LIMITATIONS ON THE ARTS IN PRISON: RESTRICTIVE
NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF REFORM

BRIDGET E KEEHAN

A submission presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the University of South Wales/Prifysgol De Cymru

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2013

Abstract

In this thesis I make the case that arts practice in prison has largely been appropriated by the discourse of rehabilitation and that other possible reasons for advocating the arts in prison are marginalised. I propose that artistic projects, which focus on aesthetic, as opposed to rehabilitative objectives, offer the greatest opportunity for those in prison to adopt an identity beyond the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*.

My original contribution to knowledge is to introduce the concepts of 'restrictive narrative identity' and 'performing reform' as a means of understanding fundamental issues that impact upon arts practice in prison. I also propose that in adopting a creative role such as actor or writer the person in prison may be able to create a broader sense of narrative identity beyond the role of *prisoner*.

The term 'restrictive narrative identity' provides a means for understanding how the institution of prison, its practices, including the discourse of rehabilitation, help create and sustain a limited identity for those imprisoned. I employ the term *prisoner* to indicate an ideologically constituted identity that the institution of prison employs but which is also manifest in narratives about prisoners in wider society, within tabloid media reports, for example. I argue that there is a need to address the specter of *prisoner* in addressing the issue of efficacy in relation to the arts in prison.

The term 'performing reform' denotes the particular cultural context in which questions over the efficacy of the arts in prison are posed, a context in which the setting and achievement of targets in order to measure

performance is ubiquitous. It is also used to signify the imperative placed upon prisoners to participate in offender management programmes, which include role-play and presentations to demonstrate reformed behavior.

Employing an autoethnographic method, which draws upon my experience as a Writer in Residence in prison, I propose that arts projects, which focus on aesthetic as opposed to rehabilitative objectives, offer respite from the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*. Conversely, when the prime purpose of the arts in prison is to rehabilitate then arts practice can itself become a contributing factor to the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*.

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported and encouraged me in writing this thesis, in particular: Hamish Fyfe, Rea Dennis and Philip Gross. Thanks to the Cardiff School of Creative Industries who awarded me a studentship and the Research Committee who also provided financial support.

Thanks to the Writers in Prison Network for giving me the opportunity to work in prison and a huge thanks to all those I had the privilege to work with.

Finally, diolch yn fawr Wyn bach for all your incredible support.

Dedicated to Daisaku Ikeda

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Abbreviations

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Abbreviations

Controlling Anger & Learning How to Manage it	CALM
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	DCMS
Ministry of Justice	MOJ
National Offender Management Service	NOMS
Offender Assessment Programme	OASys
Prison-Addressing Substance Related Offending	PASRO
Payment by Results	PBR
Prison Service Instructions	PSI
Security Information Report	SIR
Thinking Skills	TS
Writers in Prison Network	WIPN

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Introduction

How is the discourse of rehabilitation affecting arts practice in UK prisons? Might the efforts made to prove that arts projects in prison can contribute to rehabilitation be having an impact upon the kinds of artistic work being created? In focusing on rehabilitation as the reason for why the arts happen in prison, are other reasons for their presence being marginalized or ignored? These questions form the basis of the research conducted for this thesis and are both timely and necessary.

During the 1990's the prison population in the UK underwent a significant increase: between June 1993 and June 2012 the prison population in England and Wales increased by 41,800 prisoners, to over 86,000 (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2013)[1] and whilst a number of reasons can be attributed to this, for example, an increase in those receiving custodial sentences, a contributory factor to the growth of the prison population is recidivism. In other words, a high percentage of those released from prison end up returning to prison in what has been termed the 'revolving door' syndrome: 'Re-offending costs the government between £9.5bn and £13bn a year, with two in five adults being convicted again within a year of release.' Johnson, et al (2011: p2).[2]

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[1] Great Britain. Ministry of Justice (2013) *Story of the Prison Population* 1993-2012 [online]. Available at:https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/story-of-the-prison-population-1993-2012

[2] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) *Unlocking Value: the economic benefit of the arts in criminal justice*, London.

One of the stated aims of the prison service is to try to enable 'prisoners to lead law abiding lives upon release' and so various interventions are applied to prisoners in order to try to achieve this objective. It is in the context of a desire to try to curb the 'revolving door' syndrome and provide effective rehabilitation programmes that an increased emphasis on the role of the arts as a tool for rehabilitation has come about. Over the last two decades there has been increased emphasis on what the arts can achieve in helping to rehabilitate offenders. Discourse around the arts in criminal justice over this time has built an explicit association between the arts in prison and rehabilitation. The central question posed in this thesis is whether rehabilitation should be the purpose of the arts in prison?

Arts organisations working within criminal justice, representative bodies of the arts in criminal justice such as the *Arts Alliance*, as well as charities and funding bodies have created a number of research advocacy documents and academic studies that have supported and contributed to this association between the arts in prison and rehabilitation, see, for example: Allen et al. (2004),[3] Wrench & Clarke (2004),[4] Price (2009)[5] and Johnson et al. (2011).[6]

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[3] Allen, K. Shaw, P. Hall, J. (2004) *The Art of Rehabilitation* [online], Available at: http://rethinking.org.uk/publications/index.shtml

[4] Wrench, P. Clarke, A. (2004), *Reducing Re-offending & the Potential Contribution of the Arts*, Ed. Cowling (2004) For Art's Sake? Society & the Arts in the 21st Century [online] Available at: www.ippr.org.uk/ecomm/files/artssakesum.pdf

[5] Price, A.M. (2009) *Evaluation of Supporters participation in Family Man trials* [online] Available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/evaluations-and-impact/family-man-and-fathers-inside-evaluations

[6] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) *Unlocking Value: the economic benefit of the arts in criminal justice,* New Philanthropy Capital, London.

Yet in making the case for the arts in prison primarily on the contribution they are said to make in reducing reoffending, other reasons are being overlooked, for example, the idea that access to art is a human right, and that the fostering of creativity might positively impact upon the culture of prisons.

Arguments for the arts in prison, based on human rights and what is sometimes referred to as 'the decency agenda' are much less frequently voiced and possible reasons for this are indicated throughout this thesis. It is clear both from the literature surveyed and discussions with arts in criminal justice practitioners, that the purpose of the arts in prison is predominantly understood as being to rehabilitate the offender as opposed to the institution.

The former director general of the prison service, Martin Narey, initiated the 'decency agenda'. Its aim was to ensure that treatment of prisoners by staff would be professional and respectful and that prisoners would be 'provided, with a regime that gives variety and helps them to rehabilitate' (HM Prison Service 2003a: p29).[7] Whilst I am not seeking to dispute the idea that the arts may have a role to play in rehabilitation, my concern is that too great a focus on proving this to be the case may well prove detrimental to arts practice in prisons.

Throughout this thesis I argue that the relationship between rehabilitation and arts projects is more complex and contradictory than is suggested by much of the discussion and advocacy surrounding the arts in prison. The main problem being that the emphasis is placed almost entirely on how the 'arts intervention' may affect change on the individual rather than considering the importance of changing the environment of prison itself. One of

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[7] HM Prison Service (2003a: p29) cited in Scott, D (2008) *Penology* Sage Publications, Ltd. London p90

the implications of an assumed association between art and rehabilitation is that a reductive understanding of the arts is promoted and the artist enters the prison in order to 'improve' the prisoner.

I argue that the creative project, which aims to instill 'better parenting and partner skills', or develop 'employment skills', starts from a position of 'deficit'. The participant is involved due to a perceived lack that the creative project will seek to address. I suggest that arts projects with an agenda to reform become in effect part of an authoritarian discourse. Drawing on the work of Foucault (1977, 1980) I explore how subtle forms of power relations underpin such projects from the outset. Projects that promise to develop better 'family relationships' and 'employment skills' function as a means to instill a disciplined identity on the 'chaotic' *prisoner.*

There are a number of ways in which prison and punishment by the state can be read as performance and Foucault provides a genealogy of the transition from public spectacles of punishment (1977)[8] to the internalised constant 'performance' created by the panopticon, with its implied observer (1980)[9]. In relation to this Thompson (2004: p57)[10] has written about the need to recognise that the institution of prison and the 'role labeling of the person' are part of an elaborate series of performances that the arts practitioner working in prison needs to be aware of, or risk becoming implicated. A number of the most frequently used Offending Behaviour Programmes in prison such

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[8] Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin Books Ltd

[9] Foucault, M. (1980) 'The Eye of Power' in Gordon, C. (ed) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Press Ltd pp146-165

[10] Thompson, J. (2004) 'From the Stocks to the Stage', in Balfour M, (ed.) *Theatre in prison: theory and practice* Bristol, Intellect, pp57-76

as Thinking Skills (TS) and Controlling Anger and Learning how to Manage it (CALM) use presentations and role play as a means for participants to demonstrate what they have learnt. With the increased emphasis on arts projects in prisons needing to demonstrate their effectiveness in helping to rehabilitate participants it is possible to see how arts practitioners working in this context can become part of a performance of reform.

This crucial point of tension that exists for arts practitioners working in prisons marks the terrain of this thesis. I start from the position that arts practice in prison is fundamentally compromised from the associations which have been built between the arts and rehabilitation. In focusing on how arts companies such as *Safe Ground* and *Escape Artists*, amongst others, have aligned themselves to this aim, I aim to illustrate how some arts projects in prison have become contributors to the 'performance of reform'.

Issues of compromise may arise when an arts practitioner aiming to create an experience that is in some sense liberating for participants has to negotiate within the system's own narrative of the purpose of the project. This issue has been raised by Hughes (1998:p44)[11] and Thompson (2004:p63)[12] but to date there has been little focus on what appears to be increasing pressure for arts practitioners working in prisons to directly address how their work can contribute to reducing reoffending. Nor has there been much attention given to how some arts organisations working within criminal justice have shaped their projects to address issues associated with reoffending. Additionally, whilst the

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[11] Hughes, J (1998) 'Resistance & Expression' in Thompson, J (ed) Prison Theatre: Perspectives & Practices, London Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd pp43-62

[12] Thompson, J. (2004) 'From the Stocks to the Stage' in Balfour M, (ed) *Theatre in prison: theory and practice,* Bristol Intellect pp57-76

creation of an advocacy body to represent the sector in the form of the *Arts Alliance* has been valuable in facilitating communication between various arts organisations and individuals working within the sector, there has been little critical discussion of how it situates itself in relation to government policy and the institution of prison. Rather it has functioned to consolidate the idea that the purpose of the arts in criminal justice is to reduce reoffending, stating, for example about its members that 'all contribute towards preventing re-offending', *Arts Alliance* (2012).[13]

Whilst promoting the idea that this is the purpose of the arts in prison may well be politically expedient, there may be counter-productive aspects to this strategy. There is the possibility that the arts in prison become embedded in an authoritative discourse of reform and that this produces creative parameters over the kind of artistic work that takes place in prisons; secondly that it may be difficult to provide a solid evidence base for the arts as a rehabilitative tool and in the context of 'payment by results' it may not be regarded as a cost effective solution. The recent implementation of 'payment by results' means that an intervention needs to prove that it has been effective in order for the provider of the intervention to receive full payment for its provision.

Another problematic dimension is that arts projects, which are closely tied to rehabilitative outcomes, may also contribute to the idea that the prisoner needs or is required to learn a particular lesson from their involvement in the creative project. Such an approach can help contribute to the restrictive narrative identity of the person in prison. The support for this argument is made through analysis of several theatre projects in prison.

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[13] Arts Alliance (2012) Available at: htpp://www.artsalliance.org.uk/aboutus. Accessed: 31/03/12.

It is however important to recognise the wider cultural factors which have contributed to the idea that the arts in prison should serve specific rehabilitative objectives. In my consideration of the broader cultural context which has influenced recent arts practice in prisons I aim to illustrate that there is a mesh of influences shaping and determining the parameters of the arts in prison in any given period. These influences are political in origin and questioning and appraising what appear to be 'givens' about the purpose of the arts in prison is important in order to be able to influence the possibilities and future practice of the arts in prison.

To this end I aim to contextualise the current situation with a broader picture of how discourse emphasizing the usefulness of the arts has proliferated within the UK in recent years. The argument for the social usefulness of the arts has been made in publications by Myerscough (1988)[14], Landry et al. (1996)[15] and Mattaraso (1997)[16] as well as by bodies such as the Arts Council and government departments. It has also been suggested in arguments emphasising the cohesive role of arts projects in society that the arts may have a role to play in helping to reduce reoffending, see for example, Landry et al. (1996:p38)[17]

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[14] Myerscough, J. (1988) *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Great Britain*, Policy Studies Institute, London.

[15] Landry, C. Greene, L. Matarasso, F. Bianchini, F. (1996) *The Art of Regeneration*, [online] Available at: htpp:// http://www.combined-arts.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/indonesia-charleslandry-artofregeneration.pdf

[16] Matarasso F, (1997) *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*, Commedia, Gloucester, Electronic Publication.

[17] Ibid.

The development of a discourse of applied arts has been a contributing factor in helping to emphasise the usefulness of the arts, although it is also within this realm, in the field of applied theatre for example, that questions over what is being applied to whom and why have been scrutinised: see Hughes & Ruding (2009: p223)[18] Nicholson (2005:p13) Prentki (2009:p14).[19]

Although theorists and practitioners, such as those cited above, have problematized the role of the arts within criminal justice it remains the case that 'out in the field' arts organisations remain committed to proving the value of the arts in prison in terms of what they can contribute to bringing about changes in the offender; changes that will ultimately result in the offender being rehabilitated. The claim that the arts can contribute to a reduction in reoffending is something which a number of arts organizations working within criminal justice are actively seeking to prove. Several arts organisations working with the arts in prison have commissioned research in order to build evidence of the efficacy of their work, see for example, *Safe Ground* (2009)[20] *Writers in Prison Network* (2012)[21] and the representative body of the arts in criminal justice, the *Arts Alliance* has also promoted the work of the sector through the

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[18] Hughes, J. & Ruding, S. (2009) 'Made to Measure*?'* in Prentki, T & Preston, S. (eds) *The Applied Theatre Reader,* Oxon. Routledge pp. 217-225

[19] Prentki, T & Preston, S. (eds) (2009) *The Applied Theatre Reader,* Oxon, Routledge.

[20] Safe Ground (2009) Evaluations & Impact [online] Available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/evaluations-and-impact/family-man-and-fathers-inside-evaluations/ accessed 10/10/2011

[21] O'Keefe, C & Albertson, K. (2012) *An Evaluation of the Writers in Prison Network,* Sheffield Hallam [online] Available at: http://www.artsevidence.org.uk/evaluations/wipn-eval-2011/ accessed 10/12/2012

commissioning of reports such as: *Unlocking Value* (2011).[22] There are of course economic factors involved, with funders of such organisations wanting to see that their support has 'made a difference' and a funding climate which is not necessarily conducive to open discussion about projects which may have struggled to fulfill their objectives. The pressure to demonstrate effective performance is symptomatic of the culture of 'performing reform'. This is not to say that the work of arts practitioners working with people in criminal justice is not effecting change but changes may be more subtle or temporary and they may also apply to the staff or the institution in some way. Yet it seems a particular narrative of how the arts project has impacted upon the offender is required instead of a broader more complex picture of how arts projects may have impact within the context of prison.

Research conducted on the arts in criminal justice has argued the need to build a solid evidence base that can be used to advocate the value of the arts in criminal justice and to develop a theoretical basis, which can explain how the arts can contribute to rehabilitation, (Hughes 2005).[23] The lack of solid evidence to make the case for the efficacy of the arts in criminal justice is still regarded as a problem. Arts organisations working within prisons and other criminal justice settings have not "yet done enough to talk coherently and comprehensively about how arts projects work towards targets in the criminal justice system", (Johnson et al. 2011:p10).[24] Many of the arts organisations and

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[22] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) *Unlocking Value: the economic benefit of the arts in criminal justice,* New Philanthropy Capital, London

[23] Hughes, J. (2005) *Doing the Arts Justice: A Review of Research Literature, Practice & Theory* DCMS [online] Available at: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/doing-the-arts-justice-a-review-of-research-literature-practice-and-theory/ accessed at: 14/12/2009

[24] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) Op.Cit.

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practitioners working within criminal justice settings continue to try to make the case for what they do on this basis. Recently the *Arts Alliance* has produced The Evidence Library[25] to bring together a variety of studies and reports, which aim to prove the value of the work within the discourse of rehabilitation.

The pressure to prove the effectiveness of the arts in prison has seen the proliferation of a research advocacy discourse that is directed towards proving the value of the arts in prison in somewhat limited terms. A recent example of this is the report commissioned by the *Arts Alliance* (2011),[26] which focuses on savings made to the criminal justice system by several arts organisations. Whilst there may be strategic value in such a case being made there also needs to be a broader range of questions about the role the arts can play in criminal justice settings: for example, how might arts projects impact upon prison culture and staff moral or what role might arts projects play in creating links between prison and their local communities?

The problem is not just the difficulty in proving whether the arts do have a specific role to play in the rehabilitation of prisoners but also that the drive towards situating them within this role may be causing changes, which are not necessarily positive. This point is developed in Chapter One where I use the example of The Family Man course, run by *Safe Ground*, to make the argument that some drama programmes in prison appear to have taken on a 'one size fits all' approach, similar to some of the Offending Behaviour Programmes, which are used to rehabilitate prisoners.

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[25] McLewin Associates (2011) [online] Available at: http://www.artsevidence.org.uk

[26] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) Op. Cit.

In Chapter One: 'What Works? : the arts in prison and offender rehabilitation', I introduce some of the recent debates around the question of 'What Works?'[27] and consider how the system of prisoner categorisation and the pressure to complete offending behavior courses can result in a 'performance of reform'. I discuss the 'shared language' that has built associations between the arts in prison and rehabilitation and how the arts in prison have largely come to be about 'delivering interventions'. I then illustrate this point about proximity between the arts and rehabilitation through analysis of the work of *Safe Ground*.

In Chapter Two, 'The Politics of Performance: aesthetics & targets', I present some of the historical and political factors that have influenced and created particular understandings about the role of art in society. As an illustration of the emphasis placed upon instrumentalist objectives in recent years, I examine the work of *Escape Artists* and how the company's work underwent a significant shift from their early work, producing plays by Orton and Pinter, to delivering 'pre-employment training workshops' in the final years of the company's existence. I also discuss the difficulties in proving the effectiveness of the arts in bringing about rehabilitation, something which a number of practitioners working with the arts in criminal justice have drawn attention to, for example, Heritage (2004:p190)[28] and Hughes and Ruding (2009).[29] In discussing this point I draw upon the work of cultural theorists

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[27] Martinson, R. (1974) *What works? Questions and answers about prison reform*. The Public Interest 35, pp.22-54

[28] Heritage, P. *(2004)* 'Real Social Ties? The ins and outs of Making Theatre in Brazilian Prisons', *in* Balfour, M. (ed.) *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice*. Bristol, Intellect Books pp.189-2002

Belfiore and Bennett (2007)[30] who, in questioning claims made for the social impact of the arts in recent years, provide a useful perspective from which to consider some of the claims made for the arts in criminal justice.

In only addressing the question of what the arts can do to help bring about change in the prisoner, the question of what they cannot do, or rather what they are limited in achieving because of more powerful discourses that exist within a prison context, seems to be neglected. Research advocacy that supports the argument for the transformative impact of the arts does not sufficiently address the 'anti-transformative' narratives and practices of the prison environment. Becoming a prisoner is a powerful transformation in itself and one that cannot be easily undone. The conflicting discourses of punishment and reform within prison seem to be rarely accounted for in discussions about the efficacy of arts projects in prison. Although the achievement of 'soft' aims such as developing self-confidence or team work are not to be dismissed, the ways in which prison culture may undermine the attainment of such objectives also needs to be addressed. Perhaps, rather than asking how effective an arts intervention is, it might also be valuable to ask: what contextual factors are likely to limit effectiveness?

In relation to this point I argue, in Chapter Three, 'Restrictive Narrative Identity: creating *prisoner*', that within prison the identity of those imprisoned becomes subject to a restrictive narrative identity. This narrative is expressed

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[29] Hughes, J. & Ruding, S. (2009*)* '*Made to Measure?*' in Prentki, T & Preston, S. (eds) *The Applied Theatre Reader,* Oxon Routledge, pp. 217-225

[30] Belfiore, E & Bennett, O. (2007) *Rethinking the Social Impacts of the Arts* International Journal of Cultural Policy, Volume 12, Issue 2. pp135 -151 [online] Available at:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286630701342741

through staff prison service training courses, through everyday exchanges between prisoners, between staff and prisoners and in everyday rituals of prison life. It is also implicitly apparent in rehabilitation programmes that aim to address behavioural problems, such as anger management. It is not something only confined to the institution of prison itself but can also be identified in media reporting of prisoners and in political statements about prisoners. This restrictive narrative creates and perpetuates a reductive identity for those incarcerated and I term this reductive, generic identity, *prisoner*.

I use the term *prisoner* to refer to an ideologically constituted identity. The individual prisoner is required to perform a series of everyday rituals and encounters which confirm her/him as *prisoner*. To resist only serves to increase and intensify the extent to which s/he will be made *prisoner,* for example through control and restraint techniques and/or confinement to segregation. Thus discussion of the extent to which a prison theatre or writing project, for example, can contribute towards rehabilitation needs to be made with awareness of the particular conditions in which the creative project exists. Research that seeks to reveal the potential of arts projects to rehabilitate does so in a context where a re-imagining of self beyond the identity of *prisoner* and a non-criminal identity is seriously limited.

Drawing upon my experience of making theatre and writing in prison, I develop the idea in Chapter Four, 'The Artist & the Arts in prison: media narratives & prison culture', that a positive function of arts projects which are focused on aesthetic objectives is they can cultivate an artistic, creative identity that can call into question or provide respite from the overarching narrative of *prisoner*. I argue that whilst such change may not be easily measured as proof

of rehabilitation, a shift in how people view themselves and in the way they are viewed by others is key in bringing forth the possibility of change.

My research considers how the act of writing or performing a character can be a means by which a broader range of narrative identity might be experienced. Through such creative work different aspects of self might be encountered, with interesting possibilities for a broader experience and reflection upon identity. In responding to the need for new approaches to assessing the value of arts practice in prisons, I explore the potential that creative writing, acting and the adoption of artistic roles such as writer or actor may have in developing a broader sense of narrative identity. Whilst arguing that prison discourse creates and supports 'restrictive narrative identity' I use the example of a prison theatre production to consider how theatrical performance can be a means through which power relations are subverted and new roles can be experienced.

In Chapter Five, 'Creating new roles: narrative Identity & desistance', I explore how the adoption of a creative role such as writer or actor can present opportunities for a (re) consideration of personal identity, utilizing the work of Maruna (2001)[31], Maruna and Ward (2007)[32] and McNeil and Weaver (2010)[33] and their research on narrative identity and desistance. I incorporate a number of statements from participants involved in making several theatre projects in

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[31] Maruna, S, (2001) *Making Good: how ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*, Washington, D.C. American Psychological Association.

[32] Ward T & Maruna S, (2007) *Rehabilitation: beyond the risk paradigm,* London, Routledge.

[33] McNeil, F. & Weaver, B. Report No.03 (2010) *Changing Lives? Desistance Research & Offender Management*, SCCJR [online] available at: http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/publications/changing-lives-desistance-research-and-offender-management/ accessed 12th December 2012

prison and their descriptions of how making theatre alongside staff changed relationship dynamics between officer staff and prisoners. Through the adoption and the performing of artistic roles, established power relationships within prison can be re-aligned, even if only temporarily. As a result of immersion in the creative task for its own sake, the associations and identity of *prisoner* can be disrupted by the creative activity and a period of respite from the role of *prisoner* can be created. Arts projects with aesthetic objectives as a priority may therefore have a useful function to play (depending on your point of view) in acting as an intervention in established status and power relationships within a prison. This may come about through the creation of an ensemble made up of prisoners and staff who might not ordinarily associate as a unified group, or be experienced by an individual who through their artistic work becomes renowned for their creative identity. In this chapter I also present several case studies and describe my personal experience of restrictive narrative identity in relation to visiting a family member in prison.

Chapter Six, 'Limitations on the Arts in Prison', forms my conclusion, drawing together the key points of my research and also discusses some of the most current issues facing the arts in prison. This includes the Coalition Government's emphasis on prisons becoming "places of hard work and industry"[34] (Great Britain: Ministry of Justice 2010:p14) and the policy of 'payment by results'. Currently the prison service is undergoing significant change and it is claimed that we are in the midst of a 'rehabilitation

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[34] Great Britain. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation & Sentencing of Offenders*, London: The Stationery Office [online] available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120119200607/http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/breaking-the-cycle.pdf accessed 2nd February 2013

revolution'.[35] Arts organisations working within prisons, and the broader setting of criminal justice, are being invited to 'make the case' for the arts in prison on the grounds of their capacity to contribute towards rehabilitative objectives. The Government has made it clear, in publications such as, 'Breaking the Cycle' (2010)[36] that 'third sector' interventions, under which the arts are categorised, must produce evidence of impact. In the current era of 'payment by results' this may prove to be not only a challenge to arts organisations but may also impose limitations on the work they do. In relation to this I consider the response of the *Arts Alliance*, which is the representative body of arts organisations and artists working with the arts in prison, and raise questions about the demands being made of the arts in prison. In concluding, I argue the need for arts practitioners working within the criminal justice sector to create a more politicised discourse around the arts in prison: one that interrogates and debates the relationship between rehabilitation and the arts in criminal justice.

Literature Review

The literature used to inform and develop the arguments presented in this thesis span the disciplines of theatre, performance studies, sociology and criminology. Whilst this list suggests separate pools of knowledge, in effect there is fluidity and crossover, for example between studying social roles from a performance perspective and the employment of dramaturgical language to

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[35] Term used by the former, Minister for Justice Kenneth Clarke in his speech to the Centre for Crime & Justice Studies, June 2010

[36] Great Britain. Ministry of Justice (2010) Op.Cit.

understand how identities may be enacted. From within these broad fields I have concentrated my research to specific areas relating to the subject matter of the thesis, for example, within theatre and performance studies I have focused my discussion on applied theatre and in particular theatre practice in prisons. In the field of criminology I have focused on desistance theory and in particular the role of narrative identity in relation to desistance. The texts drawn upon for this thesis, as well as crossing disciplines, span a variety of sources, including reports, monographs, journal articles, policy documents, film, media reporting and interview and performance material created during the residency. Therefore for clarity I have organised my review of the literature into sub-headings as follows: Theatre and Creative Writing in Prison; Cultural Policy, Instrumentalism and Aesthetics; Power and Identity in Prison.

Theatre and Creative Writing in Prison

There are several studies that focus on and critically address theatre making in prison in the UK but there is rather less material directly addressing the work of writers in prison. This may be in part a reflection of the ecology of the arts in prison, in that whereas performance projects tend to be carried out by groups and organisations, of which there are approximately ten currently active within prisons, writers more often work in a solo capacity and presently one organisation, the Writers in Prison Network, organises the majority of writers' residencies within prisons in England and Wales. They have produced a collection of case studies (2002)[37] that gives an insight into being a Writer in

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[37] Hopwood, C (1999) (ed) *Free with Words*, Manchester, Bar None Books

Residence from a variety of perspectives and case studies. A more general overview of writers and writing activity within prison is provided in Broadhead's work (2010),[38] which spans the work of writers from Wilde and Behan to more contemporary 'names' such as Jimmy Boyle and Erwin James. There is an admirably broad scope to Broadhead's work that points to the need for more research to be developed on the work of writers in prison. An earlier publication by Davies focuses on writers in prison "who were incarcerated for writing, or… intellectuals whose incarceration came about for political or religious reasons" (1990:p3).[39] For the purposes of this thesis my interest lays with the individual who, whilst a prisoner, becomes a writer and/or actor in prison and the implications this may have for that person's sense of self rather than, as in Davies's work, the person who is established as a writer who then becomes a prisoner.

In relation to writing and research on theatre in prisons there have been several significant contributions to the study of theatre in prisons in the last three decades; notable contributors to the field include Balfour (2004), McAvinchey (2011) and Thompson (1998). The work of Thompson (1998)[40] and Balfour (2004)[41] provide studies of a broad section of practitioners working with different groups of prisoners in a range of cultural contexts. Balfour discusses the need for effective evaluation in the context of the 'What Works?'

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[38] Broadhead, J. (2006) *Unlocking the Prison Muse: the Inspirations & Effects of Prisoners' Writing in Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge Academic.

[39] Davies, I. (1990) *Writers in Prison*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd

[40] Thompson, J (1998) (ed) *Prison Theatre: Perspectives & Practices*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Ltd

[41] Balfour M, (2004) *Theatre in Prison: theory and practice* Bristol, Intellect

debate[42] and discusses the need to find appropriate methodologies which can validate the use of artistic 'interventions'. In more recent critical writing he sounds a warning note about the pressures on arts in prison to appear 'useful' or 'effective' (2009).[43] Another important contributor to theatre practice in prisons is Heritage (2004), who has highlighted the paradox of creating theatre in prison where there is a requirement for the work created to have a value beyond itself:

> It is not in the now that this work is tested, but in some indeterminate future: it will reduce risk, increase safety, construct citizenship in some other world that is not the one in which the performance or dramatic activity has taken place … is this what we want? Is this what we are promising?   (2004:p190)[44]

The question, as Heritage points out, of what is being 'promised' and to whom is crucial because such 'promises' or statements of purpose, shape and influence the kind of creative work made and the processes employed in its making. In raising the issue of what is being 'promised' Heritage also

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[42] Balfour M, Poole L, (1998) 'Evaluating Theatre in Prisons & Probation' in Thompson, J (ed) Prison Theatre Perspectives and Practices, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Ltd pp 217-230

[43] Balfour, M. (2009) *The politics of intention: looking for a theatre of little changes*, Research in Drama Education, Vol.14. (No.3) p347-359 [online] Available at: http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/crde/2009/00000014/00000003/art00003 Accessed 15/03/2012

[44] Heritage, P. (2004) *'Real Social Ties? The ins and outs of Making Theatre in Brazilian Prisons' in* Balfour, M (ed. 2004) *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice,* Bristol: Intellect, pp *189-2002.*

acknowledges the difficulty of measuring durability: what has changed for whom and for how long? This emphasis on how an arts project in prison might help produce a positive effect in the future is just as true for many of the interventions that happen in prison. In such an environment, set apart from the realities of non-institutionalised life, almost every intervention is in some sense a rehearsal for the post-prison life to come. Thompson (2003:p82)[45] has discussed this point in relation to prison work creating the term: 'futuritive' to express the narrative frame that places prison work and training programmes as a 'rehearsal' for the life to be lived after release.

McKean (2006) writing about her experience of producing theatre productions in prison, points out the conflicting objectives that may arise between what institutions and funders may require of the creative project in prison and the needs of the group involved in the creative process:

> Whilst not disputing the need to provide evidence of the efficacy of arts programmes in secure institutions the pressure to do so can shift the agenda of projects away from the group and its needs into fulfilling institutional demands which can sometimes be at odds with the ethos of a project. (2006: p314)[46]

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[45] Thompson, J (2003) *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond*, In Stage & Screen Studies, Oxford. Peter Lang.

