personal realities. Nowhere is this more apparent than if we juxtapose the Justice Minister's description of peer mentoring with that of a reformed offender coordinating one such project:

*When someone leaves prison, I want them already to have a mentor in place to help them get their lives back together... Often it will be the former offender gone straight who is best placed to steer the young prisoner back onto the straight and narrow — the former gang member best placed to prevent younger members from rushing straight back to re-join the gang on the streets. There are some really good examples out there of organisations making good use of the old lags in stopping the new ones. (Chris Grayling, Justice Minister)<sup>2</sup>*

*People generally think if you are in prison you are an offender, if you are in the community on license you are an ex-offender, I think you actually become an ex-offender once you have demonstrated that you have moved away from offending and if you are going to do good work in custody and then come out and do good work in the community you have to be given opportunities. To then deny opportunities like this to people who have got four years of a license to serve is to say you are lost for the next four years in the community, no matter how much preparation you have done, when you come through the*

*gate you are at the wall. (Mentoring Coordinator, 2013)*

For Grayling then, interveners are viewed to have power and agency, it's in their hands to 'steer, prevent and stop' the criminal actions of their peers. In practice however, labels are imposed upon people, which result in powerful restrictions. Peer mentors are defined in relation to their past harms and denied (even restorative) opportunities accordingly. The resulting language is of 'denial', 'loss' and being 'at the wall', with power and agency not so apparent.

The following account further illustrates limitations upon full civic engagement, albeit for different reasons. 'Olivia', like many women with criminal convictions, has experienced controlling violence and exploitation within an intimate relationship. As a result she has debilitating

emotional health needs and is dependent on sickness benefit, she also volunteers as a peer mentor on a near full time basis. She simultaneously therefore embodies the *civic volunteer* essential to 'big society' ideals, AND the *economic dependant* caricatured as the antithesis to these; a drain on economic ideals. Perhaps unsurprisingly it is her identity as a 'drain' that she feels most keenly:

*I volunteer Monday to Friday, I do it for the love of it, but the Job Centres don't see it like that and the government don't see it like that, they see me as going to work in a shop, even though my past [of violent public attacks by her ex-partner]... they say well 'we'll put you in a shop' now as soon as one person knows where I work everyone will know... the Job Centre are trying to make me, but my doctor gives me a sick note every four weeks because he will not put me in that situation, but the likes of government are like 'you can do it, if you can do voluntary work, you can do this', but I can pick and choose, on my bad days I don't come in... I'll have to have calm tablets to stop me from falling over... because I panic and I think I'm going to see him, and when I see him he'll see that I'm with [my partner] and smiling, and he'll just walk up and knock me out, he's done it plenty of times in the middle of town and I think I can't do that, so*

Peer mentors are defined in relation to their past harms and denied (even restorative) opportunities accordingly.

2. Grayling, C (2012) 'Rehabilitation Revolution' speech, 20th November 2012, available in full at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/speeches/chris-grayling/speech-to-the-centre-of-social-justice>

*I won't put myself in that position, but the government don't see it like that, it's just like: 'get over it, it's been nearly 3 years now, you should be well over it.'* (Olivia, Mentor, 2012)

Whilst policy ideals for ex-prisoner rehabilitation will require an 'army of volunteers to do it properly'<sup>3</sup> there is perhaps an underestimation of the complex needs some of these volunteers will have, and some of the significant challenges they face. If there were recognition of and provision for these needs however, the rewards are likely to be immeasurable. Olivia is undertaking an NVQ level 3 in Information, Advice and Guidance having successfully completed level 2 with her project's help. She has also accomplished a sign language qualification and puts these skills to use as a peer mentor, a role she is described as extremely skilled at.

The voluntary contributions of many interviewees then, despite meeting civic — or indeed 'big society' — ideals, did not always overcome the stigma of being labelled an 'offender'. Moreover they often did not appear to meet more dominant economic ideals, such as the demand to be in salaried forms of employment.