[46] McKean, A. (2006) 'Playing for Time in 'The Doll's House'. Issues of Community & Collaboration in the Devising of Theatre in a Women's Prison', Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre & Performance, Vol.11 (No.3) pp 313-327

This statement articulates two specific and related issues pertinent to this thesis: one is to do with questioning the degree to which creative arts projects may be 'fulfilling institutional demands,' and the second is encapsulated by McKean's point about 'not disputing the need to provide evidence of the efficacy of arts programmes'. The relationship between these two points is key to understanding how and why the association between the arts in prison and rehabilitation has become so embedded. Arts practitioners and organisations working with the arts in criminal justice, by accepting the need to prove 'the efficacy of arts programmes', are in one sense already engaged in the process of 'fulfilling institutional demands.'

McKean's statement is representative of an orthodoxy surrounding the arts in criminal justice. Whilst this statement is perfectly logical in that this is the political reality that arts organisations working within criminal justice face, it is important to question the repeated message that the arts must prove their efficacy in rehabilitating prisoners.

Whilst practitioners and theorists writing about theatre practice in prison have acknowledged issues that may arise in adopting the rehabilitative agenda and its discursive frameworks, see for example the work of Thompson (2003)[47] and McAvinchey (2011),[48] there is little research on how this has impacted upon the work of specific arts organisations. In a recent article Balfour (2009) notes how:

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[47] Thompson, J (2003) Op.Cit.

[48] McAvinchey, C (2011) *Theatre & Prison,* Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan

Companies, such as Geese Theatre… began as radical practitioners

working with the marginalized in prisons in the USA to, become a

company specialising in the use of theatre to focus on an individual's

responsibility for their offending behaviour. (2009:p349)[49]

Yet to date there has been no specific focus on the shifts in practice that have happened within companies and what this might tell us about the future direction for the arts in prison. Therefore in this thesis I discuss the work of two companies, *Escape Artists* and *Safe Ground,* as examples of arts organisations whose work in prisons has been shaped by the rehabilitation agenda. I focus on these companies as a result of having observed their work in practice and for the fact that both companies began their work in prisons with artistic concerns as primary goals. However, they are not unique amongst arts organisations in having shifted more towards a focus on what their work can achieve in terms of rehabilitating the offender. Most, if not all, arts projects in prison promise some degree of rehabilitative outcome to greater or lesser degrees. See for example the following statements made by organisations about the work they do in prisons:

Superact has been working in the Justice System since its formation

with a clear vision of providing performance and workshop opportunities

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[49] Balfour, M. (2009) 'The Politics of Intention: looking for a theatre of little changes', Research in Drama Education, Vol.14. (No.3) p347-359 [online] Available at:
http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/crde/2009/00000014/00000003/art00003
Accessed 15th March 2012

to those in prison with the overall aim of reducing re-offending and

improving personal development (*Superact*)[50]

Active participation in *Synergy's* projects develops practical,

psychological and social skills essential on the path to release,

rehabilitation and social integration (*Synergy Theatre Project*)[51]

Geese Theatre Company has an excellent reputation for developing

highly effective interventions for addressing a variety of offending

behaviours issues. Some of our projects are complete programmes of

work and others are designed to form part of longer-term programmes

already being delivered in an establishment.

(*Geese Theatre Company*)[52]

The ways in which these companies work in prisons differs considerably,

for example, whereas the work of *Synergy Theatre Project* focuses on creating

productions of plays and developing new writing for theatre, *Geese Theatre*

Company focus on creating specially designed projects and productions that

deal directly with issues of offending behavior. Although the methods of all

three companies are significantly different, they all lay claim to the notion that

the work they do can bring about changes in the people they work with. Yet the

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[50] *Superact* (2006) Available at: http://www.superact.org.uk/uk-projects/uk-justice, accessed 10/12/12

[51] *Synergy Theatre Project* (no date) http://www.synergytheatreproject.co.uk/index.php?maincat=2, accessed: 09/07/11

[52] *Geese Theatre Company* (no date) http://www.geese.co.uk/HTML/prison-mental-health.html accessed 09/07/11

question of whether the arts in prison really have the power to transform people for the better and how they actually do this is difficult to answer. Who defines 'transformation'? How can transformation be measured, sustained and proved? This notion of 'transformation', the idea that participation in a creative project will bring about behavioural change, has been problematised by a number of practitioners and theorists working in the field of applied theatre: see for example, Nicholson (2005:p12),[53] Prentki and Preston, (2009:p14),[54] Hughes and Ruding (2003:p221).[55]

Schechner describes aesthetic drama as having the capacity to bring about 'transportation', inducing a temporary "leaving of self" (2002:p72)[56]. The notion of the prisoner being temporarily 'transported' from the immediacy of the prison environment is to suggest 'escape' from the punishment of prison, and this is politically problematic. This point, of how involvement in theatre may result in an experience of 'transportation;' as opposed to a transformation in behaviour is addressed by Nicholson (2005:p12)[57]. She discusses how Schechner defines transformation as something permanent and most often occurring through a rite of passage. This idea is important for considering how the experience of being imprisoned is itself a powerful transformation and how in such a context, the 'transportative' experience may be more powerful than a

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[53] Nicholson, H. (2005) *Applied Drama: the gift of theatre*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

[54] Prentki, T & Preston, S. (2009) (eds) *The Applied Theatre Reader*, Oxon, Routledge

[55] Hughes, J & Ruding, S. 'Made to Measure?' in *The Applied Theatre Reader*, (eds) Prentki, T & Preston, S. London & New York, Routledge pp217-225

[56] Schechner, R. (2007) 2nd Ed, *Performance Studies: an introduction*, New York, London, Routledge

[57] Nicholson, H. (2005) *Applied Drama: the gift of theatre*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

project, which in addressing issues such as lack of employment or poor family relationships, serves to support the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*.

This idea of being taken to 'another world' is important for the possibility of re-imagining the self beyond what might be a restrictive narrative identity. According to Hughes, "Drama workshops, for example, provide 'transitional space' in which people can reflect on themselves and 'be' something or somebody else". Hughes (2005:p66)[58]. An important issue to consider, is to what extent that 'transitional space' is self-realised, as a 'place' to freely imagine or a place where a particular set of objectives and associated values are prescribed?

Another issue is that with the arts in prison framed as a rehabilitative tool, with the aim of helping to transform behavior, they may be used in order to sharply remind the prisoner of why they are in prison. Hughes raises this point in her discussion of a project with women prisoners at HMP Styal: "The objective becomes to confront women with what they have done," (1998:p52).[59] Thompson too describes witnessing theatre-based projects with the aim of making those imprisoned, "face up to… what they have done" (2003:p48).[60] The opportunity to reflect on offending behavior may of course be extremely important but whether this in itself will necessarily ignite a desire for change is

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[58] Hughes, J. (2005) *Doing the Arts Justice: A Review of Research Literature, Practice & Theory* DCMS [online] Available at: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/doing-the-arts-justice-a-review-of-research-literature-practice-and-theory/ accessed 14/12/2009

[59] Hughes, J (1998) 'Resistance & Expression', in Thompson, J (ed) *Prison Theatre: Perspectives & Practices*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Ltd.

[60] Thompson, J (2003) 'Doubtful Principles in Arts in Prison', in Williams, R.C.M. (ed) *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars*, Boston, Northeastern University Press pp41-61

debatable. Issues of power and authority arise whenever an arts project seeks to elicit particular and prescribed changes and especially so in prison.

One of the more recent contributions to the study of theatre in prisons is McAvinchey's *Theatre & Prison* (2011), which provides a useful overview of the relationship between theatre and prisons in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She notes the increasing tendency to define theatre in prison in terms of the 'predetermined outcomes it promises' and also raises the issue of politics in relation to the motivations of practitioners working in prison, "that they cannot be assumed to be left leaning or radical" (2011:p59).[61] This issue of the politics of arts projects in prison is a crucial one and is considered more fully in my final chapter.

Cultural Policy, Instrumentalism and Aesthetics

In order to better understand how the rehabilitative agenda for the arts in prison has been set, I draw upon recent debates about the purpose of the arts in society. In particular I discuss recent research advocacy literature that has emphasised the social value of the arts in economic terms. The drive towards making the case for arts in prison based on measurable outcomes, for example qualifications and skills gained, relates to a wider political agenda, which has advocated the arts in terms of their contribution to economic regeneration and social inclusion.

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[61] McAvinchey, C (2011) *Theatre & Prison,* Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan

The wider context of critical debate about the arts in contemporary UK society, and the promotion of the value of the arts in terms of their social use, has of course impacted upon the arts in criminal justice sector. Many arts organisations which work in criminal justice settings are also active in working with a range of socially excluded groups, companies such as: *Escape Artists*, *Geese Theatre Company*, *The Comedy School*, to name just a few, with much the same language being used to describe the objectives of the work.

The ways in which publicly funded art projects and organisations have become tied in to a funding discourse with particular social aims is something that I examine in relation to the arts in prison. In doing so I look at the cultural policy of the Department of Culture Media and Sport during the period of the New Labour Government, to place the association between the arts and rehabilitation into a wider political discourse linking the arts to the achievement of particular social aims. Chris Smith, who was appointed Minister for Culture, Media and Sport when Labour came to power in 1997, justified public funding for the arts in the following terms: "this is not something for nothing. We want to see measurable outcomes for the investment, which is being made" (Smith 1998).[62] The idea that public funding of the arts should represent 'value for money', that funding for the arts was in fact an 'investment' and that the 'return' should be realised in some tangibly beneficial social outcome, is an argument which gained ground under New Labour. The politics of arts funding comes under particular scrutiny and pressure when being discussed in the area of criminal justice. The pressure to 'prove' value for money in terms of

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[62] DCMS (1998) *Chris Smith details biggest ever increase in cultural funding.* DCMS press release 167/98

rehabilitative outcomes being seen as crucial where public money is being used to fund arts projects in prison.

The difficulties involved in proving whether the arts can make 'transformative changes' is discussed in relation to the work of Belfiore (2002),[63] Bennet and Belfiore (2007)[64] and Selwood (2006)[65] whose research into cultural policy has questioned some of the claims made for what the arts are said to achieve. Belfiore and Bennett, for example, argue that the 'advocacy agenda' for the arts sets out to 'prove' its own rhetoric.

> The advocacy agenda that has underpinned most of these studies has blurred the boundaries between advocacy and research. Instead of questioning whether or not the arts actually do have the economic and social impacts claimed for them, researchers have directed their efforts to coming up with evidence that they do.[66] (2008:p6-7)

The point they make here is relevant not only to some of the research literature produced that seeks to make the case for the arts in prison on

[63] Belfiore, E. (2002) 'Arts as a Means of Alleviating Social Exclusion: does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies & social impact studies in the UK', International Journal of Cultural Policy, Vol 8 (1) pp91-106

[64] Belfiore, E & Bennett, O. (2007) 'Rethinking the Social Impact of the Arts' in The International Journal of Cultural Policy, Vol 13, (2) pp135-151

[65] Selwood, S. (2006) 'Unreliable Evidence: The Rhetorics of Data Collection in the Cultural Sector', in Mirza, M. (ed) Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts? pp38-52 [online] Available at: http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/culture%20vultures%20-%20jan%202006.pdf, accessed 12th June 2010

[66] Belfiore, E. & Bennett, O. (2008) The Social Impact of the Arts, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

rehabilitative grounds but also to the ways in which such 'research' is then

disseminated. With regard to the arts in prison, several of the studies I have

looked at in researching this thesis make their claims for what the arts can do

to rehabilitate prisoners with some degree of qualification but there are cases

where the 'evidence' from such studies is then presented as proof that the arts

projects concerned effect certain changes. An example of this is the report

commissioned by the *Arts Alliance* and published by New Philanthropy Capital

(2011).[67] Whereas the report qualifies its economic analysis of several

companies working with the arts in prison, stating:

> Our analytical approach is suitable for the purpose of exploring the
>
> challenges and opportunities of the economic analysis, but we caution
>
> against using the returns on investment as conclusive evidence of the
>
> charities' impact, (2011:p4)[68]

Yet the subsequent press release from the *Arts Alliance* promoting the

report states that: "Arts programmes in prisons can dramatically reduce the

rates of re-offending which in turn generates savings to the taxpayer, research

shows" (2011).[69] Whilst it can of course be argued that the *Arts Alliance* are

simply trying to put the best case forward for the arts in prison in terms that are

compatible with the agenda of the Government, it is nonetheless problematic

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[67] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) *Unlocking Value: the economic benefit of the arts in criminal justice,* New Philanthropy Capital, London.

[68] Ibid

[69] Arts Alliance (2011) Press Release [online] Available at: http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/finance/news/content/10767/art_projects_in_prisons_reduce_re-offending_rates_says_arts_council_research

that in advocating for the arts in prison a particular discourse about the performance of the arts in prison is adopted.

Previous research into the arts in prison, for example, Cowling (2004)[70] and Hughes (2005), argues the need to produce evidence and find sound methodological processes that can adequately capture the value of the work that is being done. Hughes makes the point that whilst there is a good deal of anecdotal evidence that points to the rehabilitative contribution the arts in prison make there is a lack of 'hard' evidence to support this:

There is an abundance of success stories to be told within this field. However it is important to understand how and why the arts can make transformative changes and how sustainable these changes are. (2005:p7)[71]

The call for evidence, with the need to prove the impact that the arts have in reducing reoffending has been made clear by the Ministry of Justice in reports and consultation documents, see, for example, (Great Britain, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011)[72] and also in statements

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[70] Cowling, J. (2004) (ed) *For Arts Sake? Society & the Arts in the 21st Century,* Institute for Public Policy Research, London, [online] available at: http://www.ippr.org.uk/ecomm/files/artssakesum.pdf
Accessed 14th December 2009

[71] Hughes, J. (2005) *Doing The Arts Justice: A Review of Research Literature, Practice & Theory* DCMS [online] Available at: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/doing-the-arts-justice-a-review-of-research-literature-practice-and-theory/ accessed 14th December 2009

[72] Great Britain (2011) Department for Business Innovation & Skills, [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31464/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf accessed 5th June 2012

made by politicians. At a recent *Arts Alliance* conference, where the Minister for

Justice met with representatives of the arts in criminal justice sector, the need

to provide evidence of effectiveness of was made clear.[73] Through such

statements the discourse, which ties the arts in criminal justice to rehabilitation,

is ever more firmly established and it seems that the possibilities for expanding

the debate about the arts in prison is limited by the present imperative to prove

efficacy.

In addition to my focus on the politics of arts funding I discuss political

pressures in relation to media representations of the arts in prison and the

effect this has had on companies using the arts in prison such as *The Comedy*

School[74]. The work of Jewkes (2011)[75] and Kearon (2012)[76] has been useful

for considering how stereotyping of prisoners, particularly in mainstream news

media, help fuel political tensions around arts provision in prisons. Newspaper

articles, identifying those in prison as 'pampered lags', see for example, Kay

(2009)[77] promote the idea of prison as being a 'soft option'. These limited

narratives as told by tabloid media reports carry significance for my notion of

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[73] *Arts Alliance* Conference (2010) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7AehtrhfTc.

[74] *The Comedy School* [online] available at: http://thecomedyschool.com

[75] Jewkes, Y. (2011) *Media and Crime*, 2nd edition, London, Sage Publications, Ltd.

[76] Kearon AT. (2012) 'Alternative Representation of the Prison and Imprisonment - Comparing Dominant Narratives in the News Media and in Popular Fictional Texts'. *Prison Service Journal*, (199) p4-10. [online] Available at:
http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/opus1898/PSJ_January_2012_No._199.pdf
accessed 5th June 2012

[77] Kay, J. (2009) 'Con Air', *The Sun* [online] Available at:
http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/2150289/Fury-over-new-2m-radio-station-to-entertain-lags.html accessed 03/11

restrictive narrative identity in that such narratives follow common emotive themes that blot out more nuanced or less certain interpretations and accounts.

Power, Identity and Aesthetics

Drawing upon the work of Erving Goffman, I consider how role, identity and performance function in prison. I discuss the concept of performance both in terms of the performances that rehabilitation programmes sometimes require through presentations in which participants attest to what they have learnt but also in terms of performance management discourse that concerns itself with how a prison is performing. I employ the term 'performing reform' as a means to understand how prisons, prison staff and prisoners are all faced with specific performance pressures that can create 'cynical' performance (Goffman 1959:p28).[78]

Goffman sees identity through a dramaturgical lens with the idea that we present 'the self' we understand to be appropriate to our particular social environment and audience in order to be accepted. This has significant implications for the individual sentenced to imprisonment, as Jones & Smichd (1991)[79] argue, for the person sent to prison the need to 'fit ' with the environment and perform the role convincingly has implications for selfhood. In considering Goffman's proposal that the inmate is 'stripped of his identity'

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[78] Goffman, E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Penguin Books Ltd.

[79] Jones, R.S. & Schmid, T.J. (1991) *Doing Time: Prison Experience & Identity Among First Time Inmates*, Bingley, Emerald Group Publishing, Ltd.

(1961)[80] I suggest that one of the means through which this process is achieved is through the production of the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner.*

The work of Foucault has provided a particular critical framework through which to view how power functions, providing a more nuanced way in which to view the playing out of power relationships in prison rather than a more obvious hierarchical view of power that the institution of prison might suggest. Foucault draws attention to 'a whole technique of management' (1990:p105)[81] not only in relation to prisons but, for all sorts of contexts where different expressions of knowledge form the rationale for how people are arranged, organised, supervised and observed. This can be seen in the 'management of the rehabilitation' of prisoners through mechanisms that encourage performances of rehabilitation. The employment of the arts to facilitate rehabilitation creates a question mark over associations that link the arts to creative freedom and liberty and it is possible to see that the arts can also function as part of a disciplinary process.

Foucault's writings on discourse and power provide a means to see how an accumulation of utterances from a range of sources: government policy on crime, media representations of prisons and prisoners and criminological research on offending behavior, for example, intersect and create a rationale which explains the need for mechanisms through which to rehabilitate the *prisoner.* His approach to "question over and over again what is postulated as

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[80] Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients & OtherInmates*, London, Penguin Books Ltd.

[81] Foucault, M (1990) 'Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984, (ed) Kritzman, L.D. London, Routledge.

self evident" (1990:p265)[82], is a useful stance to adopt in order to critique the ways in which arts practice in prisons is explained through a discursive framework, which attaches art to rehabilitation.

Similarly, Gramsci's development of the concept of hegemony explained in Simon (1982)[83] offers a useful way into understanding how a consensus of values informs not only the perceived purpose of the arts in prison but the actual content of arts interventions. A consensus prevails about what is 'good' for the prisoner, not only because of political interests, but also because of a widely accepted 'common sense' view which legitimises the idea that prisoners should only have access to the arts if it can teach them to be 'better' in a way that accords with dominant cultural values. Prisoners need to be taught to adopt a culture of hard work and learn to become responsible employees and parents, for example.

The role of narrative and its relationship to identity is of importance to my concept of restrictive narrative identity. In exploring the idea that personal identity can be restricted by one's environment and by lack of narrative choice I have utilised literature on desistance theory that points to the importance of narrative in establishing a non-criminal identity. Research on desistance from crime is concerned with what enables former offenders to avoid continued involvement in criminal activities. The work of criminologists, such as, Maruna (2001),[84] Ward and Maruna (2007),[85] Ward and Marshall (2007)[86] and McNeil

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[82] Ibid

[83] Simon, R (1982) *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, London, Lawrence & Wishart

[84] Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform & Rebuild Their Lives*, Washington, American Psychological Association.

[85] Ward, T. & Maruna, S. (2007) *Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm*, London, Routledge

and Weaver (2010)[87] point to the importance of personal narratives and objectives in understanding attachment to offending behaviour and how changes to narrative identity can enable a shift from a criminal identity to someone who no longer commits criminal acts.

> Essentially, people construct stories to account for what they do and why they did it. These narratives impose an order on our actions and explain our behaviour… these self-narratives then act to shape and guide future behaviour, as persons act in ways that agree with the stories or myths we have created about ourselves.
>
> (Ward and Maruna 2007:p85)[88]

The work of Maruna and Ward (2007) emphasises the importance of reconfiguring narrative identity in constituting a desisting self. Their view is that opportunities for narrative development are important, and in relation to this I propose that character creation and the adoption of a creative role such as writer or actor can provide a means through which a broader sense of narrative identity is enabled. If this is the case then it is possible to see how rehabilitative interventions including those which use the creative arts as a means to address aspects of 'failed identity' may in fact be less helpful than a creative project

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[86] Ward, T. & Marshall, B. (2007) Narrative Identity & Offender Rehabilitation, International Journal of Offender Therapy & Comparative Criminology, Vol. 51 (3) pp297-297

[87] McNeil, F & Weaver, B. (2010) *Changing Lives? Desistance Research & Offender Management,* The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research [online] available at: http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/publications/changing-lives-desistance-research-and-offender-management/ accessed 3rd March 2013

[88] Ward, T & Maruna, S. (2007) *Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm*, Oxon, Routledge

which requires individuals to expand their repertoire of who they can be, through, for example, the portrayal and creation of characters and, in taking on a role such as actor or writer. In the enclosed world of prison, exposure to narratives beyond that of prisoner are limited and thus access to narratives of self beyond institutional narratives are crucially important. Artistic opportunities hold the possibility for this to happen.

Following through with this idea, that the creation of art for the sake of beauty and pleasure, and the taking on of the responsibility of creating something that is appreciated for its artistry has a value in broadening the scope of a person's sense of self beyond *prisoner,* I discuss the importance of the aesthetic experience in prison. In relation to this I discuss aspects of Kant's 'Critique of Judgement'[89] and also analyse an extract from the film The *Shawshank Redemption*[90] (1994) where a Kantian conception of the aesthetic is depicted.

Methodology

My professional experience as a theatre practitioner working in prison has greatly informed this thesis and has been the catalyst for this research. I draw upon personal reflections on the creative work produced as well as my experience of being a family visitor to prisons. The research methodology I have employed is best described as an autoethnographic approach.

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[89] Immanuel Kant, (1914) *Kant's Critique of Judgement,* translated with Introduction and Notes by J.H. Bernard (2nd ed. revised) London, Macmillan.

[90] The Shawshank Redemption (1994), Directed by Frank Darabont [Film]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

Autoethnography is defined by Denzin as "writing which draws upon ethnography and autobiography", cited in Shaughnessy (2012: pxix)[91].

The term 'ethnography' is a method employed by researchers who are attempting to understand a particular aspect of lived experience. The aim of employing an ethnographic approach is to develop insight into a specific cultural setting or group through "first-hand experience and exploration," Atkinson, et al. (2001:p4).[92] The ethnographer may gather a range of research data, writings, recordings, visual materials that serve to further knowledge and understanding of the particular context in which the ethnographer aims to become or is already immersed.

This close proximity to or immersion within the field of study can raise questions about the so called 'objectivity' of the findings, or in other words, how has the researcher's personal perspective shaped the research process and research findings. Traditionally, in the discipline of anthropology, for example, the objectivity of the researcher has been regarded as important for the validity of the research. Although Atkinson et al. (2001:p3)[93] cautions against the idea that "all ethnography in past generations was conducted under the auspices of a positivistic and totalizing gaze", it is accurate to say that recent paradigm shifts in theories of knowledge have questioned both the universality of knowledge, in the sense that what is 'true' for a particular situation, or, from one particular perspective, may not be 'true' for another. The questioning of

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[91] Shaughnessy, N. (2012) *Applying Performance: live art, socially engaged theatre & affective practice,* London, Palgrave Macmillan

[92] Atkinson, P. Coffey, A, Delamont, S. Lofland, J & Lofland, L. (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.

[93] Ibid

'universal truths' is associated with postmodernism but also feminist theories that have questioned totalizing perspectives and argued in favour of 'situated knowledge' (Harraway 1991),[94] in other words the acknowledgment that the researchers' own perspective and biases affect how research is conducted and how 'truths' are arrived at. This marks a shift from the idea of the researcher as someone who can neutrally or objectively, collect and present the data that 'is already there' – in the sense of uncovering the pre-existing facts of the matter – to a much more self-reflexive researcher who connects the processes by which they have gathered data, analysed, presented it, and related it to their own cultural context.

Ethnography has been employed as a research method by criminologists aiming to understand prison cultures, see for example, Jewkes (2012)[95], Crewe (2006)[96] and Liebling (2001).[97] There are a number of issues that arise in relation to prison ethnographies to do with ethics, and relationships of power that will be present in the role of researcher and researched. Questions arise over who has sanctioned the research and to what ends will the research findings be used, also who ultimately is benefiting from the research and the personal motivations of the researcher.

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[94] Harraway, D.J (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs & Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association Books

[95] Jewkes, Y. (2012) 'Autoethnography & Emotion as Intellectual Resources: doing prison research differently' in Qualitative Inquiry Vol. 18 (1) pp 63-75

[96] Crewe, B. (2006) 'Prison Drug Dealing & the Ethnographic Lens', in The Howard Journal, Vol 45 (4) pp 347-368

[97] Liebling, A. 'Whose Side Are We On? Theory, Practice & Allegiances in Prisons Research' in British Journal of Criminology, Vol. 41 (3) pp 472-484

In order to present my 'situated perspective' on why I have chosen to research and write about arts practice in prisons, an autoethnographic method has provided a means for me to articulate aspects of personal experience, which have relevance to the research questions that underpin this thesis. In my visits to a family member in prison I am required to perform certain rituals which I experience as restrictive to my sense of 'self' and I describe the experience in Chapter Five in relation to the idea of restrictive narrative identity.

As a research methodology autoethnography represents a way of framing what has been discovered with an insight into the subjective concerns of the writer and so the reader has access to another layer of knowledge not ordinarily available in more 'objective' works. There are, however, criticisms of autoethnography as a research method and they include pitfalls that I hope to avoid. Bruner (1993: p6)[98] speaks of the danger of the work becoming 'narcissistic and egotistical'. However, in producing a reflexive account of my experience of creative practice in prison, and in recounting my sense of a restricted and limited identity as a family visitor, I hope to create a study where, 'the experiential engages in dialogue with the social, cultural and critical' Shaughnessy (2012: pxix).[99]

I now want to address the issues I have raised in relation to my work and in particular the 'in the field' research that forms an integral part of the knowledge base for this thesis. My role in prison as a Writer in Residence meant I was there to make creative writing and theatre performance with the people there; I was not there in any formal kind of research capacity,

[98] Atkinson, P. Coffey, A, Delamont, S. Lofland, J & Lofland, L. (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London, Sage Publications, Ltd.

[99] Shaughnessy, N. (2012) Op.Cit.

consequently the process of arriving at the central questions of this thesis has been inductive, arising as a response to the residency rather than a situation of entering 'the field' with previously designed research questions.

It is probable that relationships between prisoners, members of staff and I were less formal than might have been the case if I had entered the prison environment identifying myself as someone 'doing research'. In terms of access to prisoners and to the prison regime this is significant. Whereas a researcher going into prison is likely to be escorted and supervised by a member of staff, the Writer in Residence is regarded as a member of staff and is issued with a set of keys to enable them to have relatively free, unescorted movement throughout the prison. They operate within a system of line-management, which gives them direct access to governor level staff and work under a contractual obligation to receive 'prisoner awareness' training. This degree of access combined with the significant duration of the residency meant there was time and opportunity to foster trust and candid discussion to a degree that would be unlikely to occur under usual visiting researcher conditions.

> Data suggests that over the course of a year-long residency (and over multiple years in some cases) Writers in Residence become increasingly integrated into prison life, slowly but surely beginning to develop a creative culture in their host prison. A unique feature of WIPN residencies, when compared with many other 'arts' projects in prison, is its long-term nature, which offers the opportunity to become truly embedded within the setting and to build up trusting and positive relationships with both prison staff and offenders. This also enables

more ambitious strategic planning and the potential to demonstrate the longer-term impact of work undertaken. (2012:p50)[100]

The point made here, about the writer becoming embedded within the setting of the prison, accords with my experience. Although, another factor that helped afford a significant level of trust and friendship included my disclosure to members of the theatre group as well as staff that I had a relative in prison. The disclosure to staff included my line-manager in prison (the Head of Regimes), the Security Department and one of the Lifer officers who worked closely with me on theatre productions. I had been advised to reveal this information to key prison staff by the directors of the Writers in Prison Network who I had shared this information with at the application stage. My line manager and members of the security staff who were informed were appreciative of this sharing of information, and this enabled them to ensure that my relative would not be moved to the same prison I was working in (which was technically a possibility). After I had been in post for a month I decided to share the fact I had a family member in prison with several of the lifer prisoners who were a core part of the theatre group. It felt valuable to explain why I wanted to work in prison (which was a frequent question) and it meant that I did not have to pretend this was my first time in prison (I had already visited several prior to starting my residency) also, in conversations regarding the experience of family members visits, I was able to contribute.

In writing about a vulnerable group such as prisoners there arise ethical considerations as to how the research material has been gathered and also the

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[100] Albertson, K. & O'Keefe, C. (2012) *"The Good Days are Amazing": An Evaluation of the Writers in Prison Network*, Sheffield, Hallam Centre for Community Justice

purpose of the research. During the residency there was ongoing dialogue between myself and the imprisoned performers and writers and various prison staff as to the purpose of the work and what would happen to the outcomes produced. For most prisoners prior agreement about this was a requirement before they would involve themselves in working with me. With regard to documentation of the work there was a standard document supplied by the prison that prisoners could choose to sign in order to give their consent for the work to be used for educational purposes.

Although during the residency I was not identified as someone pursuing academic research, the label of 'writer' brings with it similar concerns for a prison community: is the writer there to solicit material for their own gain? How might the writer represent or even misrepresent those who are being written about? In other words ethical issues relate to the role of Writer in Residence as much as to the visiting researcher. Certainly the idea that the writer may be there to exploit prisoners' stories for their own gain has been acknowledged:

> Since the first wave of writers in residence, the feeling has developed
> among many prisoners that their presence on prison wings is more
> about benefitting the writers than prisoners. (Broadhead 2006:p121) [101]

There is probably some truth in this, that writers may be attracted to working in prison for the 'characters' they might meet although I have yet to come across much actual work that supports this hypotheses. There is an

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[101] Broadhead J, (2006) *Unlocking the Prison Muse: the inspirations and effects of prisoner's writing in Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge Academic.

awareness of this potentially problematic issue by the Writers in Prison Network who have been responsible for training a large number of Writers going to work in prisons. As one former Writer in Residence puts it:

> The way I see it, if you go into prison as a writer in residence, the one thing you do not do under any circumstance is write about that stuff yourself. You're there to give not to take. (Reynolds 2006 p:121)[102]

As someone who has written and is writing about her experience of being a Writer in Residence – in writing this thesis for example – I am clearly not in agreement with Reynolds. Although the idea of going into a prison or any 'difficult' context simply to extract stories is clearly unethical, it is important that highly political and secretive institutions such as prisons are written about, and from a range of perspectives. The work of Ken Smith (1987)[103] for example, provides valuable insight to the complex emotions and range of characters that might be encountered behind the prison wall, a welcome contrast to the often stereotypical and negative images of prisoners so often portrayed in tabloid media. In a short story I wrote for BBC Radio 4, (*Sorry for the Loss*, 2008)[104] written shortly after finishing my residency, a motivation was to foreground the likeable personal qualities of the character Victor and only towards the end of the story do we learn that he has committed murder. In structuring the story this way I hoped that the listener would encounter something of my own experience

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[102] Ibid

[103] Smith, K. (1987) *Wormwood*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books

[104] Keehan, B (2008) *Sorry for the Loss*, BBC Radio 4, 16th July

during the residency where I worked alongside people who I got to know and like before learning about their crimes. In writing about prisoners there is of course the danger of exploitation but there is a danger too of invisibility for prisoners and their families if there is little representation beyond mainstream narratives and images related to crime. A broad range of voices speaking about prison for a wide range of audiences is necessary if we are to move forward in our understanding of those who are imprisoned.

A desire to readdress some of the stereotypical images conveyed in tabloid newspapers has been a motivating force for writing this thesis and has influenced the questions I raise throughout. Through the inclusion of the voices of my artist colleagues who are prisoners via the DVD recordings of interviews and also through the creative work itself, I hope that the reader is able to experience a more direct sense of the people who are both subjects of and contributors to this research.

Another means by which I hope to avoid a suggestion of 'otherness' in writing about the prisoners I worked with, and certain aspects of prison culture as I experience it, is by including as part of the research my own motivations and 'situated perspective,' (Harraway 1991).[105] Through this I aim to acknowledge 'where I am writing from' and the personal/political perspective that inform my questions and interpretations. Nonetheless, despite my personal connections to prison and my sustained period of working in a prison environment the issue of power relations between researcher and researched is still a relevant concern. So too is how the perspective and possible agenda of the researcher, conscious or otherwise, might affect the research. However,

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[105] Harraway, D.J (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs & Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association Books

through applying an autoethnographic approach and in effect 'writing myself in' to the thesis through the inclusion of personal narrative as well as my own creative work, I hope to avoid creating a sense of 'otherness' in writing about the colleagues I worked with in prison. To this end I describe my experience as a family member visiting my relative in prison. In doing so my aim is to show that the idea of a clear cut dichotomy between the researcher and researched, the insider and outsider, the powerful and the powerless, is not necessarily the case as is hinted at by Reynold's stance.

My view and recollection of how the residency and the projects proceeded cannot be anything more than a partial perspective, as Gray states: "there is no 'one place' from which to objectively view the world and claim to 'know" (2003:p181).[106] Apart from my own voice there are the voices of collaborators involved in the work and there is documentation of most of the work produced during the residency in the form of recordings of interviews, performances and written materials. Whilst again this provides partial representation of what occurred it is a tangible resource that gives a range of images and voices that produce meanings beyond my interpretations.

During the period of my residency (2004 – 2007) I had regular daily contact with those imprisoned and worked intensively with a core group of life sentenced prisoners on the creation of a bi-monthly prison magazine and several theatrical productions. In total I worked with approximately 30 prisoners on a regular basis. Included in this group were 8 prisoners who I worked closely

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[106] Gray, A (2003) *Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods & Lived Cultures*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.

with for over two years and from this group, 3 individuals I discuss through case studies in Chapter Five.

There is a practical reason for this relatively small sample drawn from approximately 30 prisoner's that I worked with in that this small group comprises of Life sentenced prisoners who worked on at least three of the creative projects. They represent the core members of the theatre group and therefore they were also the prisoners who I got to know well, relative of course to the context in which we were working. All the creative work and dialogues that form the basis of this research have the consent of those involved to be used in this way. Some prisoners understandably had concerns about protecting their identity and nearly all voiced concern about how they might be perceived publicly as prisoners.

The concerns individual prisoners expressed over how they were seen to be spending their time in prison is a very real one given hostile media coverage, and this issue of representation is something which is addressed in Chapter Four. In order to protect individual identity, names have been changed and whilst I discuss the type of prison in which I worked the actual prison is not named as a further protective measure to ensure anonymity.

The research material sourced consists of primary data, which includes my creative practice as a theatre maker, working within prison over a sustained period. Various sources have provided different forms of knowledge to draw upon: the creative projects themselves, including materials produced as a result: magazines, short stories, poems, DVD recordings and photographs as well as recorded responses to the work from audience members and participants involved in the making of writing and theatre. Primary data also

includes the observation of the working processes of practitioners from *Escape Artists* and those involved in running *Safe Ground's* Family Man course at the prison where I worked. Additionally, the training I received from the Human Resources department of the prison and from the Writers in Prison Network, as part of my induction to working in prison, also provide further source materials.

During this period I had dialogues with a number of practitioners involved in creating writing and theatre projects in prison, including Matthew Taylor and Paul Malcolm from *Escape Artists*, Clive & Pauline Hopwood from the *Writers in Prison Network* and Chris Jonhstone from *Rideout* (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation). These were mostly informal discussions spread out over the period of my residency, although since embarking on this research I have had further discussions with Matthew Taylor and Clive Hopwood that has informed the direction of this thesis.

Secondary data that forms the knowledge-base of this work is comprised of: advocacy documents produced by organisations from the arts in criminal justice sector as well as consultation documents and reports generated by the Ministry of Justice; theoretical publications directly addressing theatre and writing in prison as well as broader discussions on applied theatre; publications from the field of criminology, particularly those focusing on prisoner identity and desistance theory. In addition I have drawn upon media reports about arts projects in prison.

In the initial phase of my research I reviewed the materials I had accumulated during the residency: the DVD recordings of performances, the magazines and articles and short stories produced by participants. Alongside

this review of materials accumulated I started researching arts organisations

working within prison focusing on those employing theatre and creative writing.

In researching various organisations working with the arts in prison,

including those I had some familiarity with such as *Escape Artists* and the

Writers in Prison Network and those I was less familiar with such as *Geese*

Theatre, *Theatre in Prisons and Probation (TiPP)*, *The Comedy School* and

Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation)*,* it was clear that the majority of these

companies – all in fact except *Geese Theatre* - had been formed during the

1990s. This influenced my decision to look at the cultural context which had

helped give rise to this expansion of the sector during this particular period.

Early on in my research I looked at models of practice further afield than

the UK but it seemed important to focus on the relationships between arts

practice in prisons and particular elements of media journalism in the UK as

well as arts funding culture, in order to understand the cultural factors that

impact upon arts practice in prisons. It is in the interface between professional

funded bodies creating arts projects in prisons, government departments and

media representations of prisoners that the most significant ideological tensions

are played out. My wish to engage with these tensions has also been a factor in

my focus on the arts in prisons in England and Wales rather than adopting a

broader international scope for the work.

My reasons for wishing to place my research within these geographical

parameters stems from a desire to prioritise in-depth study of several arts in

criminal justice organisations: the *Arts Alliance* (previously the Anne Peaker

Centre), *Escape Artists* and *Safe Ground*. Whilst other arts organisations are

briefly discussed within this thesis, I decided that these companies would have

greater prominence for the fact that I have had direct experience of their work and for the fact that in my analysis they each present a particular ideological tension between arts practice and prisons. The *Arts Alliance*, as the current representative body of the arts in criminal justice, illustrates a point of ideological tension between, on the one hand being the official advocate of the arts in criminal justice sector and on the other hand a body that promotes a somewhat singular view of the value of the arts in criminal justice which fits a particular discourse that meshes the arts with the objective of rehabilitation.

The organisation *Escape Artists*, which has its origins in a prison theatre company formed in HMP Wayland, is a company that has undergone a transition from producing contemporary classic play texts to a more instrumentalist approach, for example, producing drama courses that aim to develop employment skills. This fundamental change in the kind of performance work the company does has been influenced by issues of funding and cultural policy as well as ideological positions on the purpose of the arts in prison.

The company *Safe Ground*, perhaps more than any other arts in criminal justice organisation, has become embedded within the prison system having formed a partnership with the National Offender Management Service. A focus on this company and in particular the Family Man course, which is a primary part of their work in prisons is included in my thesis as it illustrates the way that arts interventions can, as with other rehabilitative measures, be yet another tool through which a restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner* is portrayed.

I also discuss the *Writers in Prison Network,* although largely from my perspective as a former Writer in Residence. I include them as an example of a

company that has fundamentally retained its identity from its inception, acting as a producer and facilitator for a broad range of writer's residencies in prisons in England and Wales. Having lost its core funding from the Arts Council of England in 2012 its future, and by implication the future of new writers residencies being established in prisons in England and Wales, is currently under threat.

In terms of art form, my thesis focuses on theatre making and creative writing, as it is these practices that I have worked with in the context of prison. Whilst my arguments may well have application to other art making processes it is in working with these particular artistic practices that I have encountered the conflict between individual participants trying out "additional strips of identity" (Hetherington 1998 p:155)[107] and the overarching narrative of *prisoner* that permeates the prison environment.

Each chapter whilst dealing with a particular set of theoretical arguments also engages with actual practice in the form my own experience of making theatre and writing projects in prison or with exploring the practice of specific arts in criminal justice organisations. My aim is wherever possible to provide a connection between theoretical considerations and actual practice with descriptive accounts of practice informing and connecting with theoretical concerns.

My analysis of both the work and the documented discussions about the experience of performing and writing, address my proposition that involvement in character creation can provide an opportunity to imagine other aspects of self. In constructing a character through writing and/or acting and also in the

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[107] Hetherington, K. (1998) *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics,* London, Sage Publications Ltd.

adoption of the role of writer or actor, access to narratives other than the limited and prescriptive narratives that the standard prison regime expresses is enabled. Statements made by individuals in post-production interviews are incorporated and the views expressed suggest that the change to routine and shift in relationship dynamics that occur as a result of adopting a new role seems to bring about alterations in self-perception. These expressions of altered self-perception are interesting to consider for how creative activities may produce respite from the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*.

The interviews were edited and cut together by an external documentary filmmaker and each of the participants were given a copy of the interview material as well as the filmed performance. The DVD recordings inevitably represent a mediated version of the work and comments made upon the work by those who took part, but it is through watching these materials after they were created that the ideas for this thesis came to be formulated. In other words the research questions have resulted from the data collected rather than the other way round.

I now want to discuss some of the terms I employ throughout this thesis and to clarify my use of them. I employ the term 'theatre' rather than 'drama', in talking about the 'theatre group' for example as opposed to the 'drama group'. There are several reasons for this: in the context of the residency theatre group seemed to be a preferable term rather than drama group for the associations that drama has with therapy. As I discuss in Chapter One, I encountered attitudes of distrust around anything related to psychology or the therapeutic and I wanted to therefore avoid any idea that the work I would be doing would be therapy related. I also wanted to make it clear that the work I would be doing

would be rooted in my own experience as a professional theatre maker. The professional associations that the term 'theatre' may hold, is something which Nicholson (2005) discusses:

> Many people outside the theatre business tend to associate theatre with specialist buildings, lights, costumes and so on, rather than the more diverse and less showy practices often associated with applied drama/theatre. (2005:p5)[108]

There is a truth to this and there are certain cultural associations with professional theatre that can be hugely alienating, the sense that it is a place for 'the educated', the wealthy, those of a certain background etc., but there was a real desire on the part of the people I worked with for 'showiness', they desired lights, costume, make up, props, technical equipment. Whilst the sight of theatre lights and sound equipment being set up in our 'theatre building', the prison chapel, did seem to increase nervousness amongst the prison actors, it also caused great excitement and appreciation for the value being placed on the work they were creating.

At the time of the residency I would not have used the term 'applied theatre' to describe the work I was doing, because of the implicit suggestion that I would be applying theatre for some particular purpose. I would have described myself, and still do describe myself, as someone who makes theatre that is political as opposed to political theatre, the later term having connotations with work that overtly expresses a political ideology. All theatre is

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[108] Nicholson, H (2005) *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan

of course political in a broad sense with issues such as where, why, by whom and for whom the theatre is being made raising all sort of choices that are fundamentally of a political nature. The term 'applied' has more neutral connotations and this may ease entry to contexts that would not welcome a 'political theatre group'. The fact that applied theatre takes place in schools, hospitals, community settings, amongst others, with an objective of achieving a goal beyond itself and aiming to be of benefit to those who it is being 'applied to' suggests a fundamentally political act. Nonetheless, there are implicit power relations that reside in deciding what is to be applied to whom, and for what purpose, an issue that has been addressed by Prentki & Preston (2008), Nicholson (2005)[109] and Thompson (2003).[110] Prentki and Preston, for example, suggests that the term:

> Embraces a wide range of practice, it can be seen as an inclusive term. Just as we tend to understand 'community', so applied theatre as a collective term, might allow possibilities for points of congruence and commonality to be found across different practices and contexts. On the other hand applied theatre, also like assumptions made of community, might equally be guilty of concealing 'difference' and inadvertently reveal conflicting ideologies and intentions behind its mask of sameness. (2008: p10)[111]

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[109] Ibid

[110] Thompson, J (2003) 'Doubtful Principles in Arts in Prison', in Williams, R.C.M. (ed) *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, pp 41-61

[111] Prentki, T & Preston, S. (eds) (2009) *The Applied Theatre Reader*, Oxon, Routledge

Taking this idea on board, within the field of criminal justice, it seems important to lift the 'mask of sameness' and rather to invite a creative, passionate and politicised debate about the many possible functions of the arts in prison. This thesis is a contribution to the kind of debate I would like to see.

Chapter One

What Works? The arts in prison and rehabilitation

In this chapter I provide a broad picture of current rehabilitative practices in prisons in England and Wales and consider why it is that the arts in prison have become enmeshed in the discourse of rehabilitation. I discuss how systems of managing prisoners, such as prisoner categorisation, and the requirement for prisoners to complete Offending Behavior courses in order to progress through the catergorisation system, can result in a 'performance of reform'. I discuss the proliferation of Offending Behaviour Programmes in UK prisons and how these cognitive based interventions, which often incorporate drama based elements such as role plays and presentations, have provided a means through which to comprehend and employ drama and other arts practice in prisons. I then illustrate a particular point of proximity between the arts in prison and offender rehabilitation through a study of the work of *Safe Ground* and in particular the Family Man course.

Much of the current debate and discussion about the role of the arts in prison argues that involving prisoners in creative arts projects can help towards rehabilitation. Whilst some research into this argument has acknowledged the difficulties in stating how this happens and how it can be proved, see for example: Hughes (2005),[112] Hughes and Ruding (2009)[113] and Thompson

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[112] Hughes, J. (2005) *Doing the Arts Justice: A Review of Research Literature, Practice & Theory* DCMS [online] Available at: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/doing-the-arts-justice-a-review-of-research-literature-practice-and-theory/
accessed: 14th December 2009

[113] Hughes, J. & Ruding, S. (2009) 'Made to Measure?' in The Applied Theatre Reader, (eds) Prentki, T & Preston, S, London & New York, Routledge, pp 217-225

(2003),[114] the problem of identifying and proving 'what works' in terms of rehabilitation is part of a much bigger debate about 'what works?' in offender rehabilitation generally.

The question of 'what works?' has been a source of debate in criminology for several decades sparked by an article written by Martinson (1974). In this publication he posed the question: "Does nothing work?" (1974: p48)[115] and concluded that for the most part rehabilitative programmes made no impact on reducing reoffending. His research has been challenged and his methods criticised by a number of criminologists, such as: Cullen and Gendreau (2001)[116] and McGuire and Priestly (1995).[117] McGuire has championed the use of Offending Behaviour Programmes that incorporate cognitive behavioural change methods, pointing to evidence that such courses have produced a tangible measure of success in helping participants to change their offending behaviour, see for example, McGuire (1995)[118] and (2002)[119]. However, other studies have shown inconclusive evidence for the effectiveness of these courses in reducing re-offending, see for example, Merrington and

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[114] Thompson, J. (2003) *Applied Theatre: bewilderment and beyond*, Oxford, Peter Lang

[115] Martinson, R. (1974). 'What Works? - Questions and Answers About Prison Reform', *The Public Interest*, pp 22-54

[116] Cullen, F.T. & Gendreau, P. (2001) 'From Nothing Works to What Works: Changing Professional Ideology in the 21st Century', *The Prison Journal*, Vol 81 (3) pp 313-338

[117] McGuire, J & Priestley, P. (1995) 'Reviewing "What Works": Past, Present & Future' in McGuire, J. (ed) *What Works: Reducing Reoffending*, Chichester, Wiley & Sons, pp 3-34

[118] Ibid

[119] McGuire, J. (2002). 'Integrating findings from research reviews'. In J. McGuire (ed), *Offender rehabilitation and treatment: Effective programmes and policies to reduce re-offending*, Chichester, Wiley & Sons, pp 3-38

Stanley's review 2009[120] and Cann et al. 2003.[121]

In any case, during the 1990s a number of cognitive behavior programmes, designed to reduce reoffending, were introduced across most of the prison estate in England and Wales. The spread of such programmes in prison and probation settings has been described as a "rehabilitation renaissance" within the criminal justice system, Ward & Maruna (2007:p10).[122] Since they were first introduced the provision of such courses has expanded both in terms of increased numbers of prisoners commencing such programmes and in the range of courses offered. In 2009 the Prison Service website listed 13 such programmes.[123] In 2012 the Ministry of Justice's website listed over 40.[124] The growth of Offending Behaviour Programmes indicates the centrality of these programmes within the prison system.

The table below provides a brief description of several of the most frequently employed offender management programmes taken from the Ministry of Justice's website:

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[120] Merrington, S & Stanley, S. (2009) 'What Works in 2009: Progress or Stagnation?' in *Probation Journal* Vol. 56 (2) pp153-174

[121] Cann, J, Falshaw, L, Nugent, F, and Friendship, C (2003) *Understanding What Works: accredited cognitive skills programmes for adult men and young offenders* Home Office Research Findings 226

[122] Ward, T. & Maruna, S. (2007) *Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm,* Oxon, Routledge.

[123] Prison Service Website http://www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/before-after-release/obp accessed: 14th December 2009 – now available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20091016084557/http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/beforeafterrelease/offenderbehaviourprogrammes/index.asp

[124] Ministry of Justice: http://www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/before-after-release/obp accessed: 5th March 2012

CALM (Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage it) - An emotional management programme designed for those whose offending behaviour is precipitated by intense emotions. The goals are to assist offenders understand the factors that trigger their anger and aggression and learn skills to manage their emotions.

P-ASRO (Prison - Addressing Substance Related Offending) - A drug intervention, P-ASRO addresses how thought processes and socio-economic situations contribute to the development of problematic levels of substance use and crime in individuals over their life span. Uses full assessment, programme material, individual key work sessions and a post programme review to evaluate progress and identify further support and treatment needs.

SDP (Short Duration Programme) - A structured 4-week intervention, based on a CBT/Harm Minimisation model. Looking at substance awareness, harm minimisation and the treatment services available in prison and the community. Also focusing on harm minimisation, the cycle of change and relapse prevention and on high-risk situations, coping with cravings and relationships as well as problem solving, reviewing the programme and each individual's relapse prevention plan. The intervention concludes with a post programme review to evaluate progress and identify further support and treatment needs.

TSP (Thinking Skills Programme) – A cognitive skills programme which addresses the way offenders think and their behaviour associated with offending. The programme aims to reduce reoffending by engaging and motivating, coaching and responding to individual need and building on continuity. It supports offenders developing skills in setting goals and making plans to achieve these without offending.

Figure1: Sample of Offender Behaviour Course descriptions, (MoJ Website 2012)[125]

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[125] Ibid

Programmes, such as these, form an integral part of sentencing planning for the majority of long-term convicted prisoners, and courses such as Thinking Skills (TS) and Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage it (CALM) are a primary feature of rehabilitation activities in prison. The ubiquity of these programmes within prison is important for a number of reasons. They reveal a particular approach to thinking about rehabilitation, that there are general tendencies amongst prisoners that can be addressed through particular programmes of learning. Yet, as has been previously stated, the efficacy of some Offending Behaviour Programmes has been questioned, with some studies showing mixed results for their effectiveness.[126] For this reason they are useful to consider in a discussion about the effectiveness of arts interventions in prisons because many of the problems that arise with regard to measuring the impact of Offending Behaviour Programmes can also apply to measuring the impact of what are "increasingly referred to as 'arts interventions." (Hewish and Johnstone 2008:p5)[127]

Where research has demonstrated reduced levels of reconviction for those that have participated in arts projects, as opposed to those who have not, there are still problems with identifying involvement in the arts project as the primary reason for the reduction. Problems in defining participation in arts activities as a contributing factor in desisting from crime are many: there are likely to be other variables that make it difficult to pinpoint involvement in the

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[126] Cann, J, Falshaw, L, Nugent, F, and Friendship, C (2003) *Understanding What Works: accredited cognitive skills programmes for adult men and young offenders* Home Office Research Findings 226 London: Home Office

[127] Hewish, S & Jonhston, C. (2008) 'Lies, Damned Lies, Statistics & 'What Works' 2008, [online] Available at: http://www.rideout.org.uk/documents/3rd_Sector_Consultation.pdf accessed 4th March 2010

arts project as being the significant factor in reducing offending behaviour.

Additionally, where a reduction in reconviction rates has been recorded there is

still uncertainty as to whether this means an actual reduction in criminal activity.

There is a difficulty too in measuring changed attitudes towards criminal

behaviour in that where a shift in attitude has been identified after participation

in a project there is the question of how sustained this change might be.

Another issue of concern, where research seeks to identify changed attitudes

to criminal behaviour, is the reliability of participants' responses, for example, a

research project into the effectiveness of Blagg!, a drama-based offending

behavior workshop that was developed to explore criminal behaviour with

offenders, found that:

> The reliability of information gained via the questionnaire and interviews
>
> with young offenders is debatable – getting beyond young people saying
>
> what they think you want to hear is a particularly acute problem.
>
> (Hughes and Ruding 2009: p219)[128]

The issue of 'social desirability bias', of speaking what the questioner is

perceived as wanting to hear or responding in order to represent one's self in a

particular light, is a widely acknowledged issue in social science research.[129]

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[128] Hughes, J & Ruding, S, (2009) 'Made to Measure?' in The Applied Theatre Reader, (eds) Prentki, T & Preston, S, London & New York, Routledge, pp 217-225

[129] Spector, P. (2004) Social Desirability Bias in M. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman & T. Liao (eds) Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods, California, Sage Publications, Ltd pp 1045-1046

How, for example, do issues of taboo, power and desire potentially impact upon the responses of those participating?

This is a particular problem within the prison system where prisoners are often acutely aware of the importance of providing the 'correct' answer if they are to progress through the system, gain privileges and ultimately freedom through demonstrating appropriate attitudes. Participants may be tested to assess the impact of the course with the objective of gathering accurate data. However, the desire to give the 'right' answers, in a context where being tested and observed for risk is not only pervasive but often produced in repeated patterns, can encourage a propensity towards 'performing reform' whereby the 'script' of rehabilitation becomes assimilated and re-presented so as to appear more effective:

> this can lead offenders to learn how to 'play the game' by constructing and performing the 'right' response… rather than generating opportunities for participants and leaders to explore and undermine fixed patterns of thinking and constructions of self and others that underpin offending behaviour. (Hughes and Ruding 2009: p220) [130]

It is not just offenders who 'learn to play the game'. It could be argued that by attempting to validate their presence in prison through proving their effectiveness as a tool for rehabilitation, arts practitioners are also engaged in a kind of game with the criminal justice system, the game being: gaining access to the prison in the first place and then being allowed to stay. This is not to

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[130] Hughes, J & Ruding, S, (2009) Op.Cit.

suggest cynicism but rather a desire to 'survive' in the system, (see

Hughes1998: p44)[131] and, like the prisoner who faced with a rehabilitation

programme that signals how they ought to respond, recognises the need to

give the required 'performance'.

It is also important to consider how the organisation and management of

rehabilitation programmes in prison might provide "motives for trying to control

the impression" made, (Goffman1959:p26).[132] In other words, the ways in

which current sentencing and categorisation of prisoners is structured can

contribute towards a pressure to 'perform reform'. It is worth explaining the

system of categorisation to illustrate this point.

Once a prisoner has been convicted and sentenced for a crime he or

she is given a category, which serves to illustrate the level of threat they pose.

The system of prisoner categorisation was implemented in 1967 and arose out

of an inquiry and report, headed by Lord Mountbatten in the aftermath of a

series of successful escapes from prison. Initially the categorisation system

served as a tool to identify those prisoners most likely to make an attempt at

escape and ensure the highest security conditions for them. Whilst the

categorisation system is still used as a means to identity prisoners who pose

the greatest risk to security it also now operates as a marker of progress

through the prison system. The categories for male sentenced prisoners range

from 'Cat A' to 'Cat D'. The categorisation system differs for women, young

offenders and juveniles where a decision based on risk factors such as

likelihood of escape determines whether the young offender or female prisoner

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[131] Hughes, J (1998) 'Resistance & Expression' Op.Cit.

[132] Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Penguin Books Ltd.

enters 'closed' or 'open' conditions. Detailed below are the criteria for each

category taken from Prison Service Order 0900, which came into effect in 2000.

Category A: Prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public

or the police or the security of the state, no matter how unlikely that escape

might be, and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible.

Category B: Prisoners for whom the very highest conditions for security are not

necessary, but for whom escape must be made very difficult.

Category C: Prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions, but who do

not have the resources and will to make a determined escape attempt.

Category D: Prisoners who can be reasonably trusted in open conditions.

Figure 2: Categorisation for Adult Males PSO 0900[133]

For Life sentenced prisoners and for Indeterminate Sentenced

Prisoners: prisoners do not know their release date, there is considerable

concern over their progression from, for example, category B status to category

C or D status or, in the case of women and young offenders, to be

recommended for 'open conditions'. In the case of adult male prisoners, in

order to be recommended for release they will need to have reached category

D status. Achieving that status depends on the prisoner demonstrating that

they no longer poses a risk to security and have made demonstrable efforts

towards rehabilitation. The primary means by which a prisoner can do this is by

participation in approved rehabilitative courses such as Controlling Anger and

Learning How to Manage it (CALM) and Thinking Skills (TS).

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[133] HM Prison Service PSO 0900 (2000) see Appendix

Whilst participation in such courses is obviously meant to benefit participants through enabling them to observe thinking patterns that lead to criminal behaviour, it is possible to argue that such explanation also "provides a kind of palatable ideology for the application of these techniques of coercion", Chomsky (1977)[134]. What lends this view support is the fact that whilst such courses are not compulsory neither are they wholly voluntary, for example, if your sentence plan recommends that you participate in a course before you can be recommended for re-categorisation then there comes a stark choice between doing the course and potentially not advancing through the system. For anyone sentenced to Life or serving an Indeterminate Sentence this has significant implications as, without evidence of progression via such courses, parole boards are unlikely to recommend release even when the minimum tariff has been served, thus for most people serving such sentences these courses are in effect compulsory. The issue is also not just about whether or not prisoners are being effectively coerced into such courses – which in itself might impact upon their experience of doing the course - but also the extent to which participants feel it necessary to present that the course has indeed changed them for the better.

It is not of course possible for me to know what the various and many individual participants of courses such as Thinking Skills (TS) have experienced as a result of their participation. It is beyond the scope of this research to attempt to secure accurate data from significant numbers of prisoners, but more to the point it would be very difficult to access candid

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[134] Chomsky, N. (1977) Interviewed by Cohen, D. in *Psychologists on Psychology: Modern Innovators Talk About Their Work* [online] available at: http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/1977----.htm. Accessed 02/11

accounts in any case given the context I have already described. What I will be analysing is a devised theatre project made during my residency which, in the process of making and performing, produced rich material from those who had experience of Offending Behaviour Programmes such as TS and CALM. More detailed discussion of this project appears in Chapter Three but for now I want to describe, in brief, the criticisms that were expressed about these courses during the devising process.

Participants complained about the generalised content of the courses, that the scenarios and problems depicted were not specific to the experiences of those taking part and that the scenarios depicted indicated assumptions about the participants. A common criticism was the perceived lack of understanding from those teaching the courses about the reality of the participants' lives. This perceived lack of understanding was cited as a contributing factor to participants saying what they thought would be the 'correct answer' even though they did not necessarily believe it to be true for them and for the contexts in which they would be likely to find themselves.

These courses have been structured in such a way that they are designed to be rolled out amongst the prison estate and be repeatable. The issue about the generalised content of these courses is important to emphasise, partly because it has been argued that this 'one size fits all' approach is suggested as a factor in why such courses may not be as effective as early research had indicated, see Coyle (2005:p79).[135] This has relevance for considering how such an approach applied to the use of drama in prison might limit its potential effectiveness.

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[135] Coyle, A (2005) *Understanding Prisons: Key Issues in Policy & Practice*, Berkshire, OUP

One argument put forward against the mass scale application of these courses is the issue of 'programme integrity'; Merrington and Stanley (2000) and (2004)[136] argue that:

> there is a risk that the positive attributes of small-scale operation will consequently be lost – especially the commitment and ownership by staff involved in developing their own material. It has yet to be demonstrated that a single programme delivered on a large scale can consistently have the same impact as when it was a locally owned initiative. (2000:p274)[137]

This seems a crucial point, and one that has relevance for the 'delivery' of arts programmes in prisons and to the work of the company *Safe Ground*.

An example of a large-scale approach to providing a drama-based arts programme in prison is illustrated in the work of the company *Safe Ground* who currently operate two drama-based courses in a number of prisons in England and Wales: Family Man and Fathers' Inside. The company began its work in prisons in 1991 using classic literary texts as the starting point for productions. They also included puppetry and "lighting, costumes and music worthy of a miniature West End production" (Escape Artists 2006)[138] The company's work

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[136] Merrington S & Stanley, S (2004) 'What Works? Revisiting the Evidence in England and Wales', *Probation Journal* Vol.51, (1) pp7-20

[137] Merrington, S & Stanley, S. (2000) 'Doubts about the What Works initiative', *Probation Journal* Vol 47 (4), pp 272–275.

[138] Escape Artists (2006) *Barred Voices: perspectives on theatre in prisons in the UK*, UK [online] Available at: http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/barred_voices_v1.pdf accessed 18th September 2010

took on a new direction in 1999 when, "the company was commissioned by the Prison Service to create a framework for the delivery of Parenting and Family Relationships Education and Key Skills" (Escape Artists 2006).[139]

Whilst these courses are not yet officially accredited, they are commissioned and thus officially sanctioned by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and it seems reasonable to say that they give a useful indication of the current direction of arts projects in prison. In 2002 the company developed the Family Man course, which "with the support from the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit, the company aim to embed "throughout the male prison estate" (*Safe Ground* 2010).[140]

What is significant about this is not only does it exemplify the use of drama as an instrument of instruction, used in this instance to teach the prisoner how to develop 'better parenting and partner skills', but it also demonstrates the extent to which an arts organisation can maintain a narrative that presents itself as working on behalf of prisoners and their families and yet at the same time be seeking and securing partnership with the authorities in the form of the National Offender Management Service. Whilst I am not trying to suggest that the arts in prison ought to be fundamentally in opposition to government agencies, or to the prison regime in general, there needs to be a more critical discourse that acknowledges the inherent contradictions that may be involved in such partnering. More will be said about this later but for now it is

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[139] Ibid

[140] *Safe Ground* (2010) available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/about-us/the-safe-ground-story accessed 20th September 2010

also interesting to note the way in which the Family Man programme is structured and 'delivered'.

The programme is designed for large-scale application, running for a period of several weeks, taught by 'in-house' tutors who follow a detailed syllabus that aims to provide specific learning outcomes. In its design the *Family Man* course resembles the model of officially accredited and approved cognitive behaviour courses such as TS and CALM. In order to deliver the course to a significant number of participants the company provides training to an individual or individuals within the prison so that it is members of the prison's own staff who teach the course according to an instruction manual and DVD materials.