### **Barriers to volunteering**

The clash between rehabilitative ideals and personal realities in the spaces of peer mentoring can also be traced in transition from prison work. Professionals, ministers and researchers, for example, have all argued that reintegration efforts ideally require input pre and post release from prison:

*[W]e recognise 'reintegration' as a process that starts at the point of confinement, preparing the prisoner for success after release, and continuing for some time afterwards.*<sup>4</sup>

*There are roles for offenders acting as mentors... They can be particularly effective during transition from prison to outside world.*<sup>5</sup>

*The One to One model ideally involves a period of regular contact between young person and Mentor prior to their release from custody to allow time to get to know one another and prepare for return to the community.*<sup>6</sup>

Whilst policy ideals for ex-prisoner rehabilitation will require an 'army of volunteers to do it properly'<sup>3</sup> there is perhaps an underestimation of the complex needs some of these volunteers will have, and some of the significant challenges they face.

Yet this 'through the gate' work is proving to be a difficult basic to master, if not through a want of trying, as illustrated by this exchange between a volunteer and her manager:

*Mentor: I want to go into the prisons, do an action plan, say I'll be here if you need anything, get back on your feet and get you away from the people who are going to draw you back in.*

*Manager: I wish we could, but even the staff have struggled to get into the prison. We did their security training but couldn't pin them down to a planning meeting, and that was the external partner's link person. (Project B, 2013)*

Security has also proved to be a barrier for 'Lol', a paid mentoring coordinator working for a national charity:

*My offences are not 2 weeks old, my offences are many, many, many years old and principally as a young offender by the way and related to coming through the care system... The prison was interested in supporting us... but could not find practitioners to support the 'through the gate' mechanism... we can't keep meeting through*

3. Harry Fletcher of the National Association of Probation Officers, quoted in BBC news article 'Prison gates mentor plan for released inmates' 20 November 2012. Retrieved online, May 2013 at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20399401>
4. Association of Chief Probation Officers cited in Deakin, J and Spencer, J (2011) 'Who Cares? Fostering networks and relationships in prison and beyond' in Sheehan, R., McIvor, G., Trotter, C. (Eds.) *Working with women offenders in the community*. Cullompton: Willan.
5. Ministry of Justice (2011) 'Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation Review of Offender Learning'. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: p.23
6. Hunter, G and Kirby, A (2011) 'Evaluation summary: Working one to one with young offenders' London: Birkbeck College: p.5.

*the legal visits; we need to have some space in the offender management unit as our own... because I'm an ex offender, when they do 'enhanced' clearance for me it says no, so we've gone back to Ministry of Justice... they have come up with this 'standard plus' which is not quite 'basic' clearance, its nowhere near 'enhanced', it's somewhere between the two but what that does is allows each prison to do its own local risk assessment (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator, 2013)*

Whilst the Ministry of Justice and individual prisons are taking steps to address the barrier of restricted access on security terms then, for the moment people volunteering as peer mentors in these settings experience a restricted or scrutinized form of citizenship. For example, even when mentors are granted access to prisons, there is often a staff member or volunteer without a criminal history additionally required:

*We have access [in prison X] but a prison volunteer [who is not a peer] is always in the room, that has a massive impact, last week when I went over she turned up late, I had 45 minutes with the guy on my own and we did more in that 45 minutes than we did in any of the meetings prior to that because he just opened up (Lol, Coordinator, 2013)*

In working as volunteers therefore 'ex-offenders' may struggle to overcome the 'master status'<sup>7</sup> of having been an offender, despite their current status as volunteers or even criminal justice staff members. In other words they feel that they continue to be viewed in terms of a risk defined past, rather than a self-defined and publicly performed present:

*I've had it, going to [prison] as a paid member of probation staff... I've gone there to talk to the client... getting ready to be released... so in that I've talked about my past and what I'm doing now, and how that kind of qualifies me to offer that support, just so he knows he can*

*have confidence in me as well and build that relationship... by the time I had got back here [to probation] there had been a phone call from the head of [prison] security: 'next time you send offender up here to do visits we'd like to notified beforehand' and we was saying: 'he's not an offender, he's a paid member of [trust name] staff' and there was just this hoo ha about it. (Adam, Mentoring Coordinator, 2013)*