In a report compiled by *Escape Artists* (2006),[141] which provides a summary of arts organisations working within the criminal justice sector, one of the main problems and one of the perceived advantages of the *Safe Ground* model is described as such:

> Safe Ground's courses essentially provide a script and the success of delivery does, to an extent, depend on the commitment and imagination of the facilitators. On the other hand, although Safe Ground comprises only 4 members of staff, their intensive courses can reach 1500 prisoners a year.[142] (2006:p14)

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[141] Escape Artists (2006) *Barred Voices: perspectives on theatre in prisons in the UK*, UK [online] Available at: http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/barred_voices_v1.pdf accessed 18th September 2010

[142] Ibid

Since this report was published, *Safe Ground* has expanded their provision of courses. In 2009 – 2010, they ran 41 courses in prisons in England and Wales and have worked with over 5,000 prisoners since 2003, (Safeground 2010).[143] This represents extraordinary growth for an arts company that began its relationship in criminal justice by creating bespoke theatre productions in a single prison.[144] The claims made by the company for what the programmes can achieve are quite ambitious, for example, in relation to the Family Man programme they state that: "This 7 week programme helps to prevent institutionalisation and re-offending."[145] *Safe Ground*, perhaps more than many other companies working in prisons, have been pro-active in aiming to build evidence for the work they do, (*Safe Ground* 2010)[146] but these claims are yet to be fully substantiated by the research conducted so far.

The question of 'What Works?' in relation to offender rehabilitation and the consequent research and gathering of evidence to establish 'What Works?' rarely fore-grounds the importance of specific conditions, that is to say that what works for this particular group of participants with these particular facilitators in this particular time and place, might not work at all with just one element changed. Of course good practice needs to be shared and a body of experience and evidence built upon, but this is not the same as attempting to

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[143] *Safe Ground* (2010) available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/prison-network/statistics/ Accessed 30th September 2010

[144] *Safe Ground* (2010) available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/about-us/the-safe-ground-story accessed 30th September 2010

[145] Safe Ground (2010) Available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/courses-for-prisoners/family-man-revised/ accessed 10th November 2011

[146] Safe Ground (2010) Available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/evaluations-and-impact/full-list-of-evaluations/ accessed 10th November 2011

replicate a process over and over with the assumption that if it has worked 'here' it will also work 'there'.

Arts initiatives are often discussed within the same frames of reference as Offender Behaviour Programmes, being referred to as 'interventions' with the explicit purpose to rehabilitate or at the very least increase the likelihood of rehabilitation. Chris Johnston and Saul Hewish, co-directors of *Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation)* make this point and pinpoint what they see as a 'Catch-22' situation for arts practitioners wishing to work in the criminal justice sector:

> if you fully embrace the terminology of rehabilitation and refer to your arts project as an 'intervention' then you cannot deliver the project until it has been validated through the official channels of NOMS and recognised and fully accredited, there are nine quality assurance criteria… all nine must be covered when completing a business case for approval of an internally validated regime intervention.
> (Hewish and Johnstone, 2008:p9)[147]

Yet, this raises the question of whether achieving officially accredited 'arts interventions' would be a useful step forward for arts activity in prison? What

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[147] Hewish, S & Johnstone, C. (2008) *Lies Damned Lies, Statistics and What Works* [online] available at: http://www.rideout.org.uk/documents/3rd_Sector_Consultation.pdf accessed 14th September 2010

kinds of arts projects would receive official recognition, to what end and whom would such projects benefit?

Whereas cognitive based therapeutic interventions in prison have been designed with the direct mandate of changing the behaviour and thought patterns that lead to offending, the direct attempt to change individuals has not necessarily been seen as a primary motivation for why those working in the arts have become involved in working in prisons.

For some artists the reasons for going to work in prison were rooted in a left-wing politics that sought to challenge systems of exclusion and oppression. The work of Ken Smith, for example, whose undertook a residency at Wormwood Scrubs during the mid-1980s and whose collection, 'Wormwood' (1987) has been described as a text which,

Speaks of that institution and its inhabitants both as direct reportage and in the form of a larger metaphor for the dispossessed of Thatcher's Britain, its outsiders – in this case, those on the inside.
(Merchant 1989)[148]

Those encountering theatre for the first time whilst serving prison sentences (founder members of *Clean Break* and *Escape Artists*, for example) experienced art as "the only legal way to escape".[149] The presence of arts practice in prison could be understood as implicitly oppositional to the

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[148] Merchant, P. (1989) 'Outsiders Inside' in PN Review 66, Vol. 15, (4) [online] available at: http://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=5058 accessed 3rd December 2011

[149] Hopwood, C (1999) (ed) *Free with Words*, Manchester, Bar None Books

authoritarian culture of prison. Whilst it may still be the case that many involved with creating arts projects in prison see their role in these terms, as McAvinchey (2011:p59) writes, arts projects in prison "cannot be assumed to be left leaning or radical".[150] The reasons for this are various and touched upon in subsequent chapters, but the current discourse of the arts in prison places the emphasis on what the arts can do to change individuals as opposed to political systems.

The positioning of arts practice within criminal justice as a tool to address what are regarded as 'risk factors' that can lead to offending behaviour has impact not only at a level of discourse, but also in terms of tangible support offered from government agencies such as the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The support from Government agencies such as NOMS for arts practice which appears to have a specific rehabilitative value is something that echoes outside of criminal justice settings, in that funding support for arts projects within wider society has also, to varying degrees, become dependent upon their capacity to deliver some identified social benefit. Yet there is an important distinction to be made between arts policy with a social justice agenda, seeking to broaden access and participation opportunities, to one where the primary function is to provide instruction. Whilst the use of arts activities in prison to fulfill this role might appear logical and pragmatic, it is a strategy that can result in the 'performance of reform'. It is a strategy that is not only arguably ineffective but one that has a number of politically contentious issues attached to it.

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[150] McAvinchey, C (2011) *Theatre & Prison,* Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan

I now will address some of the difficulties that can emerge from a broad based approach to using drama as a tool for rehabilitation, based on my own experience of being involved with the Family Man programme whilst working as a Writer in Residence. As is stated in the report produced by *Escape Artists*, the success of *Safe Ground's* programmes depends significantly on the "imagination and commitment of the facilitators" (2006:p14)[151] but I would add that the level of training and support offered to the facilitators, both by *Safe Ground* and prison staff, is also hugely important. Although the course materials include dramatic texts and many of the exercises are drama-based, those teaching it are not required to have training as drama facilitators. Drama techniques however, are seen as an absolute key part of the course:

> Drama techniques are used to make the subject of family relationships accessible.[152]
>
> Drama is the key to the course. Without drama the course wouldn't be the course'.[153]

In the prison where I conducted my residency, for example, a teacher from the prison's education department – who had until then been teaching basic skills – was asked to run the course by the Head of Learning and Skills. The tutor told me that she felt unconfident in preparing the group for their

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[151] Escape Artists (2006) *Barred Voices: perspectives on theatre in prisons in the UK* [online] Available at: http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/barred_voices_v1.pdf accessed 6th September 2010

[152] *Safe Ground* (2010) available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/courses-for-prisoners/family-man-revised accessed 11th September 2010

[153] Ibid

presentations due to lack of training. She had received an initial one-week training from *Safe Ground* and one of the prison's chaplains, who had been asked to support her simply 'joined in' on running the course: "L did her initial training in 2003 and I just joined in using their training materials."[154]

Whilst it is possible that this situation of a course being run by someone who felt ill equipped to run it may have been exceptional, in the context of an overcrowded Category B prison where security is the main priority, concerns about the drama skills of a Family Man course tutor are unlikely to be a high priority. My point here relates to the issue raised by Merrington and Stanley (2000)[155] and (2004)[156] regarding programme integrity. Rather like Offending Behaviour Courses, which proved effective in initial small-scale trials, when rolled out on a mass scale to reach the targets set by Government, some research indicated a decline in effectiveness (see Coyle 2005:p120)[157]. In a discussion on BBC Radio 4 (*Analysis* 2010), Bottoms talks about the problem of trying to ensure 'programme integrity' and describes what has been termed the 'Hawthorne effect':

> rollout programmes actually work less well than demonstration
>
> programmes, but we don't really know why. The best guesses – and it's
>
> really only guesses; it hasn't been seriously researched – the best

guesses are twofold: one that the people in the demonstration projects,

people who are running the demonstration projects are better trained

than happens when you rollout a programme on a mass scale; and the

other is that the enthusiasm somehow diminishes as it becomes much

more routine as opposed to something that is innovative and that you're

trying to do for the first time. (Bottoms, 2010)[158]

Whilst the reasons given for the apparent dilution of effectiveness of

programmes are made tentatively, if they are accurate, then this seriously

undermines the idea that a creative intervention can be produced, then

repeated over and over again, producing similar effects each time. What may

produce 'effectiveness' is the fresh energy involved in the creation of something

new, a quality that is likely to be present in bespoke artistic projects.

Similarly, the expansion of the courses run by *Safe Ground* can also

result in a loss of programme integrity. It is an enormous challenge for a small

charity to ensure that every course it runs is being delivered in the best way

possible. The low status of arts activities in prison, even officially sanctioned

ones, such as Family Man or Fathers Inside, means that even when problems

are identified the charity may not be in a position to make demands for better

support and further training for in-house facilitators.

I had observed a total of 4 Family Man presentations and approximately

8 group sessions when, just over a year into my residency, I was invited to

facilitate the course due to the tutor's absence. The group that I worked with

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[158] Analysis: *Criminal Rehabilitation: a sub-prime investment?* (2010) BBC Radio 4 8th
November [online] available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00vrt9c

comprised of 12 adult males, ranging in age from 22 to 28 years, drawn from several wings of the prison, A, B and F, and were serving relatively short sentences of between 2 and 6 years. From having observed several different groups working, it seemed that a common problem on the Family Man course was that the tutor and co-facilitator were closely following a curriculum which frequently did not engage the participants' interest, consequently they became disruptive and the atmosphere would come to resemble a school situation with the tutor constantly playing a disciplinarian role in order to maintain control of the group.

Having had the benefit of observation I was keen not to experience the same sort of issues and my strategy was to keep myself and the group engaged by responding directly to them and 'going off plan' if necessary. Rather than just work with the scenarios depicted in the course materials I suggested to the group we create a character and then introduced a character creation exercise which they used to create a back-story for a young man who had a problem in relation to his family life which he wanted to resolve. A scenario was suggested whereby our character would go on 'The Jeremy Kyle Show'[159] in order to 'solve' his problems. This idea, suggested by the group, who shared enthusiasm for this reality television talk show, led us into discussion about issues to do with exploitation, blame and the ethics of presenting damaged relationships as entertainment. However, in our improvisation of scenes depicting the character's interview with our imagined talk show host and the introduction of his relatives and 'friends', the result was a sometimes funny and often ridiculous, parody of the television show that had

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[159] 'The Jeremy Kyle Show', (2005) ITV.

inspired the improvisations. Whilst the familiarity of 'The Jeremy Kyle Show'

model created a structure in which all participants wanted to get involved, I

found myself quietly questioning the gap between our playful improvisations

and the curriculum we were supposed to be following. Whereas in the sessions

with the theatre group there were particular objectives agreed upon, such as

making the best theatre performances possible, the objectives with the Family

Man sessions were to a significant degree externally drawn up. Those who had

registered for the Family Man course were supposed to be working towards

understanding how to improve communication with their partners on the outside

and to learn skills for becoming a more 'involved' parent despite their sentence

and physical separation from their families. Of course it is possible to argue that

through their active involvement and the team playing skills required for

improvisation, that participants were practicing their communication skills and

that in experiencing enjoyment from play they might be more likely to engage in

playful behavior with their children.

In an effort to introduce more of a structure to the improvisations I

introduced a convention inspired by Augusto Boal's techniques of Forum

Theatre, Boal (1979)[160] whereby once we had established the scenario so it

could be repeated, members of the group as the studio audience could

interrupt the action as it unfolded, taking on the role of protagonist or other

characters in order to propose an alternative reaction or direction for the scene.

However, unlike in Boal's Forum Theatre, where ordinarily the group or a

member of the group offer a conflict or issue from within their own lives which

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[160] Boal, A. (1979), *Theatre of The Oppressed*, London, Pluto Press.

the 'spect-actors' (1979:p155)[161] then contribute solutions, I proposed that the participants imagine themselves into the world of our fictional character and thus offer a response to the situation not as 'themselves' but as characters from his world. With these conventions established they could offer suggestions and enact responses that were not being observed as anything other than a character within the world they had helped to create. My own previous experience as a performer has taught me that the opportunity to be 'in character' can function to provide a more secure basis from which to participate. Character can function to provide a way in to play, providing both a protective 'cover' and a place of discovery.

As mentioned earlier, the process used to create our devised Family Man presentation was not without problems, the playful atmosphere resulted in participants aiming for laughter rather than more considered 'solutions' with the suggestions they made. This in turn made me question my function: was I there just to facilitate the group to have an enjoyable process and create something entertaining, or should I be concerned primarily with giving emphasis to the lessons to be learnt from the Family Man material? Whilst the group remained focused throughout and worked well together, my emphasis on keeping the group engaged meant there was little time for reflection about some of the issues raised in discussion and improvisation. Whilst I reflected that the process and the presentation seemed enjoyable for the participants and the invited audience, I could not see how what we had done would necessarily change anything about the ways in which the participants parented or related to their partners. It seemed that what had occurred was a humanising process in

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[161] Ibid

so far as the laughter, play and discussion we shared provided all of us within the group a point of connection.

In writing about my experience, both as an observer of and facilitator of the Family Man Course, the intention is to highlight the inevitable gaps and contradictions that may occur between what is presented 'on paper' as the purpose of the course and what may actually happen in practice. It is also important to acknowledge that the creative project which has become established may carry authority and proven expertise, but this may also serve to stunt the creativity within a group if too rigidly adhered to. The Family Man curriculum, with its course book and set exercises and even renowned methods of working with groups that are associated with emancipation, such as Forum Theatre, can function as 'authorative texts' that may be imposed or called upon to give weight to what might otherwise be a more problematic concept: the value of being simply playful.

With regard to the Family Man course, undoubtedly specific 'local' factors will affect participants' experience of the programme for better or worse, for example, I am not a parent and have no experience of the challenges posed in attempting to maintain a relationship with a child whilst in prison. A female tutor and a female chaplain taught the course in the prison I worked in and it is possible that participants might have felt more comfortable discussing issues of fatherhood with a male facilitator. Whilst I am not advocating that facilitators of creative projects need to have had similar experiences to the groups they work with in order to facilitate, it is important to consider how 'local' conditions will shape the way in which a programme will be shared and received and that all

sorts of issues relating to gender, ethnicity, and religious beliefs for example may affect the experience and 'success' of a programme.

The task of keeping to the Family Man curriculum and maintaining the group's interest was a difficult challenge and one that I felt I did not quite manage. From the experience it seemed crucial to me for the facilitator to have drama skills to enable the course materials to be 'brought alive' and to be a starting point at least from which material relevant to the group could be made. Without facilitation through theatre games and exercises there is limited opportunity to take ownership of the course, which otherwise remain a series of lesson plans with dramatic material included but only as texts to be studied and discussed. Yet, even with drama facilitation skills in place, there is still a risk that role-play and improvisations are directed towards coming up with the 'right' answers and a 'correct' way to behave, in which case aspects of the course can become a 'performance of reform'.

The 'common sense' message conveyed about this drama based 'intervention' is that it directly addresses a criminogenic need and is therefore 'good for' or at least appropriate to the 'target beneficiaries', but there are fundamental issues at stake here to do with power, inclusion and ultimately economics.

Research indicates that a high proportion of those in prison come from families where parental relationships have broken down and a significant number of prisoners have been raised within the Looked After Children's system, (see for example, Great Britain: Department for Children Schools & Families, 2007).[162] Thus the prospect of an arts intervention that can help

support family relationships holds considerable value. It is claimed, and largely accepted by those working with the rehabilitation of offenders, that "maintaining family relationships can help to prevent prisoners re-offending and can assist them to successfully settle into the community" (Great Britain, Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2007:p35).[163] What also appears particularly palatable about the Family Man course is *Safe Ground's* statement in their promotional literature that it is a course "designed by prisoners for prisoners and that the course was co-developed with NOMS and with the collaboration of prisoners and their families".[164] Whilst the *Safe Ground* literature does not go into detail about the depth of this involvement they do describe how the course was initially piloted at several prisons with prisoners being invited to give feedback on the course.

In recognising that maintaining family ties and relationships has a role to play in reducing the likelihood of someone reoffending, the provision of a course such as Family Man is a way in which prisons can respond to this issue. Yet, the general and broad approach, the limited duration of the course, and the lack of specialised training may jeopardise the aims of the course. There is also the significant point of whether or not those involved necessarily wish to effect change in their lives. However, perhaps the most pertinent point is that

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[162] Great Britain. Department for Children, Schools & Families (2007) *Impact Assessment for White Paper on Children in Care* [online] available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/timeforchange_IA.pdf accessed 2nd February 2012

[163] Ibid

[164] *Safe Ground* (2010) available at http://www.safeground.org.uk/courses-for-prisoners/family-man-revised

prison itself is part of the problem and a significant factor in creating disrupted and precarious family relationships.

In an interview with Action for Prisoners Families, Antonia Rubenstein, (Director of *Safe Ground* from 1992 until 2010), acknowledges the limitations of what courses such as Family Man can achieve in the context of the prison environment

In the current climate in prisons the delivery of parenting courses is not going to be the miraculous panacea for sustaining or improving fragile relationships between prisoners and their family members… I would like to believe that in 25 years there may be more and better appropriate programmes available to prisoners. But for the time being FM/FI (Family Man and Father's Inside) are helping to change the way commissioners, managers, policy makers, prison staff and educationalists think about the benefits of parenting education in a prison environment (2008:p15)[165]

This shift from bespoke creative projects to a mass 'roll out' of drama based courses that follow specific criteria and use the same texts and learning materials repeatedly in prisons throughout England and Wales suggests a belief in the course as something which can be applied as a universally appropriate means of teaching the *prisoner* to become a better 'family man'.

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[165] Interview with Antonia Rubinstein (2008) in *Action News* [online] available at: http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Publications_and_resources/ActionNewsaugust2008.pdf accessed 09/10

There are various difficulties that arise from this model: the idea that there exists 'the prisoner' and that he can be helped and his relationships 'improved' by something that was created in another time and place by others. In this example drama and role-play are being utilised for didactic purposes and it is possible to see in the lessons and values of the Family Man Programme an example of the creation of cultural hegemony, whereby the consensus of prisoners, prisoners' families, prison staff and arts practitioners is achieved through an appeal to 'common sense'.

Hegemony, as defined by Gramsci, is the means by which the interests of a dominant group hold power with the consent of those they have power over through a consensus or an alliance of interests, according to Simon (1982)[166]. An obvious example of this is the institution of prison itself, which, for the most part, functions with the consent of prisoners. This broad support of the institution of prison by prisoners is easier to understand by a focus on the micro levels at which power operates. In the case of a course such as Family Man consensus is easily achieved. The prospect of prisoners participating in something that holds the possibility of improved family relationships is something that makes an appeal to 'common sense' and as such seems almost beyond question.

Liguori, (2009:p122)[167] writing on 'common sense' in relation to Gramsci, defines it as "the most widespread and often implicit ideology" and certainly the premise of addressing issues that might be affecting prisoners' relationships,

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[166] Simon, R. (1982) *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, London, Lawrence & Wishart

[167] Liguori, G. (2009) 'Common Sense in Gramsci' in Francese, J. (ed) *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture & Social Theory*, Oxon, Routledge

and specifically family relationships, holds broad appeal across the different communities which constitute prison and is reinforced by discourse emanating from chaplaincy, rehabilitation programmes, probation and the media. As Jewkes writes: 'the media…play a crucial role in the winning of consent for a social system, its values and its dominant interests" (2011:p19).[168]

A key motivation for participation in the Family Man course is that members of the prisoner's family are invited to the presentation. In the prison that I worked the conditions in which the Family Man presentation and visit were conducted was a great deal less formal than ordinary family visits, where security and control are in much greater evidence. Therefore it could be argued that the popularity of the course has less to do with the fact that in the initial stages of developing the programme prisoners were asked for their opinions on how the course could be improved and more to do with the fact that participating in the course means a better quality visit from family members.

Obviously *Safe Ground* are trying to do the best work they can in a difficult and often unsympathetic arena, nevertheless there are a number of problematic issues to be drawn out from the story presented by *Safe Ground* about the creation of the Family Man Programme. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), *Safe Ground* and the prisoners and their families do not have equal voice in the design of the course. For their part the company needs the support of both prisoners and NOMS in order to run their courses but ultimately it is NOMS who are the more powerful partner. They commissioned *Safe Ground* to create and implement the course; they provide funding for the company and have joint copyright of the course materials. *Safe*

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[168] Jewkes, Y. (2011) *Media & Crime*, 2nd edn, London, Sage Publications, Ltd

Ground is "currently in negotiation with NOMS for the Prison Service to take over the running of Family Man and Father's Inside."[169]

In *Safe Grounds'* company literature prisoners are presented as partners in the development of the programmes. Whilst the inclusion of the voices and views of those who the courses are aimed at is hugely important, the narrative of the partnership between NOMS, *Safe Ground* and Prisoners smooth's over inequalities and differences in power relationships that ought to be acknowledged. Another issue lays with the assumption that consultation with one group or even several groups of prisoners about the content of the programme will then ensure that the course will be useful and relevant to other prisoners elsewhere.

> It is not yet a prison accredited risk reduction course like Thinking skills programme or CALM Controlling Anger and learning to manage it, but I think it can help people on the way in conjunction with other courses…different things build together to change thinking habits that they have grown up with in poorly disciplined homes. (Anon. 2010)[170]

As discussed earlier, Offender Behaviour Programmes and increasingly arts based activities are designed to address the criminogenic needs of prisoners and ex-offenders. These needs were identified by NOMS under the

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[169] Hall, S. *Safe Ground* employee (2011) Telephone interview 16th November

[170] (namewithheld@hmps.gsi.gov.uk) 2010 *RE: family man course* received 16th September, email to: bkeehan@glam.ac.uk

previous Government as the Seven Pathways (from the Reducing Re-offending
Action Plan, Home Office, 2004):

1. Accommodation

2. Education, Training and Employment

3. Mental and Physical Health

4. Drugs and Alcohol

5. Finance, Benefit and Debt

6. Children and Families of Offenders

7. Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour

Factors such as these are of course real areas of concern, the extent of
the problems faced by prisoners and their families in relation to these areas
need attention but there also needs to be a wariness that such knowledge does
not also become a means of constructing a generic identity of *prisoner*.
Research data can help us understand behaviour that has resulted in the
individual being incarcerated but it can also serve to create assumptions that
are not always helpful and might result in generalised description, such as the
notion that prisoners are people who come from 'poorly disciplined homes.'
There is a risk that such knowledge can function to obstruct more immediate
insight gained from a perspective that is more present based: to ask who is this
person in front of me right now?

To conclude, it is undoubtedly the case that participation in a Family Man or Fathers Inside course can be beneficial to participants and their families, and there exist several evaluations that support this, (see for example: McGuire 2009[171] and Boswell et al, 2011[172]). Yet, discussion about the micro-conditions that may impact upon participants experience of any given course, and thus have significance for rehabilitative outcomes, seems to be an under researched area when it comes to evaluations of the effectiveness of Offender Behaviour programmes and arts based activities in prison. There also exist questions about the role of arts organisations in moving away from the creation of bespoke artistic projects in prisons, to delivering arts based courses that aims to tackle a hugely difficult and complex issue.

The Family Man and Fathers Inside courses exemplify a blurring between offender management courses and arts projects in prisons. It is important to try and understand why and how this 'blurring' has occurred. The work of Thompson (2003),[173] gives an insight into how this developed. He describes how the discourse of rehabilitation, was taken up by theatre practitioners working with the arts in prison. Through the employment of the same terminology as other rehabilitative measures, arts projects became 'arts interventions' and in this way could be seen as a part of the 'What Works?'

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[171] McGuire, J. (2009) *Family Man: an outline of the theoretical basis of the programme* [online] available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/McGuire-2009-FM-Theory-Manual.pdf

[172] Boswell, G. Poland, F & Moseley, A. (2011) *The 'Family Man' Impact Study: An Evaluation of the Longer-Term Effectiveness of Safe Ground's Revised Family Relationships on Prisoner Graduates, their Supporters & Families* [online] available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FM-Impact-Study-final-version.pdf

[173] Thompson, J. (2003) *Applied Theatre: bewilderment and beyond*, Oxford, Peter Lang

toolkit. In the context of the 'What Works?' debate, those who advocated opportunities for prisoners to experience the possibility of change through education, cognitive behaviour based courses and arts projects could see themselves as part of an alliance for rehabilitation.

Crucially the adoption of similar terms of reference and shared objectives enabled arts practitioners to define and explain the purpose of theatre and other arts projects within the criminal justice system:

> Cognitive and behavioural psychology also uses many quasi-theatrical references and these became markers that we used to explain our practice… these common references therefore provided a structure around which we could build a way of understanding the place of theatre within the criminal justice system. (Thompson 2003:p33)[174]

This is a key point in understanding how the arts in prison could be explained and, crucially, justified in a context that frequently demands justification. The utilisation of drama techniques such as role-play to directly address offending behavior within Offender Behavioural programmes such as TS and CALM illustrates the obvious connections. Yet, as Thompson (2003) goes on to say, drawing from his experience as a theatre practitioner working within criminal justice settings in the 1990s,

> It was the rhetorical packaging of our theatre work that played well to the 'What Works?' audience. It is important to emphasise that we were

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[174] Ibid

always theatre people interpreting and performing an approach, but also

that performance was often unacknowledged. (2003:p35)[175]

This 'rhetorical packaging', which explains and justifies the presence of arts

practice in prison continues to inform and be informed by the discourse of

rehabilitation. Foucault, in his writings on the functions of discourse (see for

example, Foucault 1980[176] Foucault 1988,[177] and Smart 1985:p37-40[178])

expresses how power relations are manifest in what can be spoken of,

practiced and understood as meaningful within a particular sphere. The arts in

prison are spoken of and understood with regard to their association with

rehabilitation and now like all rehabilitative interventions within the criminal

justice sector are being called upon to prove their effectiveness.

Other factors can also account for the prevalence of a discourse

emphasising the usefulness of the arts in criminal justice more generally.

During the 1990s, when companies such as *Safe Ground*, *Escape Artists* and

Writers in Prison Network emerged there was a significant rise in the prison

population. Between 1993 and 2001 the average number of people in prison

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[175] Thompson, J. (2003) Op.Cit.

[176] Foucault, M. (1980) 'Truth & Power' in Gordon, C. (ed.) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Press Ltd pp109-133

[177] Foucault, M. (1988) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews & Other Writings 1977-1984*, in Kritzman, D, L. New York & London, Routledge p257

[178] Smart, B (1985) *Michel Foucault* London, Routledge pp 37-40

increased from 45,633 to 66,300[179] and during this time, under the New Labour administration, the notion of 'purposeful activity' in prison was introduced. With largely hostile coverage of the arts in prison in tabloid newspaper reports, the need to explain and justify arts projects in prison through a persuasive and rationalist discourse was, and clearly still is, necessary. Yet it is also important to acknowledge that the instrumentalist emphasis placed on the arts in prison was part of a discourse within wider society that looked to the arts to be useful in a number of ways, and which recognised the value of art in terms of economic growth and generating social cohesion. Thus the framing of the arts as a rehabilitative tool connects to a widespread articulation of the arts, functioning as a bridge between inequality, a means to economic regeneration, and a means of engaging communities suffering social and economic deprivation. This context and its ramifications for the arts in prison is the subject of my next chapter.

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[179] Great Britain. Ministry of Justice (2013) *Story of the Prison Population* 1993-2012 [online]. available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/story-of-the-prison-population-1993-2012

Chapter 2

The Politics of Performance: aesthetics & targets

In this chapter I discuss some of the recent debates relating to the function of art in society and discuss the wider political context, which has informed an instrumentalist application of the arts in prison. I also discuss the idea of art having a 'transportative' impact through aesthetic means with reference to Kant's *Critique of Judgement.*[180] To illustrate this I discuss a scene from the film *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)[181] in which art – in the form of classical music - is presented as having power to stimulate contemplation and as something that can momentarily transcend the harsh brutality of the prison environment. My aim in presenting somewhat contrasting ideas on how the arts may have impact is to highlight that the current dominance of the instrumentalist position, which informs the discourse of arts and rehabilitation, is indicative of particular beliefs systems within society that are contestable.

I then discuss the work of *Escape Artists*. In my discussion of the arts organisation *Escape Artists,* I contrast the early work of the company with more recent examples of their work in prison, which illustrates a shift from primarily artistic objectives to one where the arts activity is a means to a rehabilitative end.

I begin this chapter by looking at the recent social context that has positioned the arts as a force for 'social good' in terms of the regeneration of

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[180] Bernard, J.H. (1914) *Kant's Critique of Judgement,* translated with Introduction and Notes. (2nd ed) London, Macmillan.

[181] *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), Directed by Frank Darabont [Film]. United States: Columbia

areas experiencing economic and social decline, as it is against this backdrop that the notion of the arts as a tool for rehabilitation has become dominant.

The argument that the arts, as part of the creative industries, generate unaccounted value began to gain prominence in the UK during the 1990s. Categorised under the broad heading of the 'cultural industries' arts activities and institutions were presented as being transformative in economic terms, capable of playing a key part in urban regeneration programmes and in contributing to greater social cohesion.

From the 1980s and throughout the 1990s a number of research papers and impact studies were published which argued that the arts had a role to play in the regeneration of society, see for example: Landry et al (1996)[182] and Matarasso (1997)[183] One of the seminal publications of this period was Myerscough's, *The Economic Importance of the Arts,* (1988),[184] which Reeves (2002)[185] states is "widely regarded as the first publication which put the issue of the impact of the arts on to the political agenda". Whilst this is something of an overstatement, and one that I qualify in a discussion of the cultural policy of the Wilson Administration in the 1960s, it is the case that Myerscough's report was one of the first of many:

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[182] Landry, C, Green, L, Matarasso, F and Bianchini, F, (1996) The Art of Regeneration: Urban renewal through cultural activity, Stroud, Comedia

[183] Matarasso, F, (1997) Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts, Stroud Comedia

[184] Myerscough, J. (1988) 'The Economic Importance of The Arts in Britain', Policy Studies Institute

[185] Reeves, M. (2002) *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts*, Arts Council of England, London

which sought to document and argue the case for the role of the arts and creative industries as important agents for economic development and urban renewal, and began to measure this impact in quantitative terms. (Reeves 2002:p8)[186]

Reeves (2002)[187] argues that the creation and identification of the cultural industries as a growth area in the UK economy during the 1990s was a deliberate political strategy given a context where traditional sources of employment such as manufacturing were in steep decline. Many areas of the UK, such as the South Wales Valleys, were suffering significant social issues in the face of high unemployment and the demise of traditional industries such as coal and steel production. Against this backdrop of decline the cultural industries were presented as a means by which regeneration of areas and communities could occur through 'cultural investment', for example, via the creation of new arts spaces and galleries and the commissioning of artists to work within economically deprived communities. Myerscough's report (1988), argues that public money invested in the arts results in tangible economic and social gain and this idea of the arts as an investment in the redevelopment of communities was taken up by:

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[186] Ibid

[187] Reeves, M. (2002) Op. Cit.

a number of local authorities, many of which subsequently invested in the arts and cultural industries as a way of encouraging employment and inward investment in cities suffering the effects of post-industrialisation. (Selwood 2002)[188]

The view that the arts, as part of the cultural industries, could contribute to economic revival and social inclusion became a defining feature of New Labour's cultural policy. In 1998, one year after New Labour came to power, Chris Smith, then Secretary of State for Culture, issued a statement clearly expressing the idea of public funding in the arts as an investment: "this is not something for nothing. We want to see measurable outcomes for the investment which is being made".[189]

The arts, as part of the cultural industries, became part of a strategy for the development and re-branding of cities and other urban areas that had been associated with economic and social decline with the demise of traditional industries such as coal and steel production. Landry et al. (1996),[190] cited in Reeves (2002), provides a number of case studies, which claim to demonstrate the impact of the cultural industries in regeneration:

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[188] Selwood, S. (2002) 'Measuring Culture' [online] available at: http://www.spiked-online.com/articles/00000006DBAF.htm accessed 7th August 2010

[189] DCMS (1998) *Chris Smith details biggest ever increase in cultural funding.* DCMS press release 167/98

[190] Landry, C. Greene, L. Matarasso, F. Bianchini, F. (1996) *The Art of Regeneration*, [online] Available at: htpp:// http://www.combined-arts.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/indonesia-charleslandry-artofregeneration.pdf

Cultural programmes… were seen to bring a number of important benefits, including: enhancing social cohesion; improving local image; reducing offending behaviour; promoting interest in the local environment; developing self-confidence; building private and public-sector partnerships; exploring identities; enhancing organisational capacity; supporting independence; and exploring visions of the future.' (Reeves: p15)[191]

In this report, alongside examples of the cultural industries helping to bring about transformation of economically deprived areas, the idea is posited that participation in arts projects can achieve impact on individuals such as 'increased confidence' and reductions in offending behavior.