Despite these limitations, there is some hope that reformed offenders may be granted access to complete the work: '[Prison Z] have come back and they've vetted, I went out and met with the governor last week and they're perfectly happy for us to go in three times a month' (Lol, 2013) However it is clear that once in action the work can make professional and personal demands over and above those placed upon non-labelled or 'public' volunteers, as Steve, a peer mentor with a prolific offending history, and more recently a probation employee explains:

*I've got the prison officers looking at me, they recognize me, I don't say anything, I just feel uncomfortable, at first there was a lot of loop holes they had to jump through to get me in there, but now I go on*

*my own but I love that side of it, sometimes it's strange, like [Prison A] walking down the main corridor... you're walking past all the prisoners and some are my old associates are like: 'fucking hell, how you doing? Used to be a nightmare him, he was a proper grafter' and I'm like thinking 'ohhhhhh', I get really embarrassed by it, because obviously I am ashamed of my past (Steve, Mentor, 2012)*

Similarly, Phil is a peer mentor and former prisoner:

*It can get you down a little bit if I'm honest, because you never get to forget that part of your life which you'd probably like to forget, you know, it's the part that as a father now of a young child, I want to kind of bury, I'm un-*

In working as volunteers therefore 'ex-offenders' may struggle to overcome the 'master status'<sup>7</sup> of having been an offender, despite their current status as volunteers or even criminal justice staff members.

7. Becker, H.S. (1966; 1963. *Outsiders; studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York: Free Press.

*burying every day in practice, with good intentions, but nevertheless its resurfacing all the time (Phil, Mentor, 2012)*

For Steve and Phil then there is an ongoing personal demand even after navigating security concerns. Working in the prisons previously served in, serves as a reminder of a shameful past. It also brings to life an identity remembered by others. Whilst Phil acknowledges that this in itself can be motivational: 'it's an opportunity for me to revisit them dark places, just to remind myself that I never want to go back there' (2012), there is nonetheless an intense, lived emotionality to this work, which is not present for volunteers without such history.

### **The user perspective as a privileged knowledge**

In terms of civic re-engagement however, the peer mentoring picture is not all limitation, exclusion and shame. Indeed this appears to be a context wherein people with convictions can not only become civic contributors but 'civic experts' with a unique and privileged knowledge:

*65 per cent of offenders under the age of 25 said that having the support of a mentor would help them to stop re-offending; 71 per cent said they would like a mentor who is a former offender.<sup>8</sup>*

*User Voice is a charity led and delivered by ex-offenders. This gives us the unique ability to gain the trust of, access to and insight from people within the criminal justice system.<sup>9</sup>*

*Ex-offenders are 'uniquely placed' to offer support to offenders, alongside other professional services and can connect with them in a way that many other agencies cannot.<sup>10</sup>*

In the space of peer mentoring, ex-offenders are perceived as both experts with unique experiential knowledge and un-patronising equals:

*It does seem to work better when you've actually been there, that's how I personally feel anyway. Somebody who's just read it from a book isn't the same as actually been there and done it. (Ben, Mentee, 2013)*

*For a straight mentor crime wouldn't come into their thought, but another mentor thinks 'I'll have to speak to him and try and level him out', someone who's not been down that road, not be patronizing, but they've not got a clue about it really (Will, Mentee, 2012)*

*With someone else like the man in the suit you'd just think 'you haven't got a clue', and it would make me feel angry and resentful towards them but if I get it off a peer I think well 'they know what they're on about' and I trust their comments and take them on board (Lin, Mentor and Previously a Mentee, 2013)*

**Mentors who have made positive changes themselves also appear to provide an inimitable form of inspiration.**

These reflections provide some support for the arguments that peers 'are more likely to have specific knowledge... and an understanding of realistic strategies to reduce risk'<sup>11</sup> and that 'ex-offenders... have the credibility that statutory agencies don't often have'.<sup>12</sup> Mentors who have made positive changes themselves also appear to provide an inimitable form of inspiration:

*I wanted to feel the way they did, they weren't beaming out happiness, but they weren't sad, they was that content in their life they were offering to other people, to help them and I wanted to be able to do that (Georgie, Mentee, 2012)*

8. Princes Trust (2008) *Making the Case: One-to-one support for young offenders*, 23 June 2008: Princes Trust, Rainer, St Giles Trust, CLINKS.
9. User Voice (2013) 'Mission statement' available online at: <http://www.uservoice.org/about-us/mission>
10. Crispin Blunt: Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Prisons and Youth Justice, answering questions in parliament, July 2012. Reported in Puffet, N. 'Ex-offenders enlisted to tackle youth reoffending' in *Children and Young People Now Magazine*. 4 July 2012. Article retrieved online, January 2013 at: <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1073814/ex-offenders-enlisted-tackle-youth-reoffending>
11. Devilly, G.J., Sorbello, L., Lynne Eccleston, L. & Ward, T. (2005) 'Prison-based peer-education schemes'. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 10, 219-240: p.223.
12. Nellis, M and McNeill, F. (2008) Foreword to: Weaver, A. *So You Think You Know Me?* Hampshire: Waterside Press: p. xi



*To meet people who were just as twisted as I was... see somebody for yourself go through them changes and be a positive member of the community, you know it's possible... 20 years destroying everything around them then they've flipped it over and those 20 years turned into gold... it saved my life (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee, 2013)*

*I don't think of myself as being a massive inspiration but it is sort of proof that it can be done. (Katy, Mentor, 2012)*

Central to these narratives is the *image* of the ex-offender, which at once comes to symbolise new possibilities and knowledge of a shared struggle. Indeed there is theoretical support for the power of such imagery:

*It is only through recovery forums and peer-led services that people in recovery can become visible. Once these people become visible recovery champions, they can help people to believe that recovery is not only possible but desirable. I refer to both people who provide and people who receive treatment and support services.<sup>13</sup>*

Visibility is therefore seen to be vital in terms of hope, not just for people contemplating change, but also for those supporting them. In the field of mental health for example, Rufus May, a clinical psychologist and former patient argued: 'Mental health workers... don't see the ones like me who got away. Therefore they have very little concept of recovery from mental health problems'.<sup>14</sup> If we transfer his reasoning to this setting, peer mentors come to inform and constitute the possibility of desistance for service users and practitioners alike. This is particularly important as:

*Some of the most recent work on the process of desistance has focused on the role of hope in the reintegration of offenders (Burnett and Maruna 2004; Farrall and Calverly 2005). These studies contend that 'hope' for the future seems to play a significant role in*

*predicting reintegrative and rehabilitative success. It provides ex-offenders 'with the vision that an alternative 'normal' life is both desirable and, ultimately... possible' (Farrall and Calverly, 2005: 192-93)<sup>15</sup>*

## Concluding thoughts

The barriers and possibilities described in this study reflect a fundamental contradiction in expectations upon people as they move from 'prisoner' to 'member of the public'. Plans to concurrently scrutinise, monitor and restrict people with convictions, whilst engaging them as the specialist citizens in the 'rehabilitation revolution' reflects a justice system which attempts to serve punitive and rehabilitative ideals simultaneously. If desistance requires people to be responded to 'as citizens with rights and needs, rather than... past lawbreakers and future risks'<sup>16</sup> we perhaps need to reconsider how far punitive responses reach post-conviction. If we are committed to rehabilitation and reintegration, actuarial safeguarding arguably needs to be balanced with efforts to allow people fuller re-entry to public life. This is not a call for a neglectful culture of risk, but for a measured reflection of the categories and restrictions we impose upon people and a consideration of what purpose they serve. In my own field of criminology this may require a reflection upon the degree to which we are complicit in the civic exclusion of 'offenders'. We label people, we take their stories, we 'make sense' (and so label again), we publish stories and gain plaudits in our own name. We are arguably an industry which has cultivated (and sustains) notions of 'offender' and 'ex-offender'. By listening to the lived experiences of civic life after prison, and by recognising forms of knowledge that are relegated below the academic or the professional, we may be encouraged to humanise rather than objectify people involved with criminal justice services. In doing so we may open spaces for *reformed* citizens rather than *scrutinized* citizens and so promote sustainable desistance from crime.