More recent studies such as Mirza (2006)[192] and Belfiore & Bennett (2008)[193] have questioned claims made for what the arts are said to achieve in terms of economic impact, social regeneration and individual transformation. Belfiore (2006)[194] has argued that research documents, such as Landry's et al. (1996) and Matarasso (1997), rather than rigorously investigating if and how arts activities transform communities set out to support the idea that they do.

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[191] Reeves, M. (2002) *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts*, Arts Council of England, London

[192] Mirza, M. (2006) (ed) *Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* [online] Available at: http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/culture%20vultures%20-%20jan%2006.pdf, accessed 12th June 2010

[193] Belfiore, E. & Bennett O. (2007) 'Rethinking the Social Impact of the Arts' in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol13 (2) 2007, pp 135-151

[194] Belfiore E (2002) 'Art as a means of alleviating social exclusion: does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK', in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol 8 (1) pp 91-106

According to Belfiore, Matarasso fails to establish a strong enough "causal link" between "changes in people and the arts project studied" (2006:p26).[195] His finding that "73% (*of participants*) have been happier since being involved" (in an arts project) (1997: P10)[196] could benefit from greater clarification.

Similar challenges in proving the effectiveness of the arts in bringing about social improvement also apply to proving the value of the arts in prison as a tool for rehabilitation. As discussed earlier, there is the difficulty of identifying what has changed for whom and for how long and the specific role of the arts project in bringing about any perceived changes.

This question of the power of the arts on human beings, the effects that involvement in creative activity can bring about, is a complex area and as Belfiore and Bennett stress, arguments made for what the arts can achieve has been extremely broad, covering an array of objectives, including being "supposedly able to reduce the prison population" (2008:p6).[197] It is against this backdrop, of a consensus from Government and funding bodies, such as the Arts Council, that the arts can and do bring about transformation to people's lives, that arts practitioners working in criminal justice are understood to have a useful role to play in helping to bring about the rehabilitation of prisoners.

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[195] Belfiore, E. (2006) 'The Social Impact of the Arts: myth or reality?' in Mirza, M. (ed) *Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* pp 20-37 [online] Available at: http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/culture%20vultures%20-%20jan%202006.pdf, accessed 12th June 2010

[196] Matarasso F. (1997) *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*, Gloucester, Commedia.

[197] Belfiore, E & Bennett, O. (2008) *The Social Impact of the Arts: an intellectual history*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

Ideas about the potential impact of art to educate, persuade and even corrupt can be traced back through history. Belfiore and Bennett (2008) provide a broad ranging overview of differing perspectives on the purpose of art from Plato through to contemporary attitudes on what the arts can achieve in terms of personal and social impact. They make the point that by viewing current debates around the function of the arts through a historical lens it is possible to see that, "the arts have been used as a tool to enforce and express power in social relations for as long as the arts themselves have been around". (2008:p194)[198]

This is a particularly relevant point when considering the function of the arts in prison: to what extent may an arts project in prison be a means through which inequalities and divisions may be supported rather than challenged? It is crucial for anyone working with the arts as 'a tool for social change' to be aware of the contradictions and conflicts that may be contained within a project. For the artist working in prison the objective must be to remain critically aware and questioning of their function in order not to risk becoming an instrument of authority. Balfour in making this point (2004) warns that:

> the contemporary prison theatre field needs to be approached with both an understanding of criminological discourse, and an awareness of the paradox of creative work within a system orientated as much to punishment as to rehabilitation (2004:p3)[199]

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[198] Ibid

[199] Balfour, M. (2004) *Theatre in Prison: Theory & Practice*, Bristol, Intellect

Here Balfour usefully points to the contradictions encountered in making creative work in a context which is punitive, where for the most part people are being held against their will, but what also needs acknowledgement is that arts practice connected to programmes of rehabilitation are part of a blurred territory, that whilst not overtly punitive can contribute to the sense of the prisoner being 'broken'.

The Offending Behaviour Programme that teaches participants how to manage their anger and the drama course that teaches those incarcerated how to parent, are presented as remedies that can help 'fix' or at least address the implied deficits of the prisoner. Arguably the prison system is attempting to solve problems that it helps to create, but the solutions are presented in a way that identifies the source of the problem as being wholly with the offender. Whilst of course individual prisoners may well need support in developing strategies for managing their anger or learning skills in parenting, the ways in which the environment of prison contributes to such problems should also be recognised.

Returning for a moment to a broader questioning of the function of art, what is the case is that the creation of art is a particularly human activity and, in the most difficult and most inhumane of circumstances, human beings have sought to create artistic work. In light of this, and regardless of any possible additional 'results' that arts practice may bring about such as development of confidence or 'employment skills,' should not the opportunity to experience art be a part of a humane and decent prison system? Whilst this point, sometimes referred to in relation to prisons as the 'decency agenda' does from time to time

surface, currently much greater emphasis is given to the idea that the purpose of the arts in prison is to be demonstrably useful in bringing about rehabilitation.

In recent times the instrumentalist approach to the arts has prioritised objectives and measurable outcomes with the emphasis being placed on the creative process and what it can achieve. Generally speaking the instrumentalist view of art is one that acknowledges the power of art to influence thought and behaviour. Contrastingly, the intrinsic view argues for a privileging of art itself with the idea that art possesses an aesthetic impact, the value of which cannot be easily measured.

There is much contentious debate surrounding what exactly constitutes 'art' and who decides what is valued as art and what is not. Historically there are many tensions relating to economics, class and gender tied up in such debates between, for example, popular culture and what has been termed 'High Art'. This is in itself a significant area of research and discussion and not one that can be fully explored here. It is important however to understand the political and historical context for the practice of art as an instrument for change, and to understand its oppositional roots against art as an elitist pursuit for those of a privileged social background.

The 1960s saw the rise of popular culture and a critical challenge to the status quo of what constituted 'art', where it could happen, who might be involved in creating it and whom it was for. The division between 'High Art' and working class culture was something that the 'alternative theatre movement'

challenged (see Kershaw 1992)[200] and (Nicholson 2005).[201] With the recognition that certain groups were rendered invisible by mainstream artistic culture, some artists formed companies with the specific objective of giving a platform and voice to under-represented groups. In theatre, for example, companies such as *Welfare State International*, *Gay Sweatshop*, *and Split Britches* formed with a view to changing the artistic status quo and making work relevant to the communities they were part of. Within this context the artist going to work in prison could see them self as part of a radical artistic movement of making art with and for a marginalised group within society.

During the 1960s significant changes were made to the structure and role of arts funding in Britain under the direction of the Wilson government's Minister for the Arts, Jenny Lee, and "increased spending was induced by the belief the Arts were a remedy for social problems" (Black 2006:p129).[202] The idea of funding for the arts as an investment was also invoked, "the arts are not only a source of expenditure but also a source of income" (Black 2006:p129).[203]

In examining Lee's strategy for the arts during this period it is possible to see various strands of thought which were not dissimilar to New Labour's cultural strategy. However, the New Labour Government not only placed significant emphasis on arts activities targeting specific social problems but the

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[200] Kershaw, B. (1992) Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention, London, Routledge

[201] Nicholson, H. (2005) *Applied Drama: the gift of theatre*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

[202] Black, L. (2006) *The Creative Industries & Cultural Politics in Britain from the 1960s to Cool Britannia*, [online] available at: http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/conferences/culturalindustries/black-lawrence/PDF/black.pdf accessed 2nd July 2011

[203] Ibid

arts, along with education and health, were required to monitor their performance in achieving particular targets, (see, for example, Selwood 2002).[204] This, in tandem with the bracketing of the arts as part of the cultural industries, helped to cultivate a discourse of the arts that pointed to their productivity and usefulness and to an emphasis on measuring and proving levels of performance. As Winston states:

> The arts have learned to justify their value in terms such as creativity, cultural awareness and social welfare, concepts that hold performative currency in the dominant discourse. (2006a: p287) [205]

In relation to the arts in prison, but also to a degree applicable to the role of publicly funded arts practice throughout society, the language of instrumentalism provides a shared discourse of purpose for artists, participants, funding agencies and politicians. Without such a framework, where in effect the art is being created with no particular objective in terms of social application, but perhaps simply as something which an artist or group of artists desire to create, difficulties can arise in justifying public spending and eliciting support,

> intrinsic value is notoriously difficult to describe, let alone measure, and the rational econometrics of government simply can't cope with it…it affects our emotions individually and differently, and it involves making

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[204] Selwood, S. (2002) 'Measuring Culture' [online] available at: http://www.spiked-online.com/articles/00000006DBAF.htm accessed 7th August 2010

[205] Winston, J (2006a) 'Beauty, Goodness & Education: the Arts Beyond Utility', in *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol.35 (3) pp 285-300

judgments about quality…these days if you can't count it, it doesn't

count, and how do you put a number on something like this

(Holden 2009)[206]

Arguments purporting the intrinsic value of art often center round issues

of quality and excellence and under Gordon Brown's leadership there came a

slight shift in cultural policy towards this, as exemplified by the McMaster

report. The very title of this report: *Supporting Excellence in the Arts, from*

*Measurement to Judgement (*2008),[207] indicating a move away from what it

describes as the "tick box" approach to the arts, to a concern with "supporting

creativity". Yet, despite the apparent shift of emphasis from the value of arts

activities discussed in terms of socially beneficial outcomes to an emphasis on

'excellence', McMaster expresses a fundamentally instrumentalist perspective,

for example, in his introduction to the report he states: "excellence in culture

occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual" (2008:p9).[208]

His report concludes with the following statement:

Above all else I want to see every funding body and every cultural

organisation, every artist and every practitioner… striving to be as

[206] Holden, J. (2009) 'The Value Triangle', Participate Conference, Belfast, [online] available at: http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/culture/participate.asp accessed 7th August 2010

[207] McMaster, B. (2008) *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: from Measurement to Judgement*, DCMS [online] available at: http://www.creativetrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Supporting-Excellence-in-the-Arts1.pdf accessed 7th August 2010

[208] Ibid

creatively ambitious as they can and being absolutely confident in their

ability to change people's lives. (2008:p8)[209]

The idea that the arts can 'change people's lives' is reiterated.

What then is at the heart of this widespread view that art is capable of

causing individuals to change and in addition the implicit assumption that such

change will be positive? In exploring this question I want to turn now to an

interesting representation of this belief, which is evident in the popular feature

film, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994).[210]

In one particular scene there is a depiction of exposure to art as having

a powerful affect upon the prison community. In this scene the main character,

Andy, plays a recording of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* through the prison

tannoy. The affect the music has on his fellow prisoners is presented as

mesmerising and their appreciation is shown as a common response. There is

the suggestion of a communal quasi-spiritual experience displayed in the

almost trance like state in which the prisoners in the yard all gaze towards the

speaker from which the music plays. Similarly, Andy listening to the music in

the Warden's office seems to enter a state of tranquil bliss. The sense that the

music is generating a moment of inner contemplation is accentuated by the

contrasting behaviour of the Warden and the officers who are seen responding

aggressively to this act of disobedience on Andy's part. Their shouted demands

to "turn it off" appear to be both an acknowledgment of the power of the music

and a display of their philistinism, in that they appear unable to appreciate the

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[209] McMaster (2008) Op. Cit.

[210] *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), Directed by Frank Darabont [Film]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

quality of what is being played. In this way, and in keeping with the film's liberal objectives, the prisoners are humanised, whilst the guards and governor are presented as lacking in humanity. Another of the film's central characters, Red, a fellow prisoner and friend of Andy's, is the narrator of the story and provides an authorial perspective on the scene:

> I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is I don't want to know. I'd like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and makes your heart ache because of it. (*The Shawshank Redemption*, 1994) [211]

This response connects with a Kantian perspective on the beautiful, as a universal concept that cannot be explained in functional terms. In other words it is something that affects us on a sensory level as opposed to being something that we can define and utilise for a particular purpose. The 'aesthetic' or the 'sensuous' "are to be contrasted with rational ideas" (Ward 2006: p207).[212]

Kant also states that beauty symbolises the morally good, (59: Beauty as the Symbol of Morality), [213] and this idea that an aesthetic experience can inspire us and help us transcend bleak circumstances can be interpreted as having moral value. This idea of the power and importance that a focus on beauty can have, particularly in contexts where there is suffering and brutality,

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[211] Ibid

[212] Ward, A. (2006) *Kant: The Three Critiques*, Cambridge, Polity Press

[213] Bernard J.H. (1914) *Kant's Critique of Judgement,* translated with Introduction and Notes. (2nd ed.) London, Macmillan

is addressed by Thompson (2009)[214] in a call to consider the significance of 'affect' and not just 'effects'. The scene in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) exemplifies this idea and dramatically represents the idea that beauty in the form of an aesthetic experience can transport us, if only momentarily, beyond brutality.

The playing of Mozart happens as an act of rebellion, a thirst on Andy's part to let something of beauty enter the harsh penal environment and, as such, is disapproved of by the authorities. The film does not propose any idea of improvement in behaviour from the characters as a result of listening. Indeed the characters of Andy and Red are depicted from the outset as sensitive, compassionate beings and so, the film suggests, individuals who would as a matter of course be sensitive to the beauty of the music.

The notion of a link between appreciation of the arts and 'goodness', that somehow people might be more humane as a result of exposure to art, is rooted in the fact that there is something specifically human in the creation and appreciation of art, yet as is known, through the obvious example of Nazi Germany it is perfectly possible to have an appreciation of beauty and be capable of mass murder:

Stories of Nazi officers rehearsing Schubert whilst supervising the death camps would seem to deny Plato's contention that there is a

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[214] Thompson, J. (2009) *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre & the End of Effect,* London, Palgrave Macmillan

fundamental connection between beauty, goodness and the good life. (Winston 2006b) [215]

An appreciation of beauty, does not lead necessarily to 'good' and yet the sense that there is a link between aesthetic experience and morality seems to linger. Winston (2006a),[216] in another article, cites the work of Murdoch (1991) and Scary (2001) as recent examples of this thinking. The link between art and morality was an idea supported in the 19th century by thinkers such as Mathew Arnold and is connected to beliefs associated with the Enlightenment such as progress and truth. With the emergence of postmodernism and critiques by theorists such as Foucault and Lyotard (1984)[217] questioning the idea of a universal subject and the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment, such ideas have been subject to critical scrutiny. One of the many aspects of this paradigm shift has been a questioning of art. Who defines what counts as art within a culture and why is value and status given to some forms of cultural expression and not others?

In the film, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), it is interesting that the filmmakers have chosen such a recognisable example of 'High Art', interesting in that it supports the notion that it is 'great art' that is capable of eliciting such an affect. In the sequence from the film we see an example, albeit a fictional one, of a prison community being presented with an experience of art that

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[215] Winston, J (2006b) 'Some initial reflections on beauty', *Research In Drama Education,* Vol. 11 (1), pp 43 - 47

[216] Winston, J (2006a) 'Beauty, Goodness & Education: the Arts Beyond Utility', in *Journal of Moral Education,* Vol.35 (3) pp 285-300

[217] Lyotard, J.F. (1986) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Manchester, Manchester University Press

could never fit into the current instrumentalist language of rehabilitative discourse. How could one begin to articulate the apparent impact caused by the playing of Mozart through questioning how the experience of listening has resulted in greater employability or better management of family relationships? The idea of trying to apply such a set of questions is clearly absurd.

One can argue that a positive aspect of the instrumentalist approach is that it provides clarity about the objectives of an arts project and participants and facilitators can have a shared language of intention. However, a problem with adopting a strategy of setting instrumentalist objectives is that the parameters for creative exploration can become tightly defined. Additionally a particular way of applying value is placed on the project in terms of meeting a set of pre-agreed 'outcomes' for example. By contrast, in setting out to create art with the objective of having the freedom to play and to not know where exactly the process may lead, creates an ambiguity that runs counter to what government departments, funding agencies and prisons demand.

It is of course not necessarily the case that in employing theatre or another art form to address a particular issue that the work created will have little or no aesthetic impact, it can be the intention to achieve both. In a recent article (Bottoms 2010)[218] writes about his experience of watching *Journey Woman,* a theatre piece created by *Geese Theatre Company,* describing it as achieving aesthetic impact as well as addressing very directly issues of domestic violence. Yet, although creative work that addresses issues relevant

[218] Bottoms, S. (2010) 'Silent Partners: Actor & Audience in Geese Theatre's Journey Woman' in Research in Drama Education, *The Journal of Applied Theatre & Performance*, Vol 15 (4) pp 477-496

to a particular community can have enormous value, the problem comes when the objectives of instruction and rehabilitation are understood as being of most importance. The thinking that a particular audience or community, such as a prison audience, requires a particular form of art, expresses a hugely reductive view of that community or audience.

In considering reductive approaches in education Winston (2006) discusses the story, *The Selfish Giant*, by Oscar Wilde, written for children and popular in schools. He describes how the story can be used as:

> a Christian parable or as a moral tale about selfishness but… that its true educative power lies not in any lesson that it illustrates but in the qualities of beauty that are intrinsic to it (2006a: p291)[219].

The story of *The Selfish Giant* forms a significant part of the learning materials for *Safe Ground's* Family Man course and participants are encouraged to understand from this tale the cost to themselves and to their families of the selfish behavior, which has resulted in their imprisonment. The moral lesson of the story is what is promoted to participants rather than the beauty of the language and structure of the story.

The current discourse of the arts in prison foregrounds instrumentalist objectives as those that matter and this is problematic if, in creating projects 'to order', the very ingredients which are most likely to bring about high levels of artistic quality (spontaneity, playfulness, experimentation, questioning and uncertainty) are given less value than addressing a particular issue. An equally

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[219] Winston, J (2006a) 'Beauty, Goodness & Education: the Arts Beyond Utility', in *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol.35 (3) pp 285-300

crucial point, for the arts practitioner going into prison, whether the aim is to work with prisoners on a production of Shakespeare with high production values, or to facilitate a Rap workshop with the objective of enabling better communication skills, is to try to ensure humility and respect and to dissolve assumptions about prisoners. With regard to this point I want to make one final reference to the sequence from *The Shawshank Redemption*.

The moment of inspiration that comes via the playing of Mozart comes from a prisoner who chooses to play this music for his fellow prisoners in what is essentially an act of rebellion. Whilst it is not clear that his peers on hearing the music know that it is being played for them by a fellow prisoner, the scene still provides a useful illustration of an important point for any artist wishing to make work in prison: that the function of the artist is to try and facilitate the creativity that is already there as opposed to arriving with predetermined choices.

A concern with the legacy of the so called 'tick box' culture, and its attendant focus on measuring performance, is the possibility that arts activities in prison now might only occur if they are explainable in terms of tangible rehabilitative outcomes. It remains the case that with the increased emphasis on specific rehabilitative agendas in prison, and the link between these objectives and access to funding, that art activities in prison are created to 'perform well' in meeting an instrumentalist criteria but not necessarily be 'well performed' for the sake of making something which creates beauty and pleasure.

In relation to this concern with performance, in terms of achieving particular outcomes, it is useful to consider performance management

discourse and its relationship to the performance of prisons. In exploring the instrumentalist agenda set for publicly funded art over the last two decades it is apparent that there has emerged an emphasis on the setting and achieving of targets that are symptomatic of a 'performance-led culture'. In other words, the value of an activity lies not within itself, within the moment-to-moment interactions that the activity brings about, but rather in how it performs according to already existing criteria. In this way the 'performance-led culture' is essentially authoritative: it requires a scrutiny of activities often by remote agencies, and demands a paring down of what has occurred within an artistic project into quantitative data gathering, for example the numbers of participants that have taken part, the age, gender and ethnicity of participants. This is not to say that such data gathering strategies are not without value in providing information about who or who is not, accessing a particular programme, but in many spheres of 'service delivery' the emphasis seems to have been placed on the meeting of targets as the primary means of evaluating 'success.'

Whilst strategies for measuring performance were applied to various government departments and funded agencies during the New Labour administration, I do not mean to suggest that this was simply a New Labour invention. Rather, that their approach, whilst contributing to an increasing array of performance measures, was in itself symptomatic of what Mckenzie (2001)[220] has called a shift from "discipline to performance", his argument being that 'performance' is to the 21st century what 'discipline' was to the 20th century. In other words performance in a variety of manifestations: "cultural efficacy, organisational, efficiency and technological effectiveness" (Kershaw &

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[220] McKenzie, J (2001) *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, London, Routledge

Nicholson 2011:p4)[221] are stratums which impact upon, shape and organise our lives.

There are two aspects to the concept of a 'performance-led culture' that I wish to explore in relation to prison. One aspect is particularly visible, the mechanism through which activity and function are monitored and evaluated according to a discourse of organisational performance. This of course is not specific to prison but is part of a wider practice of Performance Management employed in business and increasingly in the sphere of public services, such as schools, universities, hospitals, and, of course, prisons. McKenzie (2001) describes Performance Management as such:

> The term is sometimes used to describe the recent attempts to integrate the performance of individuals and the organisation itself. Theorists also use 'performance management' to designate organisational strategies that focus primarily on *ends, results or targets.* (2001:p60)[222]

A second aspect of this idea of *performance* that I wish to explore is to do with how the requirement to 'perform well' may affect behaviour, particularly in a context where there is no secure private space. This is something I will be discussing in the next chapter in relation to the issue of 'restrictive narrative identity'. For now I wish to discuss the aspect of Performance Management and how this manifests specifically in relation to prisons in England and Wales.

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[221] Kershaw, B & Nicholson, H. (2011) Research Methods in Theatre & Performance, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

[222] McKenzie (2001) Op.Cit.

Prison performance ratings are produced using the Prison Rating

System (PRS). This provides for the first time a single framework for

assessing the performance of public and contracted prisons in England

and Wales… thirty six indicators are used and these are placed into four

domains: Public Protection; Reducing Re-offending; Decency; Resource

Management and Operational Effectiveness. (Stradling, 2010)[223]

To explain further: it relates to the ways in which each particular establishment

has its performance measured according to a system of achievement

developed initially by NOMS.

Each prison has its rating recorded on a measurement from 1 – 4. A

high performing prison that is meeting its targets might expect to achieve

a rating of 4. This is awarded to: excellent establishments that are

delivering exceptionally high performance. Level 1 indicates a poor

performer. (Stradling, 2010) [224]

The discourse of performance management in relation to prisons

manifests a system of value driven by quantitative data, and this is one aspect

of what I mean by a 'performance-led culture' but it also indicates a particular

expression of power: how well the institution, the company or the individual is

'performing' is generally measured against externally applied criteria

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[223] Ed.Stradling@noms.gsi.gov.uk, (2010) RE: Prison Ratings, received 4th June sent to:
bkeehan@glam.ac.uk

[224] Ibid

Prison performance ratings (PRS) produces initial ratings which are subject to sign-off by a Moderation Panel managed independently by a Criminal Justice Group in the Ministry of Justice as part of its role as a regulator for NOMS. (Stradling, 2010) [225]

Whilst there is a reasonable and pragmatic need to monitor how prisons are functioning, such data can only ever produce a partial picture, and the framework of performance criteria can skew the way in which a prison regime functions. For example, a prison may increase its rating by achieving a high number of 'total purposeful hours,' which means the number of prisoners involved in work or courses and the number of hours the prisoners spend on such activities. In relation to this the value of an educational or arts project in prison rests not just on its quality and potential effect for the individuals taking part, but also on the fact it can contribute to an externally applied set of performance objectives.

For many arts organisations working within the criminal justice sector, who rely on sources of funding from charitable sources or public funding bodies to carry out their work, there is a need to make themselves 'attractive' both to potential funders, who want to see their funds having an impact and of course to prison Governors or Heads of Learning and Skills who might purchase their services. To illustrate this by way of an example I will now discuss the work of the arts organisation, *Escape Artists,* who in recent years have offered a drama-based course to prisons called Pre-Employment Training.

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[225] Stradling (2010) Op.Cit.

The Pre-Employment Training course has an educational qualification attached to it (it is accredited by the Open College Network) and in directly addressing a criminogenic need, in this case, employment, it can therefore help demonstrate the prison's commitment to tackling an issue that has been identified as important to the likelihood of an individual reoffending. In providing an educational qualification to participants it is also valuable to the prison because providing help towards education and employment training is another means in which the prison can demonstrate its efforts to rehabilitate prisoners. It is also useful to the prison in that simply by participants being on the course the prison can boost its own performance because the total number of hours prisoners spend on 'purposeful activity' is collated, recorded and counts toward the performance rating of the prison. Therefore, a course such as Pre-Employment Training offers a number of attractive 'selling points' to the prison.

In the course drama is used as a tool to help prisoners 'improve their employability' and, on successful completion of the course, participants receive an Open College Network qualification. The course objectives are described as follows:

> Our Pre-employment Training course uses drama techniques to prepare clients in the search for employment. The course is designed to meet the needs of … people wishing to re-enter the labour market after a prolonged period of unemployment. (Escape Artists 2006)[226]

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[226] Escape Artists (2006) 'Pre-Employment Training' [online] available at: http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/pre_emp_training.htm accessed 5th June 2010

The rationale for the course is very clear but the extent to how successful it has been in helping those in prison secure employment upon release is not clear. Again, similar to *Safe Ground's* Family Man Course, there is the problem that the real damage done to someone's employment prospects or family relationships is because of being sent to prison, and that such courses are tackling problems that they may not be equipped to solve.

However, what I wish to focus on is the shift that this represents in terms of the work of the company *Escape Artists*, contrasting the delivery of drama workshops such as this, rooted in an instrumentalist agenda, and the work of the company in the early 1990s, producing performances of Pinter and Orton in prison. Of course this is not to say that using drama exercises to help 'boost confidence' and thereby hopefully increase an individual's job prospects is not in itself valuable, it might be enormously beneficial, but the changes that companies such as *Escape Artists* have undergone in order to maintain a presence in UK prisons are significant and warrant examination.

On examining the origins of *Escape Artists* and the kind of projects they used to undertake it is possible to see that the early work of the company is explained using a very different kind of language than that used to describe more recent projects. The description below of the company's past work given by Artistic Director, Matthew Taylor, reveals a way of speaking about theatre in prisons that seems largely absent from current discourse:

The company emerged as a result of a rare initiative. A group of prisoners serving time at HMP Wayland in 1991 had ambitions - beyond their weekly drama class – to develop their knowledge and practise of

theatre... the company survived within HMP Wayland for almost three years where they staged productions of Pinter's *The Homecoming* and Joe Orton's *Loot* to fellow prisoners, members of staff and the public... Taylor, recalls how in rehearsal for Orton's *Loot,* one of his actors suggested that the impact of the scene would be made much greater if the two performers kissed. Whilst an image of two men kissing might be regarded as hardly worth a mention in almost any UK theatre setting where a play like *Loot* might be staged the vision of two men kissing passionately in an all male jail in 1991 created the kind of theatrical electricity that in more ordinary circumstances is very rarely evoked. (*Escape Artists* 2006) [227]

This illustrates the point that theatre, which aims to be an extraordinary means of communication, has a greater power in contexts where all forms of communication are heavily controlled and where the opportunities to be daring and spontaneous are exceedingly few. Here, the power of theatre as a particular kind of language is demonstrated: what might not ordinarily be expressed publicly is shown and actions, that might ordinarily provoke a hostile response, are received in a new way. For those involved in working on such texts, as well as the audience receiving it, there is the possibility that representations of human behaviour that transgress everyday social conventions may stimulate new ways of thinking, about gender and sexuality

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[227] Escape Artists (2006) *Barred Voices: perspectives on theatre in prisons in the UK* [online] Available at: http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/barred_voices_v1.pdf accessed 2nd December 2009

for example. These less tangible 'outcomes,' that might result from a piece of theatre, are rarely present in the discourse of the arts in prison.

Whilst the staging of these works in prison might well have stimulated new ways of thinking and generated discussion, this possible impact is essentially a by-product stemming from the rehearsal and performance of a play text. The work itself has not been made with a specific prison audience in mind and the objective of teaching or improving this audience in some way. What is significant about this is the potential difference in power relations that emerge when a performance or literary text is made available in prison, as it would be outside of prison, as opposed to the creation of an arts activity that has a particular rehabilitative agenda fuelling its very existence.

There are of course particular therapeutic uses of the arts, where work is conceived and developed in order to tackle a particular issue. As mentioned earlier *Geese Theatre Company*, has created a number of projects designed for working with groups of prisoners categorised as having specific issues. Such projects have an important role to play in helping people address relevant problems. Yet it is also important to recognise the less easily expressed value of the art project that does not seek to tackle a particular problem but may well bring about a beneficial experience.

The point that Taylor (2006) makes, about the power of artistic experience in prison to challenge expectations and thinking, is something I will return to, but for now I want to describe the significance of how the company originated. Founder member and former prisoner, Paul Malcolm, describes the circumstances of the company's development:

I recognised the need for a professional theatre director to come in and work with the group but didn't expect to get what we needed. However, we had the support of the Head of Education… so myself and another lifer interviewed professional theatre director Matthew Taylor. I am still astonished by the fact that this happened, two life-sentenced prisoners interviewing someone to come and work with them in prison (Malcolm 2006)[228]

This is indeed a rare situation, but one where the initiative and responsibility demonstrated in this act demonstrates a similar range of self-motivated skills required in seeking and sustaining employment. Crucially, the prison in allowing this to happen recognised the capability of prisoners such as Malcolm to take responsible decisions.

The period of staging contemporary classic plays by writers such as Harold Pinter and Dario Fo sustained until 1994 when, due to a combination of factors, the company finished in this particular form. However, in 1995 Taylor contacted Malcolm, who was coming to the end of his sentence, and suggested they set up *Escape Artists* on Malcolm's release. The company was formally established in 1996. The aim of both Malcolm and Taylor in the early years of the company's development seems to have been directed at producing quality plays to the best possible standard. As Malcolm writes: "the mainstay of the group was its desire to produce theatre of a high caliber" (2006:p26).[229]

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[228] Malcolm, P (2006) '*Escape Artists* Interview with Paul Malcolm'. Interviewed by Editor of *The Knox*, Prison Magazine, Issue 11, pp 13-14, August 2006

[229] Ibid

Malcolm and Taylor, in describing the origins of the company, do not give emphasis to the idea of creating theatre projects with a view to achieving rehabilitative goals, although in fact rehabilitation is a part of what the company achieved. Malcolm, and other ex-offenders who subsequently joined the company, were able to access employment as actors and workshop leaders as a result of the company's existence.