*Note: The names of respondents used and cited are pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.*

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13. Kidd, M. (2011) 'A Firsthand Account of Service User Groups in the United Kingdom: An Evaluation of Their Purpose, Effectiveness, and Place within the Recovery Movement'. *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*, 6:1-2, 164-175: p.174.
  14. Basset, T. & Repper, J. (2005). *Travelling Hopefully*. Mental Health Today (November), 16-18:pp. 16-17.
  15. Farrall, S., Sparks, R & Maruna, S. (2011) *Escape routes: contemporary perspectives on life after punishment*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge: p. 168.
  16. Carlen, P (2012) 'Against rehabilitation: for reparative justice' A transcript of the 2012 Eve Saville lecture given by Professor Pat Carlen to the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies on 6 November 2012: p.5 Available online at: <http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/against-rehabilitation-reparative-justice>



# Reviews

Film review

## **Everyday (2012)**

Dir. Michael Winterbottom

*Everyday* had a limited theatrical run in late 2012 and was broadcast on Channel 4 in early 2013, but it has taken me almost a year to get around to watching it. I often have a feeling of dread when faced with a prison film, perhaps the consequence of watching too many over the years with too few worth the effort. However, this film really is worth the effort, in fact, since I reluctantly pressed 'play', it has entranced me, running over and over in my head long after the credits had rolled.

The film itself focuses on a family, with four children, over a five year period in which the father (played by John Simm), serves a prison sentence for an unspecified crime. A series of visits take place, to prisons and then home leave, before the sentence ends. The family feel the strain of staying together financially and emotionally. The style of the film is realist with the emotions muted and the narrative constrained. The realism is heightened by the use of real locations, non-professional actors in critical roles, including the four children, and fact that the film was made over a five year period, with shooting taking place in short blocks over that time, so that the characters visibly grow and age.

The director Michael Winterbottom has always been a busy and diverse film-maker. In a similar vein, he has been responsible for socially-conscious, realist films such as *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), *In this world* (2002) and *The road to Guantanamo* (2006). He has brought

new life to the work of Thomas Hardy in his adaptations of *Jude the Obscure* (1996), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (*The Claim*, 2000), and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (*Trishna*, 2011). He has also had success with a series of comic dramas featuring Steve Coogan including *24 hour party people* (2002), *A cock and bull story* (2005), *The Trip* (2010), and *The look of love* (2013). Winterbottom is one of Britain's most prolific, varied and imaginative film-makers.

Much of the coverage and reaction to *Everyday* focussed on the issue of time. Of course the unusual production schedule drew attention and in many ways shaped subsequent discussion of the film.<sup>1</sup> This concern with time was intentional, as reflected in the production technique. As Winterbottom himself has said:

*... we wanted to do a film about time passing across five years, to see how the children would change with the absence of the father and whether, for instance, he could maintain a relationship with them.*<sup>2</sup>

Rather than deploying cinematic conventions to show the passing of time or relying upon special effects or make up, Winterbottom was attempting to reveal 'the small, subtle changes as people grow up and grow old whilst being apart'.<sup>3</sup>

As well as time, the film is also deeply concerned with issues of space. This is shown most starkly through the long journeys from home to the prisons, moving from foot, to bus, to train to taxi. The distance between prison and the

home is an important aspect of painfulness of prisons for the families of those incarcerated.<sup>4</sup> The film dwells on these liminal spaces with all of the physical, emotional and financial exhaustion they contain.

The visits themselves are also an important space. The film shows them with all of their diversity from visits rooms, closed visits booths, to day release and home leave. Each has its own emotional texture of hope and despair. A recent BBC comedy set in a prison visits hall was criticised for using the situation to distance the viewer and anaesthetise them to the reality of prison life.<sup>5</sup> Rather than attempting to obscure the painfulness of prison, the depiction of visits in *Everyday*, illuminates how the tentacles of imprisonment reach out, entangling those outside as well as those inside.

The power of Winterbottom's film does not, however, rest only upon its technical innovations or its intellectual ideas; it is an emotionally moving work. The realist approach meant that the narrative and relationships developed organically over the years of production. The family experience strains in their relationships with each other and those around them, but also drawn upon their own resources and the support of others. There is no grand melodrama or wrought emotional climax, instead they face the future, scarred by their experiences but still together. The muted, constrained approach makes it all the more affecting; it is an almost unbearably honest reflection of family life.

Michael Winterbottom's *Everyday* is a cinematic gem, albeit one in a minor key. It is the product of

1. For example see *The Guardian* 15 October 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/oct/15/child-stars-michael-winterbottom-everyday> (accessed 03 February 2014).
2. <http://guru.bafta.org/michael-winterbottom-interview> (accessed 03 February 2014).
3. Ibid.
4. Mills, A. and Codd, H. (2007) *Prisoners' families* in Jewkes, Y. (ed) *Handbook on Prisons* Cullompton: Willan. p. 672-695.
5. Turner, J. (2013) *The politics of carceral spectacle: Televising prison life* in Moran, D., Gill, N. and Conlon, D. (ed) *Carceral spaces: Mobility and agency in imprisonment and migrant detention* Farnham: Ashgate. p.219-237.

a film-maker willing to take risks. However, this is not only an artistic achievement; it also illuminates hidden corners of everyday life. From that perspective, it is a work of profound humanity.

**Dr Jamie Bennett** is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.

Book Review

***Critique and dissent: An anthology to mark 40 years of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control***

Edited by Joanna Gilmore, J.M. Moore and David Scott  
Publisher: Quill Books (2013)  
ISBN: 978-1-926958-28-6  
(paperback)  
Price: £20.00 (paperback)

***Rethinking social exclusion: The end of the social?***

By Simon Winslow and Steve Hall  
Publisher: Sage (2013)  
ISBN: 978-1-84920-107-0  
(hardback) 978-1-84920-108-7  
(paperback)  
Price: £75.00 (hardback) £24.99  
(paperback)

***Criminal justice and neoliberalism***

By Emma Bell  
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan (2011)  
ISBN: 978-0-230-25197-7  
(hardback)  
Price: £50.00 (hardback)

***Why prison?***

Edited by David Scott  
Publisher: Cambridge University Press (2013)  
ISBN: 978-1-107-03074-9  
(hardback)  
Price: £75.00 (hardback)

Together these four books offer an introduction and overview of

critical criminology. This approach has a number of dimensions but is arguably underpinned by a concern with power and inequality, and how this is not only reflected within but also sustained and entrenched by social institutions such as criminal justice. Many critical criminologists attempt to describe the wider ideology that shapes politics and society. They are also often concerned with the effects, particularly the experiences of socially and economically marginalised groups, historically the poor, but also engaging with issues of gender, race, and other forms of identity and social positioning. It is a movement which seeks to challenge dominant ideas and practices intellectually, but is also linked to social activism.

The ambitions of critical criminology are well captured in the title of the first book: *Critique and dissent*. The book itself draws together contributions from 40 years of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control. The group was initially established in the early 1970s, a period of social upheaval and conflict, and attempted to bring together an international collection of scholars concerned with issues relating to critical criminology. As revealed in this book, the first manifesto made explicit reference to an underlying Marxist philosophy. As well as providing rich intellectual ideas, the group has also embraced conflict, including hosting conferences in Northern Ireland during 1981 hunger strikes, Wales during Miners strike of 1984 and more recently Greece and Cyprus. This book neatly captures the tenor of the groups work to expose the limits of knowledge and the ways that it is exploited by the powerful, and the promotion of research that reveals the experiences of the powerless and offers them solidarity and support. Whilst this book is perhaps best seen as a celebration of the work of the Group, it will offer something of

interest to both scholars and the casual reader who will be able to trace the emergence and development of this school of thought.