In later years the company expanded its remit to include working with various groups including homeless people and mental health users. The raison d'être of the company developed into being able to provide a link between various groups of people who were socially excluded and unable, for a variety of reasons, to fully partake in all aspects of society, for example, access to education, the arts or secure housing. With the arts and education culture of prison undergoing significant changes under New Labour, the company began to design and deliver courses in prison in accordance with these objectives, delivering projects that had basic skills and employment at the core of their content. However, Taylor highlights a tension in what is being asked of the company's projects and arts practitioners in general:

> We just want to ensure that drama never becomes a sterile exercise used as a convenient bolt-on designed to ease the assimilation of 'messages', or 'learning outcomes', delivered from 'on high'. What people do with the arts, the impact that the arts have on their lives, is unpredictable and shouldn't form the basis on which arts services are measured and funded. As arts providers, rather than constantly justifying what we do in terms of measurable outcomes, we should be holding our

democratically elected leaders to account, and asking them what are

you doing to ensure that everyone has access to their culture?

(2006:p5) [230]

Yet the idea that those in prison have a right to access culture is often

seen as problematic, and of course part of the function of prison is to restrict

access to many human pursuits enjoyed by those at liberty. The idea that

prisoners should have access to artistic pursuits is an issue that has produced

some strong reactions in the media and from politicians and this in part

accounts for the need to situate the arts as contributing towards the

rehabilitation of those in prison. In the next chapter I explain the concept of

'restrictive narrative identity' and discuss how this manifests within prison, but

also in wider society, and the limitations it can impose on the arts in prison.

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[230] Escape Artists (2006) *Barred Voices: perspectives on theatre in prisons in the UK* [online]
Available at: http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/barred_voices_v1.pdf accessed 2nd
December 2009

Chapter Three

Restrictive Narrative Identity: creating *prisoner*

In this chapter I explore a central idea of my thesis, that of, 'restrictive narrative identity'. Restrictive narrative identity is manifest in a variety of discourses that function to impart information about prisoners. These narratives operate within everyday practices of prison but also through discourse that forms the context of prison, for example, media representations of prisoners. I will explore this idea with reference to specific examples. In my use of the term 'restrictive narrative identity' I am referring to both a way of discussing prisoners as a homogenous group, suggesting similar traits and tendencies and the limited, 'closed' aspect of these narratives. It is my contention that the repetition of restrictive narratives forms a generic identity of *prisoner*.

I use the term *prisoner* to express what the various restrictive narratives point towards in terms of defining a set of ideas and assumptions around prisoner identity. With reference to the work of Foucault (1977)[231] (1980),[232] and also Goffman's writings on identity and 'total institutions' (1959) (1961),[233] I argue that prison discourse creates an experience of restrictive narrative identity whereby an individual's sense of self can become limited, and this may be particularly true for those serving long sentences. In such instances

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[231] Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin Books Ltd

[232] Foucault, M. (1980) Gordon, C. (ed) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Press Ltd.

[233] Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients & Other Inmates*, London, Penguin Books Ltd.

opportunities to develop a sense of self beyond *prisoner* is limited through exposure to narratives which not only place the imprisoned person within a pejorative category but also by the fact that the range of narratives and exchanges which one is exposed to are heavily defined by the context of prison.

Referring to ways in which specialised knowledge is used to define and categorise prisoners, I discuss how Foucault's theories of power and knowledge provide a useful means through which to view the discourse of rehabilitation. In relation to this I consider how one particular project I facilitated during my residency directly addressed power relationships in its satirical representation of Offending Behaviour Programmes. I begin by discussing ways in which discourses of authority within prison function to create and perpetuate the notion of *prisoner*.

Within prison it is clear that a reductive idea of prisoner is narrated via such practices as Prisoner Awareness Training and through Offending Behaviour Programmes, such as those first discussed in Chapter One. In my discussion of how the identity of *prisoner* is created and perpetuated I will be referring to the training programmes I undertook, which were part of the habituation process for working in prison. In discussing the training I received I wish to illustrate the difference between a training process in which prisoners were consciously humanised through a narrative that emphasised the diversity of prisoners and a contrasting experience of training where a restrictive narrative of *prisoner* was presented.

The Writers in Prison Network, who employed me as a Writer in Residence from 2004–2007, provided my initial training. Before discussing the

training course they provided I wish to sketch a short background to the company, in order to provide some context to the residency and the induction process.

The Writers in Prison Network (WIPN) emerged in the early 1990s and in 1996 became a regularly funded organisation by the Arts Council of England. Each year the network establishes between 4 and 6 new residencies depending on the uptake from prisons. Most residencies run for periods of two years. In initiating a residency the WIPN make contact with a key individual at the prison, usually the Head of Learning and Skills, and will explain the perceived benefits of hosting a writer. Once the residency has been agreed the WIPN request the key contact to write a project brief of what they would like to see the residency achieve. In the case of the prison residency I applied for they required a writer who would be able to develop drama activities to build upon the success of a recently staged play by some of the prisoners. Prior to interview, myself and the other candidates were given a tour of the prison by a Principal Prison Officer. The interview was conducted by the two directors of WIPN, a Governor, who would act as line-manager for the Writer in Residence, and two of the prison's chaplains. A list of the interview questions (see appendix) was sent in advance to each candidate. I was informed later that day that I had been successful and was then invited to a one-week compulsory, residential training programme.

In the training provided by the WIPN, I along with four other newly appointed Writers in Residence, were given a six-day residential course that was to serve as our induction to working in prison. The sessions largely comprised of practical workshops in a variety of media including: theatre, radio

and film, in recognition of the fact that the Writer in Residence needs to be able to respond to the differing creative needs of the various individuals and groups they will be working with. In addition to the practical workshops, we were given an introduction to prison security, which covered information such as items to avoid bringing in to prison because of their perceived risk and the importance of taking care of our keys.

Unusually amongst arts practitioners working in prisons, Writers in Residence are issued with their own set of keys in order to be able to move freely throughout the prison and in many respects are regarded as a member of staff, akin to a prison chaplain or teacher. The Directors of the network made it clear that being key holders we would need to become extremely conscious about security issues not necessarily because those incarcerated would be attempting to take our keys, but to demonstrate to the prison authorities that we were not a 'security risk'. What was emphasised throughout the training was how the institution of prison might prove challenging to us, and not necessarily the individuals we would be working with.

Despite feeling a degree of familiarity with prison, having been a visitor to various prisons since 2002, I nonetheless felt some trepidation about what it would be like to be actually working with individuals who were prisoners. A great deal of the training I received from Hopwood, Bennett and former Writers in Residence did much to allay my fears, although some of the statements made during our course also caused me anxiety. I had imagined prior to the training that I would be running workshops in a classroom, or in the prison library, but it became clear that the WIPN encouraged Writers in Residence to be available to prisoners in a much more informal way, for example, to be

present on the wings during 'free association' – the period after evening meal and before 'bang up,' when prisoners on a wing are allowed to informally associate with one another before being locked in their cells for the night - and to give one-to-one feedback on writing in prisoner's cells.

Outside of the prison environment, my anxiety seems logical and appropriate. The images of prisoners, and the ways in which stories of crime are frequently narrated through sensationalist and simplified accounts, means that a largely negative and generalised view of identity exists prior to meeting individuals who are prisoners. The demonization of criminals in the media is an example of 'restrictive narrative identity' in that in the reporting of crime, particularly violent crime, the media invokes the "evil monster", Jewkes (2011:p174),[234] reducing the complexity of an individual's life and the actions they have taken to a few powerful labels which do little to deepen understanding. More will be said about the media's role in constructing restrictive narratives of identity in the next chapter, but the point I wish to emphasise here, is that there exists a dramatisation of *prisoner* through mainstream news media, and through mainstream cinematic portrayals, in films such as *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)[235] and *Con Air* (1997)[236] for example, where the notion of 'pure evil' is presented. As Jewkes (2011) points out, even in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994):

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[234] Jewkes, Y. (2011) Op.Cit.

[235] *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Directed by Jonathan Demme [Film]. United States: Orion Pictures.

[236] *Con Air* (1997), Directed by Simon West [Film]. United States, Buena Vista Pictures

where the audience is encouraged to empathise with the prisoner protagonist, this is achieved by representing the rest of the prison population as dehumanised monsters and animals (2011:p191) [237]

Those entering prison, especially with little or no previous experience, can understandably, arrive with preconceived negative assumptions about offenders. In my experience, whilst contact with prisoners soon debunked stereotypical images, for those who worked in the prison in an administrative capacity and had little direct contact with members of the prison population, the stereotypical image of prisoners remained intact. It was not unusual for administrative staff to express prejudiced opinions of prisoners, referring to them as 'scum' or the 'lowest of the low' or just simply to express fear. This response seemed less prevalent amongst officer staff who had regular contact with prisoners.

There exist representations of prisons and prisoners, which paint a more benign image, for example, *Lucky Break* (2001)[238] where the characters are portrayed more as 'loveable rogues', in keeping with the romantic comedy genre. A much more realistic picture of the impact of prison is portrayed in *Everyday* (2012)[239]. Nonetheless, in terms of commercial success and audience figures, it is the image of the prisoner as violent and psychotic that is most prevalent and because of the separateness of prison from mainstream society it is the case that,

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[237] Jewkes, Y. (2011) Op.Cit.

[238] *Lucky Break* (2001) Directed by Peter Cataneo [Film] UK Film Four

[239] *Everyday* (2012) Directed by Michael Winterbottom [Film] UK Film Four

the mediated version…is better known to people than the reality and many individuals who do enter these realms may have expectations of them that come straight from the movies (Jewkes, 2011 p183) [240]

Kearson (2012)[241] makes a similar point in exploring the impressions made in our absorption of countless mediated representations of crime and their power in shaping our responses to the 'real' world of crime, prisons and prisoners.

The issue of how media representations impact upon people's perceptions of prisoners is a huge area for discussion and not one that can be fully explored here, but the point I wish to make is that fictional representations, as well as reports in news media, have power in constructing a restrictive narrative identity of prisoners and this is particularly true for perpetrators of violent crimes.

In the training course devised by the WIPN, there was a deliberate emphasis on countering such stereotypical images of prisoners through a perspective that focused on the environmental causes of crime. Prisoners were presented as someone 'like you or me' who for a variety of reasons, such as poverty, family break up, mental health issues, etc., have ended up in prison.

In contrast to the humanising view of prisoners encouraged during the WIPN training, was the largely dehumanising perspective presented during the prison's own training course. This training course titled, 'Prisoner Awareness

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[240] Jewkes, Y. (2011) Op. Cit.

[241] Kearson, T. (2012) 'Alternative Representations of the Prison & Imprisonment – Comparing Dominant Narratives in the News Media & in Popular Fictional Texts' in *Prison Service Journal* No. 199 pp 4-9

Training' was compulsory for all new staff and was run within the prison. I attended this course shortly after beginning the residency. Whilst both courses covered much the same ground in relation to issues of security the view of prisoners was distinctly different. Whereas the WIPN course sought to emphasise an essential 'sameness' between us, and the people we would be working with, a very different view informed the teaching on the Prisoner Awareness training course organised by the prison. Prisoners were described in generic terms, as a group of people who shared particular tendencies that we as staff needed to be aware of. They were most often described as manipulative and untrustworthy. This thinking about *prisoner* was often repeated to me throughout the three years of my residency and most often expressed in the phrases, 'never trust a prisoner' and 'never forget whom you are working with.'

During the training we were given descriptions of how prisoners might attempt to manipulate us. We needed to be wary that we were not being 'groomed' through what might seem to be friendly, helpful behaviour, out of which a seemingly innocuous request for some form of help might emerge, for example, requesting a stamp or a letter to be posted. Such seemingly 'innocent' requests, if agreed to, would inevitably lead to more challenging requests to be made, perhaps to smuggle in contraband; I am not suggesting that such warnings had no basis in reality and during the residency I was occasionally asked to bring in extra tea, coffee and biscuits, but in a context of scarcity this was hardly surprising. In short we were encouraged to be extremely cautious around prisoners and to maintain a polite, but essentially formal, relationship at all times.

The course was taught by a small group of experienced prison staff, including the prison's training officer and several principal prison officers. There were four 'students' on the course including two recently appointed Operation Support Grade staff, an Administrator and myself. The content, in brief, consisted of an introduction to the Security Department, and a consideration of our part in maintaining a 'dynamic security system'. We were given instructions on how to use the Security Information Report system; a means to report on anything that might be useful for the Security Department to know, these included: "unusual associations, overheard conversations, unusual events or behavior,"(Moore 2002).[242] It was emphasised that this was to be used for reporting on the behaviour of prisoners but also staff, and that 'selected' prisoners were, as a matter of course, encouraged to report on staff as well as their fellow prisoners. In this way the 'panopticon' or the 'eye of power,' (Foucault 1980)[243] is made pervasive throughout the entire prison body.

In addition to presentations and discussions on security issues we were shown a DVD recording of a re-enacted hostage situation, whereby a male prisoner was shown taking a female Prison Officer hostage. The showing of this film was followed with an anecdote from one of the officers about how a similar situation had recently occurred at a nearby prison.

In addition to the classroom based training, the Prisoner Awareness Course also entailed spending a day with fellow 'civilian' staff such as teachers and psychologists (as well as officer staff on a 'refresher course'), learning the fundamentals of Control and Restraint Techniques. There was also a training

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[242] Moore, S (2002) Memo: 'Security Information for New Members of Staff' (see Appendix)

[243] Foucault, M. (1980) 'The Eye of Power' in Gordon, C. (ed.) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Press Ltd pp 146-165

session on racial equality, led by the prison's race equality officer. His talk emphasised the need for all staff to be conscious of treating prisoners and their fellow staff equally, irrespective of their ethnicity or religious beliefs and to use the security information system to report any behaviour that we considered to be discriminatory. The issue of discrimination did not however extend beyond its relevance to ethnicity and religious beliefs, indeed the officer leading the session emphasised that although he was a practicing Muslim he did not treat Muslim prisoners any differently than other prisoners. Again, what was stressed was the need for staff to observe the identity of *prisoner* as the foremost identity and that all should be treated 'equally' but with the recognition that they belonged to the category of *prisoner* first and foremost, a category defined by Prisoner Awareness training as fundamentally *other*.

The idea of 'restrictive narrative identity' is not that it is an all-encompassing narrative that obliterates other narratives of self, but that other narratives of self may be thrown into question. For someone who may hold an account of them self as trustworthy, for example, to then receive responses from others that indicate they cannot be trusted could undermine their sense of 'who they are'.

The ways in which individuals can be created as 'deviant' and situated as 'outsiders' is something which sociologists such as, Becker (1963), and Lemert (1972), have explored (cited in Muncie, 2010).[244] Muncie argues how labels such as 'prisoner' can be pivotal in consolidating a criminal identity

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[244] Muncie, J (2010). 'Labelling, Social Reaction & Social Constructionism, in: McLaughlin, E. and Newburn, T. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Criminological Theory.* London: Sage.

(2010:p142).[245] Goffman argues (1959) that our identity is bound up with our environment and how others respond to us, and that we perform identity according to expectations. Through roles and behaviours, already established, the self arises "from a scene that is presented" (1959: p245).[246] Audience expectations help to shape the story we tell, about 'who we are,' and our identity is thus a process of continual creation through 'appropriate' narrative acts.

The ways in which prisons train staff to respond to prisoners through particular narratives is something that is likely to have impact upon the prisoner's sense of self. The information conveyed in Prisoner Awareness Training indicates that the person, prior to becoming a prisoner, is essentially flawed and that this is the reason for the fact they are now a prisoner, rather than foregrounding factors such as social environment as being influential in why the person is in prison. In summary, the aim of the training was to communicate that the biggest threat to security was for staff to regard prisoners as trustworthy. The impact of such training in shaping how prison officer staff view prisoners is likely to be significant, and may account for research conducted by Liebling et al, which shows that: "seventy-eight percent of discipline staff agreed or highly agreed with the statement, *you can't ever completely trust a prisoner*" (2011:p38)[247]

The discourse of Prisoner Awareness Training in its narration of *prisoner* foregrounds the untrustworthiness of prisoners and excludes other possible

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[245] Muncie, J (2010) Op.Cit.

[246] Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London Penguin Books Ltd

[247] Liebling, A. Price, D. & Shefer, G. (2011) *The Prison Officer*, 2nd Ed Oxon, Willan Publishing

interpretations, how, for example, the environment of prison might itself cause those incarcerated to behave in particular ways: "Prisoners will often try to test out a new member of staff. They may try to trick you into doing things for them." (Moore 2002).[248]

However, although the narrative of *prisoner* presented in Prisoner Awareness Training suggested a uniform approach to the treatment of prisoners, as I began to work on the wings I noticed contradictions between the official narrative and everyday exchanges and relationships between individual staff and prisoners. Whilst everyday practices of ensuring security: body searches and cell checks, for example, operated as consistent performances of outright power, such demonstrations of authority also gave rise to subversions and challenges played out by both staff and prisoners.

The prison I worked in had several wings, each with their own particular culture, and arguably the most progressive culture was to be found on the Lifer wing, where the majority of the team I worked with resided. Perhaps as an inevitable consequence of the longer term stay of these prisoners, relations between the majority of prisoners and officer staff on the wing was mostly relaxed and informal. It became clear, as I began to work closely with several of the lifer officers and with a regular group of lifer prisoners, that there were implicit understandings and connections between staff and some prisoners that suggested the opposite of the official security discourse of 'never trust a prisoner'; on the contrary several officers spoke to me of 'trusting individual prisoners with their life'. Yet, the source of this trust seemed to be based on an officer knowing that s/he would be unlikely to encounter trouble whilst prisoner

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[248] Moore, S (2002) Memo: 'Security Information for New Members of Staff' (see Appendix)

x was around and that in return for this prisoner x would be afforded implicit support from the officer. This kind of mutual security arrangement created a value around the prisoner who was capable of helping to maintain order, ultimately through the threat of violence. In this way, individuals who had been used to the idea of violence as a useful language outside of prison also had this idea validated within the prison environment; as such, a contradictory backdrop to the notion of rehabilitation in terms of thinking and behaving differently was at work. This 'co-dependent' dispersal of power enabled the prison regime to function although the specter of *prisoner* could be summarily evoked whenever perceived necessary.

Foucault's analysis asserts that power is not simply mediated through obvious hierarchical relations, for example, between a clearly identifiable oppressor and oppressed, but rather that power is micro and multi-faceted, being expressed and arranged continually through discourse. According to Foucault, discourse functions as a way of presenting reality and what is included and what is excluded from a particular discourse expresses power relations that have impact upon people's lived experience: "power is constructed and functions on the basis of particular powers, myriad issues, myriad effects of power"(1980:p188).[249]

With regard to how power relations are expressed through discourse, I want to explain how the thinking behind current rehabilitative measures in prison contributes to the problem of 'restrictive narrative identity'. The dominant framework of current rehabilitation practise is based upon what is termed the

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[249] Foucault, M. (1980) 'The History of Sexuality' in Gordon, C. (ed) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Press Ltd pp 183-193

'risk/needs model' also described as a 'deficit model,' "which sees offenders as characterised primarily by deficiencies to be corrected and needs to be met by others" (2009:p121).[250]

The means of assessing and addressing 'deficiencies' has, since the late 1980s, been conducted through the proliferation of Offending Behaviour programmes (2009:p119).[251] The reasoning for the widespread application of cognitive based Offender Behaviour Programmes within prisons is connected to the belief that a cause of criminality is due to 'flawed thinking' and stems from research conducted by Ross & Fabiano, cited in Crow and Robinson (2009), which showed that: "persistent offenders differed from non-offending populations in that they were more rigid in their thinking styles, more impulsive, less likely to think before acting" (2009:p108).[252]

There have been criticisms of this perspective, that it locates the cause of crime within the individual, without sufficient factoring in of environmental causes (see Coyle, 2005:p119).[253] However, McGuire, cited in Robinson and Crow (2009:p120), [254] has argued that Offender Behavioural programmes are "not an attempt to pathologise offenders", rather these programmes can be a means through which participants have the opportunity to acquire skills in order to "act differently." In other words, if the offender is given a greater range of

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[250] Robinson G & Crow I, (2009) *Offender Rehabilitation: theory, research & practice.* London, Sage Publications Ltd

[251] Ibid

[252] Robinson G & Crow I, (2009) Op.Cit.

[253] Coyle, A (2005) *Understanding Prisons: Key Issues in Policy & Practice*, Berkshire, OUP

[254] Robinson G & Crow I, (2009) Op.Cit.

responses in order to deal with perceived 'difficult' situations then s/he might not resort to behaviour that in the past has resulted in a criminal offence. The problem with this argument of course is that - as explained in Chapter One - Offender Behaviour Programmes are in effect compulsory and this can sometimes result in resistant learning (Fox 2001).[255]

A primary point of conflict that emerges from Offender Behaviour Programmes is that participating prisoners do not necessarily agree with the fundamental thinking behind such courses. They may not accept the position that there is a problem with the way they have responded to difficult situations even when that response has involved violence. Whilst Mcguire, cited in Robinson & Crow, (2009:p120)[256] argues that, "there is no attempt to deny the importance of environmental factors in giving rise to offending," a prisoner in claiming, for example, that their angry response to a situation was justified is presenting a viewpoint that is seen as evidence of 'flawed thinking'. Until the prisoner acknowledges that their offending behavior is the result of 'poor emotional judgment', for example, they cannot be said to have 'progressed' and will potentially stay in prison until they present the required evidence of cognitive change. The result is that prisoners may feel compelled to tell those assessing them what they believe they wish to hear, whilst amongst their peers, express a contrary opinion, for example, that they were not at fault and that circumstances compelled them to behave in a certain way.

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[255] Fox, K. (2001) 'Self Change & Resistance in Prisons' in Gubrium & Hostein (eds) *Institutional Selves: troubled identities in a postmodern world* New York, OUP

[256] Robinson, G. & Crow, I. (2009) Op.Cit.

Taking on Goffman's idea that we perform roles we believe appropriate to the context, it could be argued that this 'presentation of self' to peers is no more authentic than the presentation of greater 'self awareness' performed as part of the offending behavior programme. In either case, the point I wish to make is that the prison regime gives rise to limited performance options.

The notion of 'cynical' performance is a term used by Goffman (1959:p28)[257] to describe when the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience. This has relevance to the situation of prisoners who recognise the necessity of 'performing reform' in order to register their 'rehabilitation' through the Offending Behaviour course in question. This 'give them what they wish to hear' strategy, in order to achieve a successful completion (and thus ensure progression through the categorisation system), is also a part of the 'restrictive narrative identity' of prison because the 'cynical' performance is symptomatic of a power relationship between contesting narratives. In other words, if my belief system is unacceptable to a more powerful authority, I either 'choose' to 'convert' (sincerely or cynically) or suffer the consequences. The prisoner cannot freely say – without fear of presenting themselves as unreformed – what they might really believe and instead feel compelled to give the required response, in effect limiting an aspect of their identity. A response, which might be a truer reflection of their beliefs, is an aspect of self that can only be expressed amongst like-minded peers. In this way a sense of division can be emphasised between a 'front' presented in order to achieve progression and with it the sense of a deviant identity strengthened. Gofffman's idea of a 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' self

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[257] Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London Penguin Books Ltd

(1959)[258] is useful here as a way of understanding how rehabilitative programmes and arts interventions which require an 'improved' self to appear can result in the 'performance of reform.'

The discourse of *prisoner* functions to legitimate the institution of prison and make meaningful the various roles required to sustain its function. Without the various cast of uniform staff, prison governors, psychologists and of course prisoners, the 'play' that is prison cannot be enacted. The narrative of *prisoner* forms the foundation from which other roles and functions are necessitated and without which the institution of prison itself is rendered redundant.

The use of dramatic terms to describe how certain narratives intersect and give rise to specific roles and behaviours evokes Goffman (1959),[259] who uses dramaturgical discourse to illustrate the performed nature of identity and to describe the adoption of roles in order to present the required or 'best self' in daily life. He discusses how, as social actors, we inhabit a range of roles or selves in response to a range of contexts. In other words, 'the scene' in which we appear, 'the set' or context determines our 'presentation' of self. This idea, along with Goffman's discussion of how the 'total institution' impacts upon identity, is of particular interest to my discussion of 'restrictive narrative identity' in prison.

In his discussion of the 'total institution' (1961:p13) [260] Goffman proposes that the 'inmate,' on entering the 'total institution', is stripped of identity via a process of 'mortification'. The process of initiation that Goffman

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[258] Ibid

[259] Goffman, E. (1959) Op.Cit.

[260] Goffman, E, (1961) *Asylums*, London, Penguin Books Ltd.

describes is a sequence of rituals by which the institution subdues individual character and imposes an identity with the objective of communicating the role to be adopted: in the case of prisons the person is now above all *prisoner*. Although one may have a job in prison or be attending education, the foremost role is that of *prisoner*, therefore the meanings associated with this term and the rituals of discipline that are required as a result have a potentially significant impact on one's sense of self. What is not apparent in Goffman's work on the inmate's experience of entering an institution such as prison is the element of relief and security, even from first-time prisoners, in having a clearly defined role to play.

Entering prison bestows an identity, which although an apparently subjugated one, seems in some instances to be welcomed. This is not to suggest that there is not suffering in being separated from loved ones, or fear on being incarcerated, or a desire for some prisoners to seek ways to individuate themselves and to speak about how others behaved 'just like prisoners.' Yet the role of *prisoner*, from my observations, seemed in some cases to provide a role or identity to inhabit in the absence of a clearly defined alternative.

To illustrate, whilst working as a writer in residence at an adult male jail I was also asked to run workshops with a group of young men at a young offender's institute. Initially the group presented a disengaged attitude but during introductions, and on learning that I worked at the nearby adult male jail, they became highly engaged and interested, asking many questions about what it was like there. It is of course possible they were 'playing up' their apparent interest, out of a desire to suggest to their peers that this is where

they were heading, but it seemed they were genuinely curious about what they saw as their future place of residence in much the same way as if they were A-level students keen to get a place at university and I was a lecturer at an institution they wanted to attend.

There are many social and cultural factors that can be used to explain this, but one idea is the importance of self-narrative or rather the narrative choices that are available to envisage and articulate a future that might involve a range of possibilities, rather than further crime and prison. This relates to a key issue in rehabilitation: what is it that someone who offends is seeking? Maruna and Ward (2007)[261] argue that understanding this is fundamental to the issue of rehabilitation.

In studies of rehabilitation narratives by ex-offenders, Maruna argues the importance of narrative identity in maintaining the criminal self and crucially in sustaining a desisting self and that identity is bound up with a person's capacity to "keep a particular narrative going" (1997:p62).[262] In order for an individual to 'swap,' as it were, their sense of self as someone who is criminal, there must be another 'story' in place of the criminal narrative and specifically a narrative shift that can make sense of the criminal past as part of a desisting future. It seems crucial therefore to ask to what extent are all forms of rehabilitative practice, whether in the form of offender training programmes or in the form of arts 'interventions', potentially confirming a sense of *prisoner* identity or offering the chance for broader narrative possibilities to be formed.

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[261] Ward T & Maruna S, (2007) *Rehabilitation: beyond the risk paradigm,* London, Routledge

[262] Maruna S, (1997) 'Going Straight: Desistance from Crime & Life Narratives of Reform' in Lieblich & Josselson (eds.) *The Narrative Study of Lives,* Vol 5, London, Sage Publications

Rather than replacing a strong sense of 'pre-prison identity', the institution of prison, with its expressions of restrictive narrative identity, can be received as a process of 'identity confirmation' and the prisoner can be 'active' in positioning themselves as 'limited' in their options. This connects with the concept of 'prisonization,' a term coined by Clemmer (1940), which is used to describe the assimilation of prison culture by the prisoner, (cited in Austin 2005)[263] The concept of 'restrictive narrative identity' however, refers to a particular authorised narrative of *prisoner,* which is dominant within prison and wider society, and which indicates the need for prison and its processes of rehabilitation.

Robinson and Crow (2009 p97)[264] also draw attention to the generalised nature of assessing prisoners' needs and the risk they pose. In 2001 the 'Offender Assessment System' (OASys),[265] was introduced in prisons with the aim of providing a more complete and systematic assessment of prisoners' criminogenic needs and their relationship to the likelihood of reoffending. Whilst a positive aspect of this approach is that it seeks to understand a range of environmental factors that are relevant to the prisoner's risk of re-offending, for example, housing and employment issues, the picture of an individual's circumstances remains broad and it is this general picture which the OASys

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[263] Austin, A. (2005) 'Prisonization' in Bosworth, M. (ed) Encyclopaedia of Prisons & Correctional Facilities, CA, Sage Publications [online] available at: http://www.sagepub.com/hanserintro/study/materials/reference/ref2.2.pdf

[264] Robinson G & Crow I, (2009) Op.Cit.

[265] Debidin M, (2009) (ed) *A Compendium of Research & Analysis on OASys 2006 – 2009*, Ministry of Justice Research Series, 16/09 [online] available at: http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research.htm

system provides that is used to indicate a prisoner's suitability for a particular programme of rehabilitation.

A criticism of this system is that it has been developed with the 'white male offender' in mind and does not sufficiently provide for the possibly differing criminogenic needs of women and black and ethnic minority prisoners (2009:p99)[266]. Whilst drawing attention to this generalised approach to assessing offenders in terms of their 'risk factors' is valuable, the issue of how the criminal justice system might respond more specifically to a diverse prison population is not fully developed. The suggestion that categories such as 'woman' or 'ethnic minority' are, of themselves, sufficient means for developing more specific sentence planning is contentious. A serious consideration of diversity requires more than creating general sub-divisions within a general category. The argument that greater attention needs to be paid to diversity is of course applicable to Offender Behaviour Programmes and in fact to all 'interventions' within prison.

Another example then of 'restrictive narrative identity' in prison is the application of Offender Behavioural Programmes to large numbers of individuals, which seem to be symptomatic of a 'one size fits all' approach to the 'treatment' of offenders. The main criticisms I heard about Offender Behaviour Programmes from prisoners was that they often felt patronised by the content of the courses. In courses such as TS and CALM, prisoners are invited to imagine scenarios, which could trigger an aggressive response. One programme for example invites participants to imagine how they would react if: 'they were at the pub with their girlfriend and another man took interest in her

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[266] Robinson G & Crow I, (2009) Op.Cit.

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and their girlfriend then began flirting with this man'. The men I spoke with felt that being asked what their response to such a scenario would be suggested they were immature but also they felt that it seemed so obvious to them as to what the 'right' response should be.