It could, however, be argued that the moment for critical criminology is not historical, but is now upon us. The financial crisis and subsequent recession have drawn attention to the failures of capitalism. In relation to prisons, there has been a loosening of the grip of popular punitiveness and the appeal of mass imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> This is partly because it is no longer considered affordable, but also the political payload has been reduced as crime rates have fallen. In addition, there is a growing body of evidence, including that offered by critical criminologists, which has revealed the harmfulness of prisons and questioned their effectiveness. The three further books reviewed here address these contemporary circumstances.

Two powerful critiques of contemporary UK political and social culture are offered by Simon Winslow and Steve Hall in *Rethinking social exclusion: The end of the social?*, and by Emma Bell in *Criminal justice and neoliberalism*. Both take as their starting point the dominant ideology of neoliberalism. As Bell argues, neoliberalism is a complex system that has economic aspects but also social, political, legal, cultural and intellectual dimensions. In essence it encompasses the withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere, instead promoting the deregulation of markets and the contracting out of state services. In addition, this also embraces interventionism in dealing with problematic groups or institutions including the marginalised and those that resist. For Winslow and Hall, the enduring, permanent poverty and punitive control of those at the margins are integral parts of the whole system. However, Bell disagrees, suggesting that neoliberalism and punitiveness

1. Cullen, F., Jonson, C., and Stohr, M. (2014) *The American prison: Imagining a different prison* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

are not inevitably interlinked, but indeed address contradictory impulses about the role of the state. She argues that offering safety from crime, or at least the appearance of action in this regard, is compensation for reduced economic and social security for the majority.

For Bell, neoliberalism is mediated through local cultures and therefore is different in different countries. Nevertheless, she does accept that the UK has been more willing to embrace punitiveness and that neoliberalism helps to create conditions that sustain this, including: reduced social solidarity and the rise of rampant individualism; the deprofessionalisation of criminal justice and creation of managerial elites, and; the triangulation of politics, media and judiciary to create a powerful orthodoxy. Bell offers an in-depth and deft contribution, linking wider social changes with those that took root in the criminal justice system during the New Labour era.

Winslow and Hall's account is more polemic. Its commitment and consistency is admirable and it is persuasively argued, but it does also reveal many of the limitations of critical criminology at its most strident. They describe notions of 'social exclusion' as inadequate for a number of reasons. First, they suggest that those in circumstances are not excluded, indeed their position is an integral aspect of capitalism and neoliberalism. They are the losers than enable others to be winners. In addition, in perhaps their most significant contribution, they describe how the subjectivity of those in poverty can only be understood by reference to the dominant consumer culture: many are unable to consistently and extensively enter into this world and therefore experience that as a source of painfulness, and seek opportunities, however, fleetingly to access this. More widely, they even question whether there is a 'social' from which it is possible to be

excluded. They describe the 'non-places' of manufactured dormitory estates and towns, bland shopping malls, and empty social experiences in an atomised, individualistic world. They describe an ugly and unpleasant society, which makes one wonder, whether if Blur hadn't got there first, then this book might have been called *Modern life is rubbish*. But is such a description entirely justified? There is certainly much to be said for the harms that capitalism perpetuates on those at the margins and the disproportionate power and resources accumulated by a few, however, it is in the relentless problematising and criticism that perspective can be lost. For example, at one stage Winslow and Hall briefly take on the idea of social media, describing this as 'low level immaterial labour that is appropriated by capitalism and used to generate profit' (p.115). Whilst such a perspective has some merit, it is too dogmatic, ignoring the potential for meaningful social connections that can be forged and sustained across space and time through social media, let alone the potential for developing networks of shared interest, or even resistance. However, moderation is not the aim, instead they are pitching at more revolutionary change, arguing:

*... if we are serious about preventing the manifold harms of exclusion in their entirety, it is clear we need a fundamental reorganisation of the global political economy from its financial core. . . (p.170)*

Critical criminology has itself been sometimes criticised for failing to present a persuasive alternative. Winslow and Hall should be applauded for articulating an alternative, grounded in reduced levels of economic inequality, optimistically asserting that:

*Despite the failures of previous ill-conceived attempts to do so,*

*it is always possible to be something else, to transcend the ideology of liberal capitalism and replace institutionalised selfishness with genuine community, to replace enmity with solidarity, and exclusivity with inclusivity (p.175)*

However, they also do not flinch from revealing the challenges of persuading people to embrace this:

*What by and large we cannot countenance is the painful reality that we might have to get by with less, that whatever power fills the void left by the exit of capitalism would decree an end to our profligate lifestyles. Despite the likely protestations of the ethical consumers of the middle class, a world without foreign holidays, iPads and other accoutrements of a socially included lifestyle fills the mainstream Western population with dread (p. 172-3)*

In many ways this book is impressive. It has a singularity of vision and a seductive passion. However, for all that it also leaves an unsatisfactory sense of its own futility. It is so ambitious and revolutionary that it feels unachievable. A bit like the street corner, sandwich board wearing prophet declaring that the 'end is nigh': they might not get what they want but the world would be a poorer place without them.

Finally, David Scott's edited collection *Why prison?* will have the most relevance to prison practitioners and will also have the broadest appeal. It offers an impressive array of leading scholars dissecting the emergence of global hyper-incarceration and strategies for change. As was mentioned earlier, now is a time when the grip of imprisonment has been loosened and this book talks directly to this issue and indeed plays an active role in the struggle.

The first part of the book traces the rise of mass imprisonment, spreading penalty into new forms of detention such as migration, and the dominant neoliberal ideology that underpins this development. The role of the public is also examined, including the role of spectatorship in defining how we think about and engage with prisons. Most importantly, this book develops a credible argument for the abolitionist cause, that is the view that the institution of imprisonment should be abolished and instead alternative institutions and processes be developed that can manage transgressions. Such an argument is not located simply in a change of the criminal justice system but also encompasses a wider change in social structures and ideology. In their chapter, Vickie Cooper and Joe Sim challenge the notion of asking 'Why prison?' and instead suggest we should ask 'why *not* utopianism,

abolitionism and socialism?' (p.210). Whilst this reveals an explicit political agenda, it also raises a wider issue about whether removing prison from the question opens the imagination and offers more creative opportunities for thinking about crime and society. In other words the prison acts as a dead hand, stifling ideas. A particularly important chapter by Keally McBride describes the recent process of decarceration in California, driven by legal judgements and the economic crisis, which saw a 16.5 per cent reduction in the prison population in a year (2011-12). This case study shows that radical change is possible. The final two chapters of the book take forward the abolitionist cause. Julia C. Oparah provides an account of how to make the case and to campaign effectively for radical change. In closing, David Scott sketches a utopian, but nevertheless grounded and practical, vision of abolitionist alternatives. This

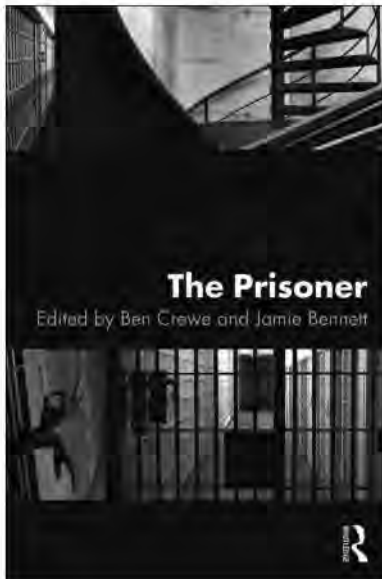
is a very welcome contribution which deserves close attention and would merit expansion in the future. As with Emma Bell's book, Scott offers a nuanced and grounded analysis throughout this excellent edited collection. What he additionally contributes is an engagement with the activism of radical reform.

Critical criminology offers a challenge to conventions; it leads one to question not only professional practice and criminal justice but also the wider social world in which it is situated. That can be an uncomfortable experience but also one that is enlightening and emotionally powerful. These four books illustrate that this is a diverse field but one that is full of imagination and remains relevant to the way we live now and in the future.

**Dr Jamie Bennett** is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.



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