Offending Behaviour Programmes require participants to acknowledge their flawed thinking and to give the 'right' answer in order to present to prison psychologists and staff facilitators that the course is helping them to change their thinking and behaviour. Whilst I am not trying to suggest that staff facilitating such courses are being duped, or to deny that there are valuable instances of learning on such courses, but the fact that prisoners need to perform successfully on these programmes in order to progress through their sentence reduces the likelihood of participants openly expressing disagreement or questioning the course content. Crewe (2011) discusses this kind of scenario and the sorts of performances it can elicit:

> One prisoner – Martin – argued that, to be considered 'honest', he had to play up to a record that portrayed him as 'some violent beast'. Asked in an offending behaviour course how he would react were he to bump into an ex-girlfriend with a new partner, he was disbelieved when he claimed he would simply 'say hello': 'so I just said ''all right then, I'd buy him a drink and I'd glass him'', and [the tutor said] ''that's what I thought you'd do''. (2011:p516)[267]

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[267] Crewe, B. (2011) 'Depth, weight, tightness: Revisiting the Pains of Imprisonment' in *Punishment & Society* Vol 13 (5) pp 509-529

Aside from the problem of being in effect coerced in to completing such courses, due to sentence planning procedures, (see Crewe, 2011)[268] and (Smith 2011),[269] there is also the issue of how the language of such courses implies certain traits. Being recommended for an Offender Management course, such as CALM (Controlling Anger and Learning How to Manage it) implies an inability or a lack in 'managing' anger, similarly being recommended to participate in a Thinking Skills (TS) course implies a flaw in your thinking. Thus a pre-judgment is conferred on individuals who are recommended for such courses, as being in need of expert help in order to amend their thinking and behaviour. Again, whilst participants are recommended for the course on the basis that their crime related to issues of anger, for example, the individual histories and contexts may vary significantly between participants in any given group, and so the sense of a generic identity of *prisoner* is perpetuated.

It is in this context, where courses to 'improve' prisoners in their thinking and behaviour that 'arts interventions' such as the courses devised by *Safe Ground* to help prisoners become 'better fathers' or the course by *Escape Artists* to help prisoners become 'more employable' also operate. Whilst current research for the most part seeks to ascertain how successful such courses are in tackling issues linked to reoffending, it could be argued that such arts interventions are rendered ineffective as a result of a discourse matrix that is continually presenting *prisoner* as essentially flawed, a *other* in need of

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[268] Ibid

[269] Smith, N. (2011) 'Do Offending Behaviour Programmes Really Work?' [online] available at: http://www.insidetime.org/articleview.asp?a=1048&c=do_offending_behaviour_programmes_really_work

'improvement' Fox (2001)[270]. Whilst I am not saying that such courses as Thinking Skills and the arts based courses developed by *Safe Ground* and *Escape Artists* will inevitably result in participants feeling patronised, on the contrary, there may be moments of sheer enjoyment or great insight experienced by participants on such programmes, but I am arguing that the foundations of the current strategy for rehabilitation and the use of the arts in prison for this purpose is built upon a reductive notion of *prisoner*.

I now want to focus on two examples of theatre performance made during the residency, which highlight how opportunities to make artistic decisions and inhabit new roles offer the chance to broaden narrative identity. Before doing this I want to briefly outline the background to the establishment of the theatre group and my involvement.

I was in a fortunate position in beginning my residency in that the desire to make theatre performances had already been established from the 'ground up' and was not something imposed. It was as a result of the efforts of members of the lifer wing in putting on a play the previous year that encouraged the Head of Regimes to bring a Writer in Residence in to the prison.

This first production at the beginning of my residency was developed from a play script, *Scrooge* written by a core member of the theatre group, and loosely based upon Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. This founding member of the theatre group had also been responsible for scripting a pantomime (*Snow White and the Seven Addicts*) prior to my appointment. Whilst the writer and

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[270] Fox, K. (2001) 'Self Change & Resistance in Prisons' in Gubrium & Hostein (eds) *Institutional Selves: troubled identities in a postmodern world* New York, OUP

several key contributors to the initial production were generally well disposed towards the idea of a Writer in Residence as someone who would support their work they also had reservations about 'outside involvement' which they made clear to me in our initial meetings.

The group at this time was comprised of four 'lifers', three prisoners serving significant sentences (i.e. above 5 years) and 3 from a wing, which generally housed those serving shorter sentences; the group numbered 10 in total. They ranged in age from 21 to mid 50s. Of this group 4 had performed in the previous production. The 7 new members of the group were recruited by the writer, whose job as a gym orderly allowed him to have regular connection with men from all wings of the prison. The lifer officer, who had been key in supporting the initial production, joined forces with me to raise awareness that a second production would be happening and to encourage involvement across the prison. However, it was understood that the core members of the group, in other words the lifer prisoners, would need to 'approve' someone before they were able to become involved in the second production. Whilst I had initial reservations about this – feeling that anyone who wanted to should be able to join – the core group and the officer supporting them counseled that this could be problematic as there was the risk that someone would join for the 'wrong reasons'. The selling and consumption of drugs was an issue at this prison, like most, and in order to protect the continuation of the theatre group it was understood that only certain prisoners (those deemed 'low risk' by the security department as well as the group itself) would be allowed to get involved.

During my first meeting with the group it was agreed that I could observe them rehearse and that they would welcome suggestions from me. They were

keen to improve upon the last production and they expressed the hope that I would be able to help. It became apparent in further discussion about the group's first production, as well as in talking about the objectives of their second production, that a major aim of the group was to provoke laughter. This desire is also referred to by several of the participants in the post show interview material (*Scrooge-the cast* 2005)[271] with one of the participant's saying, "you just want all the laughs for yourself it's greedy isn't it?"

The emphasis on making their fellow prisoners laugh seemed a crucial motivation for getting involved and one of the points made to me in our initial meetings was that they did not want to take the making of work too seriously or to cover serious subjects. Additionally they were at pains to point out that they had no interest in using theatre as a therapeutic tool. Once we agreed upon our objectives, which were, to create something that would make us and the audience laugh, and that would be made with as much skill as possible, work began to progress, but not without some conflict between members of the group over content.

One example of this came with a scene including a married man who has visited a 'massage parlour' and the representation of women as prostitutes. This led to a group discussion about issues of gender representation, but also for me a conflicted sense of my responsibility to challenge stereotypes but at the same time not create an environment of censorship but one where all shades of viewpoint could be expressed. However, I was by no means the only person within the group who could see that this was an area of representation

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[271] Scrooge-the cast (2005) DVD 1 (see Appendix)

we needed to carefully consider and whilst it was me who first raised it as an issue, others within the group were also keen not to "stick to the clichés".

Below is an extract from the scene that provoked debate, the outcome of which was that the characters of Jill and Cerys were given more prominence in expressing 'their points of view'.

Scene 3

Mike	What's going on?
Joe	Listen mate, you parked illegally, the signs are all over the place and if you want the clamp removed it will cost you £50
Mike	But it's not my car, my wife will go mad,
Joe	Well you should have thought about that before you went into that massage parlour.
Mike	But I thought it was a travel agents, I was only in there for a minute or two.
Joe	Pull the other one mate, I've been out here for an hour and I know you wasn't in there booking a holiday to Porthcawl, now pay up or get towed away. Your choice. (ENTER Jill SL)
Jill	Hey you, don't you realise you are making things very difficult for us by harassing our customers? Punters park here all the time, can't you go and hassle somewhere else.
Joe	What like you, do you mean?
Jill	I resent that remark, I'll have you know that I'm a very honest hard working woman.
Joe	But you're a man dressed up in woman's clothes.
Jill	I'm still honest! At least I'm not some idiot with no dignity, running around in a Santa outfit on Christmas Eve.

Joe   Listen, the only thing I can think about is reaching my target! My boss, says I've got to clamp 20 vehicles by Christmas Eve or I'm out of a job. So far I've only got 11 including your punter- where's he gone!

(ENTER Cerys)

Cerys   Sounds like you need to know your moral limits
Joe   My what?
Jill   Your moral limits. Cerys here will never eat a McDonalds
Cerys   Jill will never waitress for the minimum wage
Jill   Cerys refuses to take it up the arse, whereas I might, subject to negotiation…
Cerys   Not knowing your moral limits leads to worry, anxiety, stress, depression-
Jill   In other words we both know what we'll do and most importantly what we won't do for money. We reckon that anybody who works in a job they hate, doing things they'd rather not do, just for the money is prostituting them self; they just don't always know it…

IN ZOOMS OLD LADY ON SCOOTER, JOE WATCHES AS SHE PARKS. WE SEE *HE THINKS ABOUT CLAMPING HER BUT LOOKS AT JILL & CERYS & REALISES HE CAN'T.* (Extract from the production of *Scrooge* 2005)

Within this scene moral issues arise: the situation which the character of Joe faces for example, of being under pressure to do something harmful in order to make money, is something which possibly many in the audience could relate to. Yet, because members of a particular community are making work to entertain others from the same community there was no sense that a didactic moral point was being made.

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As mentioned earlier, the initial collective objective agreed upon for the production was that it should entertain the audience and 'lift the spirits' of their peers. It was also decided by the group that performances should be used as a fund raising opportunity for a children's charity. For some of these participants it was also important to be seen to be doing something 'worthwhile' by their family members: 'My Mam and Dad been down to see it, they thought it was real good' (*The Production of Oliver the Twister* 2006, DVD3).

For three of the men I worked with, the opportunity to act and write in front of audiences, particularly audience members who were professionally involved with the arts, was an important factor for getting involved. 'Rewards' from being involved (recorded in post-production interviews) included 'the buzz' and 'natural high' of performance (Scrooge-the cast, DVD1) and what was described as 'role reversal' with officer staff involved in the productions.

The key point is that in making decisions about what kind of theatre performances they would make and in considering what they wanted to achieve through their creative work a sense of creative responsibility was encouraged. This has implications for creating or reinforcing a sense of self other than *prisoner*.

Rather than witnessing an external message such as the importance of becoming a 'good family man,' the group created scenarios that originated from their sense of what would appeal to their audience. The power to create and enact stories of their choice, which proved popular with their peers and to receive praise for doing so, had a significant impact on participants. I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five how arts projects in prison which focus on aesthetic objectives, as opposed to rehabilitative ones, offers possibilities for an

experience of alternative identities and respite from the role of *prisoner*. I now want to discuss the second production and to describe the context for this piece.

My expectation prior to beginning the residency had been that relations between prisoners and prison officers would be acrimonious but, whilst there were certainly governors and officer staff less liked than others, there was what might be best summed up as a relationship of mutual acceptance which seemed to be based on an understanding of written as well as 'unwritten rules'. Prisoners shared knowledge and understanding on the whole of what was required of them by officer staff and although this was still a relationship of fundamental inequality, officer staff also shared knowledge of how best to 'work with' the prison community in order to ensure stability. What was more of a surprise to me however, was the degree of hostility from a large section of the prison community towards psychologists:

> Many psychologists appear indifferent to prisoners, dispassionate at best. It is almost impossible for prisoners to develop a meaningful relationship with their assessors, nor do they seek to do so, for they are in little doubt about whose side psychologists are on, and regard them almost universally with cynicism and contempt. (Crewe 2011:p517)[272]

This became apparent during the rehearsal process for the second show made during the residency.

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[272] Crewe, B. (2011) 'Depth, weight, tightness: Revisiting the Pains of Imprisonment' in *Punishment & Society* Vol 13 (5) p509-529

In August 2005, almost a year into the residency, we began rehearsals for a devised show that would be based upon various characters and scenes that had materialised from weekly improvisation classes. The show, *Little Prison*, was performed on the 14th & 15th September 2005 to several 'inside' audiences, consisting of specific wings as well as some members of staff including officers and psychologists. One show was presented for family and friends. The production consisted of distinct scenes that were linked through the establishment of characters who provided connections between each scene. The purpose of each scene and indeed the whole production was to provide a satirical perspective and comment on the group's experience of prison life. For the purpose of illustrating this point about antipathy towards psychology in prison and in order to discuss the notion of 'restrictive narrative identity' in relation to this, I will be discussing the first sketch from *Little Prison* (see appendix DVD2).

Before discussing this sketch I want to describe how the idea of a satirical show on prison life came about and how material for the show was developed. This was the second of 5 productions that I worked on with the theatre group during the course of my residency. In beginning the process of improvising and devising material for a series of sketches on their experience of prison I suggested that we start with activities of prison life and with locations. For example, to think of an activity in the gym, such as being on the running machine, and whilst imaginatively embodying this activity to begin telling a story about something that was happening in the gym right now and to tell it from a character's point of view. I also suggested we share with each other the clichés and stereotypes of prison life and to play with exaggeration.

The improvisations that arose from these starting points were then repeated and given structure and characterisation. All the scenes were then scripted by one of the group, although during rehearsals and performance the actors were encouraged to improvise 'in the moment' and to respond to the audience. The scenes were then linked together to make up the performance of *Little Prison* and consisted of 'The Psychologists'; 'Treatments'; 'The Only Gay in the Prison', 'Security' and 'The Old Lags.'

Agreed objectives for the show included: causing laughter and not offence, treating all communities of the prison equally so that prisoners, uniform staff, faith leaders and psychologists would all be presented in a satirical vein. Out of all the scenes it was 'The Psychologists' scene that caused members of the group, myself included, some anxiety as to whether we should go ahead with it or not. Ultimately the decision lay with the group, but particularly with those who had decided to take on the roles and would be performing as psychologists in front of the prison's psychology team.

The scene opens with two 'prison psychologists' who are observing the audience of prisoners and making notes on their behaviour. They then address their audience explaining their purpose today of introducing a new Offender Behaviour Programme. The aim of this opening was to mirror the convention established within arts based interventions such as Family Man, where prisoners on completing the course give a presentation. Members of the theatre group in devising this scene were keen to play with the familiar expectations they thought many of the audience would have as a result of being escorted from their wing to witness a presentation in the chapel. Having watched such presentations, where it sometimes seemed as if the audience's function was to

witness the passing of a 'presentation test,' it was interesting to observe something of a reversal where the audience, which comprised of not only prisoners but members of psychology, probation and governor staff, being placed in front of two prisoner/performers adopting the role and discourse of experts in the 'brand new field of suggestive psychology'. What this scene therefore served to illustrate is how professional roles are adopted and learnt like any other.

As well as presenting themselves as authorities, the performers, through various 'in jokes' that reference official offender management courses and the acronyms they employ, establish a shared language with their audience, in particular those who have been participants on such courses. The satirical nature of the scene is firmly established in lines such as 'we are in the business of improving identity' and with the introduction of their new offender management course, 'Hydra', which is capable of producing 'middle-class citizens'.

All of the members of the theatre group who created the scene, through improvisation and scripting, had been participants on several of the courses mentioned during the scene: Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage it (CALM) and Prison-Addressing Substance Related Offending (PASRO). The scene gave the performers an opportunity to use terminology that they felt was a language of power. It also gave the opportunity to express some frustration with the system of courses they were frequently requested to do, hence the flip chart displaying the words 'Another Bloody Course'.

Perhaps the most controversial part of the scene comes when they ask for a volunteer from the audience to undergo one of the techniques of the 'Hydra' course. This participant (a plant) is taken through a 'scenario' in which the psychologists refuse to accept the reasonable responses the prisoner gives as to how he would act when confronted with a difficult situation. The psychologists ultimately succeed in provoking the prisoner into a very aggressive response and although the scenario becomes surreal it is suggested at the end that the prisoner has become damaged and disorientated as a result of their participation, but according to the 'logic' of the psychologists they have simply unearthed 'repressed aggression' and proved the necessity of their intervention.

Other aspects of prison life, such as healthcare and security checks were also given satirical treatment within this production and perhaps inevitably all of these scenes ridiculed the regime and placed the prisoner in an ultimately helpless position, for example, being given a paracetemol for a life threatening condition and being accused of drug dealing for being found in possession of a herbal tea bag. Yet in the making and the showing of the work, which, because it was theatre allowed a collective saying of the unsayable, a sense of collective empowerment was achieved. Whilst nothing changed as a result of this production in terms of a dialogue between prisoners and the psychology team, it did result in members of uniform and chaplaincy staff acknowledging the limitations of the Offending Behaviour Programmes with the theatre group.

The discourse of rehabilitation speaks of the effectiveness of 'arts interventions' in prisons: 'effectiveness' meaning the capacity to reduce

recidivism and, as has been discussed in previous chapters, how this should be achieved is increasingly prescribed. It seems evident that an overly regulated approach to the arts in prison can result in arts projects contributing to the 'restrictive narrative identity' of *prisoner*. Arts projects that focus on parenting skills, domestic violence and employment issues do have a role to play in highlighting particular problems and may well resonate with the crimes which those involved have committed and may also chime with their own childhood experiences, yet they can also signal by their subject matter that this is 'who you are'. What is also implicit in the programming of such an event is the notion at some level that the work is being presented to you because of some psychological need. Power operates in diffuse and subtle ways and whilst knowledge communicated through an arts project in prison could be understood as a tool to 'empower', it is also possible that in seeking to get its 'message' across that it functions as a tool for disseminating the beliefs held by 'experts' on how others, should behave.

The programming of an art experience which held no such obvious message, but was programmed because of a recognition of its quality, its beauty, might communicate that this has been presented because you (the audience) might appreciate it. Additionally, theatre performance, with its potential to draw attention to character as something created, rehearsed and performed, can offer explorations of identity that provide a useful broadening out from the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*. In continuing my exploration of how the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner* is created and sustained, I consider in the next chapter the impact of restrictive narratives of *prisoner* within media discourse.

Chapter Four

The Artist & the Arts in Prison: media narratives, politics
& prison culture

In this chapter I continue to look at various forces that shape and limit the practice of creative work in prisons but now with a focus on how the arts in prison are narrated and impacted upon by media representations. I use examples of media reports to consider how limited perceptions about the arts in prison are propagated. I discuss the role of the *Arts Alliance* in advocating the arts in prisons and suggest that for the most part they present a limited narrative of purpose for the arts in prison. The conflicts that can emerge between arts practice and prison are also discussed, not only in relation to politics and the media, but also with regard to the role of the prisoner officer and prison culture in general.

I illustrate the ideological conflicts that can arise between the arts in prison and the media through the example of *The Comedy School.* In discussing obstacles that can arise in creating arts projects within the authoritarian culture of prison, I discuss my own experience as well as that of practitioners such as, Keith Palmer (Director of *The Comedy School*) and Chris Johnstone (Co-Director of *Rideout*).

In this chapter I also consider how legacies and associations with particular arts practices such as 'community' or 'applied theatre' can contribute to assumptions about the kinds of creative activities that take place in prison. I begin this chapter by exploring the ways in which the arts in prison can contribute to the stated objectives of prisons in England and Wales.

The current stated aims of the prison service are:

- Holding prisoners securely
- Reducing the risk of prisoners re-offending
- Providing safe and well-ordered establishments in which we treat prisoners humanely, decently and lawfully (HM Prison Service 2012) [273]

The arts in prison could be seen as having a role to play in contributing to these last two objectives. However, as has already been discussed, whilst there is a good deal of research advocacy supporting the arts as a tool for rehabilitation, arguments for the arts in prison on the basis of providing a humane and decent prison service are rarely expressed. The notion that the arts should happen in prison as part of a human rights agenda is a more problematic position to adopt, at least in the public arena of media coverage of the arts in prison, as Kearson (2012:p6)[274] writes: "particular ire is reserved for perceived over emphasis on the 'human rights' of prisoners." This is partly because of the power of negative narratives about prisoners in the media, which hold political sway.

Restrictive narrative identity can be seen in tabloids accounts of prisoners as selfish, cynical and in some instances, evil. Kearson argues that there are:

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[273] HM Prison Service (2012) http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps

[274] Kearson, T. (2012) 'Alternative Representations of the Prison & Imprisonment – Comparing Dominant Narratives in the News Media & in Popular Fictional Texts' in *Prison Service Journal* No. 199 pp 4-9

a number of recurring motifs in popular media coverage of the perceived experience of imprisonment; that of pampered, well-fed, leniently supervised prisoners enjoying privileges often denied to their victims and to society at large (2012:p6) [275]

Considered debate about the purpose of prisons is rare within mainstream media and is often emotive, setting up the rights of victims in conflict with the rights of prisoners. Newspapers such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* have frequently presented prison as 'too soft', a place in which cells are equipped with 'mod cons' such as video games and other luxury items. The term frequently used by *The Sun* newspaper in talking about prisoners is 'lags', a pejorative term, which does nothing to enlighten its readership as to who these individuals may be.

Popular news media stories of prisons and imprisonment routinely embrace an urban mythology of prisoners who 'brag' that prison is like a hotel or holiday camp, or who allegedly demand luxuries as a right" (2012:p6)[276]

The arts have been used by some newspapers to fit this image of 'pampered lags' with tabloid newspaper articles reporting how tax-payer's money has been wasted: "£400k for lags' music lessons" writes O'Shea

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[275] Ibid

[276] Kearson (2012) Op.Cit

(2010)[277] in *The Sun* newspaper. Individual politicians and government departments have also been the target of fierce criticism for allowing such activities to take place, see for example, Doyle (2010).[278] Such media reports induce and support the conventional political line to be 'tough on crime'.

Issues of justice and people's experience of suffering on both sides of the prison wall make decisions about what should or should not happen in prison difficult. The arts practitioner working in prison is operating within a particularly charged context, one in which prison staff and prisoners are for the most part highly sensitive to, and which is influenced by media stories like those referred to. This context produces an environment in which the purpose of artistic activity for pleasure or play is problematic. I now want to discuss an example of this, which relates to *The Comedy School* and their work in Whitemoor prison. This example illustrates the power of some elements of the media over arts activities in prison and exemplifies some of the political issues at stake.

The Comedy School, which was set up in 1988 by Keith Palmer, "aims to raise the profile of the many uses of comedy, from stimulating personal creativity to encouraging social skills and improving literacy".[279] Despite being

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[277] O'Shea, G. (2010) '£400K For Lags Music Lessons' *The Sun* [online] Available at: http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/2895471/400k-for-lags-music-lessons.html accessed 3rd November 2011

[278] Doyle, J. (2010) 'Now you pay for prison parties: Tory minister says taxpayer must fund balls and comedy workshops for prisoners' Mail Online, available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1296986/Now-pay-prison-parties-Tory-minister-says-taxpayer-fund-balls-comedy-workshops-criminals.html accessed 10th October 2012

[279] The Comedy School at http://thecomedyschool.com/mission.shtml accessed 10th October 2012

an organisation that has been involved in running courses in prisons for many years their course at a high security prison was cut short when tabloid newspapers published reports critical of the idea that prisoners should be partaking in 'comedy classes'. Newspapers, including *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun,* reported how prisoners in Whitemoor, including a man who was allegedly a member of Al Qaeda, were enjoying lessons in comedy at the Taxpayer's expense (see McDermot 2008).[280] They also reported the cancellation of the workshops by the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, (see Kay 2008).[281] As a consequence Straw issued Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 50 2008[282], which states that all prisoner activities should undergo a 'public acceptability test'.

According to Keith Palmer, the Director of *The Comedy School*, since the media's reporting of these events the company has not worked in prison, not because they are barred from doing so but, such was their frustration at having their work so publicly interrupted and misrepresented, they wish to avoid this happening again. In an interview in 2012,[283] he described the experience as having "an extremely detrimental effect on the company". The company has subsequently concentrated its efforts on working with disadvantaged groups, including ex-offenders within the community. He also spoke of his frustration

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[280] McDermot, N. (2008) 'A sick joke: Terrorist signs up for comedy classes at top security prison' Mail Online, available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1088172/A-sick-joke-terrorist-signs-comedy-classes-security-prison.html accessed 10th February 2012

[281] Kay, J (2008) 'Are you having a laugh?' The Sun [online] available at: http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/1955875/Are-you-having-a-laugh-Prisoners-given-comedy-workshop.html accessed 10th February 2012

[282] PSI 50 (2008) see Appendix

[283] Palmer, K. Director of The Comedy School (2012) Telephone interview with Bridget Keehan 8th March

that at the time of the crisis no one asked staff from *The Comedy School* to comment upon the work that they were doing. According to Palmer, the company had gone in to work at Whitemoor at the Governor's request and the course they ran "had been part of a project targeted at prisoners with literacy problems." [284]

What this case illustrates is that even when an arts company has a track record of working in prisons, and even when they are delivering a project that directly addresses a key need such as literacy, they can still be susceptible to negative media portrayals that have significant consequences: in this case the curtailment of the project and the withdrawal of the company from working in prisons. What this example also illustrates is the restrictive narratives employed by some elements of the press in their reporting of prisoner's activities.

The political reaction to the press furore over *The Comedy School's* work at Whitemoor provides a clear illustration of the political sensitivities around the arts in prison. Certainly the following extract from PSI 50 highlights the importance of media reporting and public perception over activities in prison:

Acceptable activities in prisons
Purpose
1.   This Instruction sets out arrangements to ensure that activities for prisoners are appropriate, purposeful and meet the public acceptability test. It also contains guidance on the attendance of visitors at events within the prison.
2.   Governors are accountable for all such events taking place in their establishment, including those agreed by junior managers or staff.

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[284] Ibid

3.   This instruction applies to interventions, educational and offending behaviour programmes (whether CSAP accredited or not), recreational activities (particularly those associated with national holidays and religious festivals), the celebration of religious festivals (see PSI 46/2008), and events such as those marking prisoners' achievements.

Mandatory actions

4.   *Governors are responsible for ensuring that all interventions and activities that take place within their establishment meet the tests set out in this Instruction.   They must consider how the activity might be perceived by the public and by victims and whether it meets Prison Service objectives effectively.*

5.   *Governors must consider the possible reaction to any existing or planned activities and avoid those, which would generate indefensible criticism and undermine public confidence in the Service.*

6.   *Where Governors are unsure whether to allow an activity or event to continue or to take place, they must seek advice from the Area Manager/DOM.*

7.   *The Area Manager/DOM must, if necessary, take further advice from Policy Advisers and senior officials and, if appropriate, Press Office.*

Background and guidance

8. **Prisons are places, which are, rightly, under intense public scrutiny. It is essential that we are able to justify all aspects of prison life to the public. The Prison Service is a public service, protecting the public, carrying out the sentence of the court and seeking to reform offenders. It is crucial that the public has confidence in prison regimes.   Adverse attention will be damaging to the credibility of the Prison Service and the National Offender Management Service Agency, and undermine**

public confidence in the critical and challenging work which we do in prisons.

9. *In considering whether a particular activity should be approved, Governors must consider, in the first place, how it is likely to be perceived by the public and by victims and whether it meets Prison Service objectives effectively regardless of whether the event was made known to the public by the media.*

11. *Secondly, Governors must consider whether the event or activity is appropriate in terms of those who will take part; it is legitimate to take into account the type of prisoner participating in terms of their offence / offences, the level of risk they present, their identified needs, and how their victim / victims may perceive the activity*

12. Further consideration should then be given to:
    - Does the activity provide value for money?
    - What value does the activity provide in reducing re-offending?
    - Will the activity improve the prisoners' self esteem / skills / behaviour / contribute to the good order of the prison?
    - **How will the activity be perceived if open to media scrutiny?**

13. **It is essential that all creative schemes are used appropriately by following this instruction and ensuring the case is made for their contribution to the package of offender management, referring any cases of doubt to Area Managers.**

14. The Ministry of Justice and Arts Council jointly support the work of an independent Arts Alliance, launched as part of the NOMS plan of work with the Third Sector. The Alliance and the Government's Arts Forum support the contribution of the arts to reducing re-offending through developing skills, tackling mental health problems and

> raising confidence. They have information on the impact the arts can have on those who participate in their programmes, including evaluations and statistics and verification of an organisation's credibility. They will be happy to share this with prisons or Area Managers to help assess the case for continuing a programme.

Figure 4: PSI 50 (2008) See Appendix

I have marked in bold particularly pertinent parts of this instruction. The instruction refers to the importance of Governors considering the 'acceptability' of arts programmes in prison (point 4) and it is made clear that they must consider how any activity they allow to take place might be 'interpreted' by the media (point 5). With the very many pressures that prison governors have to face in the day to day running of a prison, many might feel it wise to avoid the risk of attracting unfavourable publicity and forgo arts activities in their prisons altogether. It is also important to acknowledge that prisons are steeped in an authoritarian culture where mistakes are largely regarded as unacceptable (Select Committee Report 157-158)[285], so it is a safer option for prison Governors if any arts activity they bring in already has approval from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), such as a course like *Safe Ground's* Family Man.

This instruction gives a very direct message, that the only kind of arts practice acceptable in prisons is one that can be clearly explained in terms of its contribution to rehabilitation. What is striking in the example of the cancellation of *The Comedy School's* course at Whitemoor is the indirect power

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[285] Justice Committee, 'Role of the Prison Officer' HC (2008-9) 12, (29) [online] available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmjust/361/36106.htm

invested in the media to be the arbitrators of what activities are deemed acceptable in prison. As Palmer has commented, in an article by Duggan (2009), [286] "I'm trying to understand what other areas of criminal justice *The Sun* gets to decide?"

Point 14, makes reference to the *Arts Alliance,* in brief the *Arts Alliance* is the representative body of organisations and individuals who work with the arts in Criminal Justice. As a result of lobbying, initiated by members of the *Arts Alliance*, PSI 50 was withdrawn in 2010 and has since been replaced with PSI 38. This more recent instruction on activities in prison acknowledges the restrictiveness of PSI 50:

> PSI 50/2008 created some concerns amongst some intervention providers, particularly those in the Third Sector and among those offering interventions of a creative nature, who have felt that it has made it very difficult for some of them to continue to provide some tried and tested programmes. In fact the Ministry of Justice recognises the valuable contribution that creative activities can make, particularly with those prisoners who are hard to engage in other types of programme, in tackling offending behavior, in ensuring their engagement with the regime and the offender management process, and in improving prisoner behaviour and tackling safer custody issues. The appropriate use of such activities is perfectly acceptable.' (PSI-38 2010)[287]

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[286] Duggan, E. (2009) 'Straw clamps down on prison comedy classes', The Independent, [online] available at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/straw-clamps-down-on-prison-comedy-classes-1515322.html accessed 10th February 2012

[287] PSI-38 (2010) see appendix

Whilst the language of this instruction is certainly less prescriptive than that of the Prison Service Instruction it replaces, it maintains the point that arts interventions are justifiable in terms of the contribution they can make to encourage compliance with the prison system: the creative arts have a valuable contribution to make in encouraging engagement with the "regime and offender management process". It is clear from this statement that the arts in prisons are positioned in order to support the rehabilitative processes of Government agencies such as NOMS.

This narrow frame for understanding arts work in prison serves to normalise a correlative relationship between involvement in the arts and rehabilitation. This idea is persuasively presented as a 'common sense' argument for the purpose of the arts in prison, but my concern is that it may become the 'only show in town,' so to speak. For, although the idea that the arts have the potential to contribute to an individual's rehabilitation does connect with what many practitioners working with the arts in prison attest to, there is a danger that in directing creative practice towards achieving rehabilitative goals, other attributes such as beauty and artistry, which may in themselves be a source of inspiration that ignites a desire for change, may be side-lined or lost.

In an interview, conducted with a member of the *Arts Alliance's* steering committee, Simon Ruding, I asked if he felt that the organisation had much influence on shaping policy in relation to the use of the arts in prison. Ruding responded by saying "in all honesty, very little although we were instrumental in

getting PSI 50 changed".[288] Whilst this is a clear example of the organisation having some effect it is in actual fact a relatively small concession. The somewhat ludicrous idea of a 'Public Acceptability Test' for the arts in prison has been removed, but the fundamental issue that an arts project in prison must be able to justify itself in terms of the contribution it can make to reduce reoffending, is still very much in evidence and remains largely uncontested. Arguably, part of the problem is that the advocacy discourse for the arts in prison places so much emphasis on the role of the arts in helping to 'fix' the prisoner. With regard to this point I want to discuss the representative body of the arts in criminal justice: the *Arts Alliance*.

The *Arts Alliance* aims to "provide a vital link between Government, policy makers and practitioners" (*Arts Alliance* 2013)[289] and is funded by the Ministry of Justice and The Monument Trust. It provides information to its members about current Government policy in relation to prisons and aims to function as a channel of communication between government and arts practitioners working within criminal justice. However, the extent to which this channel of communication is a dialogue, with knowledge and expertise being shared between the arts in criminal justice sector and Government is questionable. A stated aim of the *Arts Alliance* is to put forward 'the best case possible' to those responsible for prison policy about the value of the arts in criminal justice settings.

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[288] Ruding, S. (2012) Telephone Conversation with Bridget Keehan 29th June

[289] Arts Alliance (2012) [online] available at: http://www.artsalliance.org.uk/policy accessed 3rd May 2013

Recent initiatives of the *Arts Alliance* have included working alongside the charities evaluations services to produce a guide to "help arts organisations demonstrate their effectiveness". They have also commissioned the creation of the 'Evidence Library':

> the online Evidence Library is a comprehensive collection of independent research and evaluation on the impact of arts-based projects in the Criminal Justice System. Arts organisations aim to respond proactively to budget cuts and reforms in the Criminal Justice System, by providing evidence that what they do works.
>
> (Arts Alliance, 2013)[290]

In addition to the creation of this resource the organisation has also provided a model to its members of how to provide evidence of their value in economic terms having commissioned a report, which demonstrates a way in which this can be done. The report, 'Unlocking Value' (2011) makes the case that arts interventions, by reducing reoffending, saves the Government money. The report states:

> In the current funding environment, arts charities in the criminal justice sector are under increasing pressure to provide evidence of their impact on re-offending. Re-offending costs the government between £9.5bn and

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[290] Arts Alliance (2012) [online] available at: http://www.artsevidence.org.uk accessed 3rd May 2013

£13bn a year, with two in five adults being convicted again within a year of release. (Johnson, et al, 2011:p2)

The message conveyed by the *Arts Alliance* to the press is that the arts are a cost effective way in which to rehabilitate prisoners. The press release issued by the *Arts Alliance* below clearly communicates this message.

Arts projects working with offenders save the taxpayer an average of £4.50 for every £1 invested in them, according to a study from New Philanthropy Capital. The report, *Unlocking Value*, was commissioned by Arts Alliance and examined the results of three organisations – Clean Break, Only Connect and Unitas – which work with different groups of offenders. The report found that they brought about savings of between £3.06 and £5.89 for every £1 invested in them. Report author David Pritchard said that the findings helped to demonstrate the value of arts organisations working with offenders…Tim Robertson, chair of the Arts Alliance, said: 'This report makes it clear that arts-based interventions can help to reduce reoffending, and in doing so also save serious amounts of public money.

Figure 3: Press Release: Arts Projects Reduce Reoffending (Arts Alliance 2011)[291]

A possible reason for the absence of arts advocacy on the basis of art as a human right rests with a reluctance in society to debate the question of what prisons are for and who ends up in prison and why. The narrative

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[291] Johnson, H. Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2011) *Unlocking Value: the economic benefit of the arts in criminal justice*, London.

perpetuated by mainstream media reporting of criminals is that ultimately prisoners are 'bad' people who set out to offend and that in providing prisoners with creative activities such as the stand-up course run by *The Comedy School*, criminals, to quote *The Sun,* are "having a laugh" at society's expense.[292]

Whilst some elements of the press present a hostile reaction to arts activities in prison, and whilst there are of course people who feel strongly that the purpose of prisons is to be punitive, my personal experience is that I rarely encountered negative responses to the work I was doing. What I did encounter however, was the assumption that the work was for rehabilitative or therapeutic purposes. The idea of art as a human right, and therefore something prisoners should be exposed to is a view I rarely encountered. I met all sorts of people in my three years working within prison, some of whom did seem more concerned with their rights and entitlements rather than reflective of what caused them to be there, however, I never met anyone who expressed the view that being in prison and receiving opportunities to learn a trade, take part in a theatre show or write for the prison magazine was something to laugh about in the sense of 'getting one over' the authorities or the tax-paying public. In fact what I encountered mostly was a discomfort with being seen to be engaging in arts activities purely for the sake of those activities. Involvement in arts activities seemed to need self, as well as peer, justification and these justifications were narrated in altruistic terms, such as raising money for charity, a means of raising the spirits of fellow prisoners and to show something 'they could be proud of' to family and friends. I will discuss these explanations of involvement in more depth when discussing each of the projects but before doing this I want

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[292] Kay, J (2008) 'Are you having a laugh?' Op.Cit

to briefly consider the wider arts culture that also has some impact upon perceptions of the arts practitioner in prison.

Within the UK, discourse about arts practice posits a difference between certain practices of making art that are bound up with context and audience. In spite of an increasing blurring of boundaries between artistic practices evident within cross-art form work, as well as examples of work that cross economic and cultural divisions, there is nonetheless 'bracketing' of work within particular discursive contexts. Defining the kind of theatre one makes and whom it is intended for, such as site-specific work, new writing, or theatre for young people, helps to distinguish one artistic experience from another. Equally, where the work is taking place is a factor in forming a notion of what kind of theatre experience it will be, and: "what is meant by theatre changes according to the manner and context of application" (Prentki & Preston 2009:p10).[293]

There can be assumptions about creative work made in contexts such as prisons, such as the notion that the aesthetic quality of the work will not necessarily be a priority and rather that process and the exploration of 'issues' will be primary objectives. Theatre in prisons is generally situated within the umbrella term of Applied Theatre, and whilst the broadness of this term is acknowledged (2009:p10),[294] it is generally understood that the purpose of applied theatre practice is to use theatre as a means to 'transform or change human behaviour'. Such descriptions will not always accord with the objectives of participants. I strongly suspect that had I proposed to my colleagues in the

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[293] Prentki T & Preston S, (2009) *The Applied Theatre Reader* London, Routledge

[294] Applied Theatre/Drama: an e-debate in (2004) RIDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, Vol.11 (1) pp 90-95

theatre group in prison that the aim of our work would be transformation - in the sense that we would learn something about ourselves in the making of the work and that our everyday behaviour might change as a result - they may well have decided not to work with me.

Whilst I believe there were changes in attitudes and outlook experienced by most participants involved in the performing and writing activities, including myself, had I presented this as a central pursuit it would have resulted in a very different creative process. One of the important factors influencing the process during the residency is that the work we did was not directly focused on the concerns of the group but rather focused on their audience. Therefore what they received from me in terms of professional theatre experience: script and character development, explorations of the actor and audience relationship, for example, and what I received from them: expertise in what the audience might like and be challenged by, meant there was always a 'third party' to consider in making creative choices. In coming to understand that I had no particular interest in analysing them and no particular interest in working on 'issue related' themes, the group made the work they wanted to make, albeit with some obvious caveats in relation to their audience, prison security, and with suggestions and challenges from me. This is not to suggest the group was not without power struggles and conflicts but the experience of being able to think about and discuss the kind of theatre they wanted to make was itself an incredibly important aspect of the work.

At the beginning of the residency I had scant knowledge of other practitioners working in criminal justice. I had heard about *Geese Theatre Company* and had a notion of their work as broadly therapeutic. Aside from

this, my discussions with the Writers in Prison Network were my primary source for understanding my purpose as a writer and theatre maker working in prison. Through the application process and through my training with them I understood my role as being that of a professional artist, not a teacher or therapist, but simply there to practice my art and to motivate others to express their capabilities as artists.

My experience as a theatre director prior to undertaking the residency had been that of making theatre within mainstream arts venues where the audience for the work comprised mainly of fellow artists. Whilst work as a freelance artist has occasionally involved me in running theatre and writing workshops for 'disaffected' young people and working with young people in the 'looked after system,' I had never sought to define myself as a 'community artist' and had never formally trained in participatory arts practice although I had some familiarity with techniques associated with community and applied theatre such as Boal's Forum Theatre.[295]

My 'toolkit' was limited to what I had learned from working with professional actors. I highlight this because I think it has significance more generally for which artists work in prisons. My sense of personal identity, familiarity with criminal behavior, plus a relative currently serving a sentence, made me feel 'qualified' to work in prison but my professional identity as someone making work primarily with mainstream arts organisations meant that I felt in some sense professionally unprepared for the task: that I ought to have come from a 'community theatre' background in order to work in prison. A kind of 'territorialism' within arts culture can support the idea that particular arts

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[295] Boal A, (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, London, Pluto Press

practice belongs in certain contexts. Having said that there have been examples of mainstream arts organisations such as the Royal Shakespeare Company creating projects in prison (see, for example, Scott-Douglass 2007)[296] but these tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

At the start of my residency I felt a degree of uncertainty about what I might be able to achieve and sometimes uncertain about my role in response to others ideas of why I was there. For example, during Prisoner Awareness Training a newly appointed member of the Operational Support staff asked if I was going to teach prisoners how to write. His perception of why I was there was perfectly logical given the job title, and research indicating high levels of illiteracy amongst prisoners (see for example, Chitty 2008).[297] Another perception was that I would be doing drama therapy and working alongside the psychology team to help the men I would be working with address psychological issues that might be a factor in their offending behavior. Such perceptions indicate how strong the association is between the arts in prison and rehabilitation. I now want to discuss some of the challenges that I encountered during the residency in relation to what I term prison culture, by this I mean an institutional culture that criminologists such as Coyle (2005)[298] and Liebling (2008)[299] have written about.

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[296] Scott-Douglass, A. (2007) Shakespeare Inside: the Bard Behind Bars, London & New York, Continuum Books p5

[297] Chitty, C. (2008) *What Does the Evidence Tell us About the link between Lifelong Learning & Reoffending*, MoJ [online] available at: http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/lifelong-learning-and-re-offending.pdf

[298] Coyle, A (2005) *Understanding Prisons: Key Issues in Policy & Practice*, Berkshire, OUP

[299] Liebling A, Price D & Shefer G, (2011) The Prison Officer, Oxon, Willan Publishing

The process of setting up a magazine gave me my first introduction to several re-occurring themes that would continue to be prevalent within every creative endeavor. These intertwining themes, which posed a challenge to the realisation of creative projects, were as follows:

1. An expectation of failure and a culture of negativity.

2. Prison politics

3. Issues of security.

It is worth examining these factors as a means of illustrating how arts practice in prisons can be a useful counterpoint to some of the dominant aspects of prison culture. I will now discuss the first theme in relation to the setting up of a prison magazine. I then go on to discuss how the role and training of prison officers has significance for prison culture in relation to the 'prison politics' and the place of the arts within prison.

The most common response I had from staff and from prisoners – to paraphrase - was 'if the magazine ever gets produced then most people won't bother with it in any case'. Issues of illiteracy and general apathy were cited as reasons for this. This tendency: of an expectancy of failure and apathy has been acknowledged by other practitioners working within criminal justice, (see for example, Johnstone 2010).[300] Whilst I am sure that in most, if not all UK prisons, there are staff and prisoners who work hard to resist this tendency, it would seem that the levels of apathy and negativity I encountered were nothing out of the ordinary. In terms of the Government's own measure of performance,

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[300] Johnstone, C. (2012) *Exit from Blunderland* [online] available at: http://www.molebehaviour.com/writings.aspx accessed 25th June 2013

the prison was 'performing well,' (for an example of prison performance ratings see: Great Britain, Ministry of Justice),[301] and so again, there is nothing to suggest that the malaise I encountered was particularly exceptional. Indeed, conversations with my work colleagues suggested that, on the contrary, morale amongst staff and prisoners at this establishment were high compared to other establishments they were familiar with.

Given the fact that prison is not a pleasant environment, that those who are sent to prison often have troubled backgrounds, that the rate of self-harm and suicide is higher per person in prison than the general population,[302] and that prisons are perceived as failing in terms of carrying out their objective of rehabilitating offenders,[303] it should not come as a surprise that levels of energy and the motivation to initiate new projects are low. What I soon came to realise was the importance of cultivating the support of officer staff, as without their co-operation the opportunity to work with groups of prisoners was very limited.

Although I had a set of keys, which meant I could move freely around the prison to visit different wings and landings, I was not allowed to escort groups of prisoners for security reasons. This meant that in order to gather together prisoners from different wings of the prison to work together in either

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[301] Great Britain Ministry of Justice: *Prison Annual Performance Ratings 2010/11* [online] available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/163310/prisons-annual-performance-ratings2010-11.pdf.pdf accessed 3rd March 2013

[302] Bromley Briefings-Prison Fact File (Summer 2013) [online] available at: http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Factfile accessed 25th June 2013

[303] Ibid

the library or the lifer wing (which is where the magazine 'office' was based) or to the prison chapel which doubled as our rehearsal and performance space, I needed an officer to go to each wing to 'collect' participants and bring them to the center (the holding area for prisoners before 'movements' – when prisoners are escorted to specific work areas by an officer). I was told there was not sufficient resources to allocate an officer to support this and was therefore reliant on the goodwill of individual officers to see to their other escorting duties or wing responsibilities before coming back to the wing to do a second round of movements for the magazine team or theatre group.

The solution to this problem was not immediately apparent and initially getting things to work on an organisational level proved very difficult. It involved getting permission to work in a particular area, getting permission for particular individuals to work together, making arrangements for the escorting of the group to and from the meeting place and then being able to arrange 'officer cover' for wherever the group was working, for example, ensuring that an officer would be on duty in the chapel at the time I was working. This made for a wonderfully effortful process of learning about the everyday arrangements of prison life and people's understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

In essence the activities that I had been asked to bring about had no internal 'on the ground' mechanism of support and because some officer staff were not necessarily in favour of having a Writer in Residence, it was sometimes very difficult to enable groups of prisoners to meet for creative work. For some members of staff I suspect that escorting prisoners to play rehearsals was not something they felt they should be doing. I frequently found myself in situations where an officer would refuse to support an activity, for example

escort a prisoner to the rehearsal area, until a more senior member of staff

instructed them to do so. It was not necessarily the case that the officer simply

did not want to, but a reliance on authority and ultimately a fear of making an

error meant that many of the staff required explicit instruction from a senior

grade to carry out a task. Recent research suggests that there has been some

unease amongst officer staff over changes to the role:

> the role of the prison officer is contingent upon the wider and deeper
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> question of the aim(s) and purpose(s) of prison within the wider criminal
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> justice system. Professor Andrew Coyle told us that the role of the prison
>
> officer could only be understood if the purpose of imprisonment was
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> clear, and that remained a matter of debate: "In general terms, we are
>
> fairly clear about the purpose of most of the large institutions in our
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> society: the school, for example, is there to educate young people, the
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> hospital is there to heal people who are sick. There is no similar clarity
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> about the role of the prison." (Justice Select Committee 2008-9)[304]

In talking about prison officers there can be the same issue of stereotyping as

occurs with prisoners, and media representations of prison staff are often

negative. What is the case is that prison officers' work on the front line of

dealing with people who are being kept in difficult conditions and who often

have significant emotional and psychological needs. The entry requirements for

this demanding role are interesting to note:

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[304] Justice Committee, 'Role of the Prison Officer' HC (2008-9) 12, (29) [online] available at:
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmjust/361/36106.htm

Prison officers are not required to have any qualifications. In the 1990s the Prison Service introduced a requirement that all applicants have five O-levels or GCSEs, including English and Maths. The experiment was slowly abandoned, however, as it became clear the number of recruits in London and South East England was drying up and that, with national recruitment, regional limitations on recruits were unworkable. (Justice Select Committee 2008-9 q.57) [305]

Liebling et al (2011)[306] makes the point that higher-level educational qualifications are not necessarily the best means of assessing suitability for the role of prison officer and certainly should not be the only means through which prospective applicants for the role are assessed. In my experience the similarity between officers' backgrounds and some of the backgrounds of prisoners, including for example educational attainment, had more positive than negative outcomes. Many officers and prisoners spoke to me of their mistrust of so called 'experts' who had never spent time in the 'real world' or attended the 'University of Life', and it seemed that the shared antipathy towards prison psychologists I encountered, from both uniform staff and prisoners, had its roots in the idea that having a degree should not be valued above 'real life' experience. Yet the fact remains that both assessment and training provision for the role are severely limited when compared with other comparable roles

[305]Justice Committee, 'Role of the Prison Officer' HC (2008-9) 12, (57) [online] available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmjust/361/36105.htm

[306] Liebling A, Price D & Shefer G, (2011), Op.Cit.

such as social worker or police officer. Research on the background and experience of those who become prison officers is extremely limited: "it can be difficult to find material about prison officers in published form and even more difficult to find material about officers working in the private sector" (Liebling et al. 2011).[307]

Whilst the work of Liebling et al (2011) illuminates factors such as, gender, ethnicity, age and experience, to provide a greater understanding of the background of prison officer staff, I have not been able to find any research relating to the 'cultural consumption' of prison officers. If it is the case (as I suspect from my time working in prison) that the majority of prison officer staff have on the whole little experience of the arts, then it is not surprising if there is not much 'goodwill' towards arts projects in prison and possibly some confusion about their purpose. The co-operation of prison officers is essential to the success of a project and if there is incomprehension and even hostility towards prisoners having the opportunity to make theatre or write poetry, when officers are working long shifts in less than ideal conditions for little financial reward, then co-operation may not be forthcoming. This point connects to the second theme: that of 'prison politics' in which a concern with power, and most often the power to say no, can be prevalent:

Visitors such as visiting artists are particularly vulnerable to these moment-by-moment decisions… When we were arrived, we were told we couldn't go in because we 'weren't on the list'. We insisted the gate

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[307] Ibid

officer phone the Education staff member who was waiting for us with the lads. She confirmed to him verbally over the phone that we were authorised to enter and that she had earlier sent an email to this effect. He confirmed that they were having internal email problems. All therefore seemed well. But it wasn't. The gate officer now accepted that we were entitled to enter and that Education staff were waiting to receive us. However, he said, we couldn't go in. The reason was simple; we weren't on the list. And to prove it, he thrust the list, created earlier that day, up against the window and bellowed his refusal through the glass. We never got in that day. (Johnstone 2012) [308]

This experience, recounted by Chris Jonhston of *Rideout*,[309] is very familiar to me and is something that was echoed by other Writers in Residence who shared similar experiences at different prisons. The inflexibility of prison culture is not surprising when considering it is an institution formulated through strict adherence to rules, but paradoxically prison is also an institution which runs courses on the problems of 'inflexible thinking' in order to help prisoners reduce their risk of reoffending.

The third theme of security can significantly impede the practicality of arts projects happening in prison. Apart from the fact that the prison regime runs to a strict timetable where space and time are strictly controlled, the

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[308] Johnstone, C. (2012) *Exit from Blunderland* [online] available at: http://www.molebehaviour.com/writings.aspx accessed 25th June 2013

[309] Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation) [online] available at: www.rideout.org.uk accessed 5th December 2012

security conscious, risk averse culture of prison can mean that situations, such as the one described above happen frequently, not necessarily out of a wish to exercise authority but, as stated earlier, from a fear of making mistakes. In the Justice Committee's session on the role of the Prison Officer, the over emphasis on security being a causal factor in creating a culture of fear was raised:

> In many ways success in the Prison Service is still measured by absence of failure: make sure nothing goes wrong…To fundamentally uproot the negative culture in a prison, Professor Coyle told us that there needed to be an increase in trust, not only within individual prisons, but throughout NOMS: There is a culture where the worst thing is to do something wrong rather than to do something that is right. (Select Committee Report 157-8)[310]

My particular interest in this general culture of negativity lays with its likely contribution to the idea of 'restrictive narrative identity' discussed previously. If the culture in an institution is risk averse and tending not to be welcoming new initiatives then it is unlikely to be an environment that fosters self-development and change.

What is also important to consider is the ways in which arts projects may impact upon the institution of prison it self. An arts project that engenders collective passion, enthusiasm and creativity provides a stark contrast to the

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[310] Justice Committee, 'Role of the Prison Officer' HC (2008-9) 12, (157-8) [online] available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmjust/361/36106.htm

general ethos of negativity. Additionally creative projects that aim for high standards and place high expectations on both participants and the audiences who come to view the work, is a challenge to the culture of inertia that seems typical of prison. Thus an emphasis on excellence and the creation of an ethos where participants are encouraged to work hard to achieve a high level in their creative work can be something which has transformative implications for the institution as much as the individuals taking part.

In the next chapter I discuss this with reference to individual statements and case studies drawn from the residency. I also consider how character creation through performance and writing might have a role to play in helping to forge a broader sense of narrative identity.

Chapter Five

Creating New Roles: narrative Identity & desistance

In this chapter, using examples of work created during the residency, I explore how the adoption of a creative role such as writer or actor can present opportunities for a (re)consideration of personal identity and become a means through which individuals have an opportunity to inhabit an additional 'strip' of identity (Hetherington1998: p155).[311] I argue that this has potential to stimulate a broadening of narrative identity and in doing so provide positive alternatives to the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*. I discuss this idea with reference to the recorded comments of individuals who participated in projects as well as examples of work created during the residency.

I also draw upon research in the area of narrative identity and desistance, in particular the work of Ward and Maruna (2007),[312] which argues the importance of providing opportunities for narrative 're-configuration'. I then refer to statements made by participants in the interview material (DVDs 1 & 3, see Appendix) and audience responses to the work, and explore these in relation to the concept of 'restrictive narrative identity'. I then use several case studies drawn from the theatre group as a means of exploring further how involvement in writing and acting may help bring about a broader sense of narrative identity. I also describe my experience as a family visitor to prison and

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[311] Hetherington, K. (1998) *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics,* London, Sage Publications Ltd.

[312] Ward T & Maruna S, (2007) *Rehabilitation: beyond the risk paradigm,* London, Routledge

the experience of being cast as a group of people who 'need' to be treated with suspicion. I begin by discussing the concept of identity and its relationship to narrative.

Much questioning and debate surrounds the subject of identity: for example, is it something constructed through language or does it exist in some kind of pre-discursive essence. According to postmodern concepts of identity, there is no essential self but rather identity is constituted through a mesh of intersecting narratives, through the stories we tell and are told:

> we are all constituted in a broad range of subject positions…so that all of us are combinations of class, race, ethnic, regional, generational, sexual and gender positions. (Butler 2002:p56)[313]

As Butler suggest we are born into pre-existing narratives that shape our sense of identity, for example, narratives of gender, sexuality and religious belief. Whether or not we hold the view that there exists an essence of self or, that self is constituted through discourse, it is the case, generally speaking, that we experience who we are as a continuum, a self that grows, develops and is continuously forming through narrative. Our sense of self and others' sense of who we are is connected through social ties that situate us in time and place, and in particular roles. The roles we take on and the actions we perform are themselves related to narratives of identity. The ways in which we 'perform' our identity become normalised so, in relation to gender for example, ways of being masculine or feminine can appear to be innate as opposed to cultural. Who and

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[313] Butler, C. (2002) *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxon, Oxford University Press

what we identify with is also a part of identity formation and we may choose a particular identity in order to belong to one grouping and not another (Hetherington 1998). This is not to imply that identity is simply a straightforward menu of options that we opt for or reject but rather what we choose or reject relates to an understanding of who we think we are and who we wish to become. Consequently our 'choices' need to make sense and fit with our narrative of who we are and who we wish to become.

The emergence of 'identity politics' has brought to the fore the issue of marginalised voices and how political power can result in the silencing of the 'other', for example the voices of women and colonised populations. Theorists such as, Said (1979) Hall (1990) and Butler (1980) in addressing power relations connected to gender, sexuality and ethnicity, have challenged "realist and essentialist views of identity," (Hetherington 1997:p25).[314] Whilst it is beyond the bounds of this thesis to provide a comprehensive overview of the arguments around identity theory, the relationship between narrative and identity, and desistance theory, has particular relevance to my concept of 'restrictive narrative identity'.

In recent years criminologists, such as, Maruna (2001, 2004, 2007) McNeil and Weaver (2010) Ward and Maruna (2007) and Ward and Marshall (2007), have considered the importance of narrative theories of identity in relation to criminality and desistance. In relation to the importance of narrative in desistance theory, Maruna states: "long-term desistance does involve identifiable and measurable changes at the level of personal identity or the 'me'

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[314] Hetherington, K. (1998), Op.Cit.

of the individual" (2004:p13).[315] The extent to which the person who is identified as criminal – and prison is perhaps the most powerful marker of this – can be 'released' from that identity is dependent on being recognised by others as being someone other than criminal. This can be a powerful contributing factor in that person ceasing their offending behavior. The work of Ward and Maruna (2007),[316] points to the importance of narrative identity in constituting a desisting self. Desistance is used to describe the situation of someone who has previously offended, ceasing to do so. The term has been further qualified by the use of secondary and primary desistance to indicate the difference between when a person who commits crime has a lapse from doing so (primary) and when someone who has been a criminal refrains totally from committing any further crimes (secondary). McNeil and Weaver (2010) describe secondary desistance as: "ceasing to see one's self as an offender and finding a more positive identity; it is about successfully peeling off the criminal label." [317]

In order to achieve this transition process and to find a more 'positive identity' Ward and Maruna (2007) argue that opportunities for narrative development are important, and this stems from a view of identity as being expressed through wants, or objectives. This idea is also supported in an article

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[315] Maruna, S. (2004) 'What's Love Got To Do With It?' in Walker, D (ed) *The Journal of Crime Reduction & Community Safety* No. 22. [online] available at: htpp/www.Academia.edu/1145459Whats_love_got_to_do_with_it

[316] Ward, T. & Maruna, S. (2007) Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm, London, Routledge

[317] McNeil, F. & Weaver, B. Report No.03 (2010) *Changing Lives? Desistance Research & Offender Management*, SCCJR [online] available at: http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/publications/changing-lives-desistance-research-and-offender-management/ accessed 12th December 2012

by Ward and Marshall (2007); rather than pathologise offenders, their work prioritises an understanding of the objectives of the person who commits an offence: "offender's personal strivings express their sense of who they are and what they would like to become" (Ward and Marshall 2007:p279).[318] As discussed earlier, the dominant framework of current rehabilitation practise is based upon what is termed the 'risk/needs model', also described as a 'deficit model'. This model: "sees offenders as characterised primarily by deficiencies to be corrected and needs to be met by others" (Robinson & Crow, 2009, p121).[319]

In discussing the need for a new paradigm of rehabilitation Ward and Maruna state:

> the process of rehabilitation requires not just the targeting of isolated 'factors' but also the holistic reconstruction of the 'self'… people acquire a sense of who they are and what really matters from what they do. What this means for correctional practitioners is that it is not enough simply to equip individuals with skills to control or reduce their risk factors; it is essential that they are also given the opportunity to acquire a more adaptive personal identity, one that gives them a sense of meaning and fulfillment. (2007:p117)[320]

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[318] Ward, T & Marshall, B, (2007) 'Narrative Identity & Offender Rehabilitation' in *International Journal of Offender Therapy & Comparative Criminology*, Vol.5 (3) pp 279-297

[319] Robinson G & Crow I, (2009) *Offender Rehabilitation: theory, research & practice*. London, Sage Publications Ltd

[320] Ward, T. & Maruna, S. (2007) Op.Cit.

The work of Maruna (2001) in particular, proposes that offenders, in order to become consistent non-offenders, need to create a sense of self that *makes sense* of their transition from offender to non-offender. His findings in the Liverpool Desistance Study, for example, seems to indicate that in the case of the non-desisting group there seemed to be a lack of narrative management to their lives. According to Maruna's study, when the non-desisting group were asked questions about their future (for example, how do you see yourself in 5 years time?) their responses indicated a belief that they had little or no control over their lives. The desisting group on the other hand, expressed the belief that they were on a path of progression towards achieving their goals and their criminal past had a positive role to play in their future. Ward and Marshall (2007) summarise Maruna's findings as follows:

> Persistent offenders appeared to live their lives according to a condemnation script and felt there was little they could do to change their lives or themselves. Desisting offenders appeared to live their lives according to a redemption script, where negative past experiences were reinterpreted as providing a pathway to forging a new identity (2007:p286)[321]

What this research indicates is that it is not in itself enough to provide someone who possesses a strong sense of criminal identity with a job and expect a situation of 'going straight' to inevitably follow. Only if that job were to 'make sense' to the person in terms of their sense of self might a 'career

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[321] Ward, T. & Marshall, B. (2007) Op.Cit.

change' follow. It follows, therefore, that barriers to change come not just through external problems, such as difficulties finding employment but also via the internal narrative of the person who is or has been a prisoner and how they view themselves. According to Ward and Marshall people: "draw from discursive resources or webs of meaning to construct a sense of who they are" (2007:p280).[322]

In a study, focusing on the role of religious conversion in constructing a desisting self, participants related how the specific experience of imprisonment can create a crisis of identity.

> The prime concern for sample members, once they had overcome the shock of committing their crime and adjusting to the physical shock of imprisonment, then appeared to be trying to resolve some of the problems and questions surrounding their self-identity. Essentially, they sought answers as to how they could be in the place they were at and still be good and worthy human beings inside. Opportunities to do this and to construct a new, positive way of thinking about themselves, however, were constrained by the prison environment and their exclusion from mainstream pro-social roles.
>
> (Maruna et al, 2006:p174) [323]

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[322] Ibid

[323] Maruna, S. Wilson, L. Curran, K. (2006) 'Why God is Often Found Behind Bars: Prison Conversions & the Crisis of Self Narrative' in Research in Human Development, Vol.3 (2/3) [online] available at: http://johnjayresearch.org/cje/files/2012/10/Why-God-is-found-behind-bars.pdf

The situation the prisoner is placed in is that nearly all experiences and tasks within prison presents to them that they are first and foremost *prisoner*. Other aspects of their identity, such as parent or partner are severely limited and 'role dispossession' (Goffman 1961)[324] can therefore occur. In adopting an additional 'strip' of identity via a religious belief, for example, another narrative dimension in which to view past, present and crucially the future is opened up. However, as the work of Ward and Maruna indicates, what can be hugely problematic in prison is the lack of opportunity to experience a change in role and to experience being viewed as someone other than *prisoner*.

> One of the conclusions of that previous research has been that ex-offenders' opportunities for reconstructing their self-narratives were too limited. That is, there were too few plausible scripts or meta-narratives for them to model their self-narratives on. (Maruna et al, 2006:p181)[325]

Cultivating opportunities to create an 'additional identity,' both in the process of creating character but also in adopting a role of writer and/or actor, can provide a means by which those experiencing the strictures of prison life may gain a greater sense of autonomy. I also contend that the device of fiction, whether performing a character or writing a fictional story, can be utilised as a means for expressing opinions and attitudes that one might be reluctant to express (particularly in a prison context) as simply one's own. My point is not to suggest that the writer/actor uses fiction and character simply as an outlet of

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[324] Goffman, E. (1961) Op.Cit.

[325] Maruna, S. Wilson, L. Curran, K. (2006) Op.Cit.

expressing personal attitudes - they can also be means for exploring what seems opposite - but rather that such work can display a broader range of attitudes, beliefs and behaviour than is likely to manifest in more formal or conventional modes of communication.

Writing and performing characters can be a means through which individuals have an opportunity to inhabit an additional identity, an alternative to the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner*. Added to the everyday rituals of prison life is a new dimension. Time behind your cell door is time to imagine and/or write your character's next predicament. 'Bang up' becomes the chance to learn your lines and identify your character's objectives. The tasks of performing and writing require actions and in taking actions to fulfill the creative task in hand the sense of being someone other than *prisoner* is developed.

In making a theatre project, for example, which has creative ambition as its focus there is always the possibility that the best idea, dramatic moment, movement, stillness, silence or turn of phrase will be written or improvised by anyone taking part, or observing. There is no 'expert' in so far as the goal is concerned. The artistic project which aims towards creating something extraordinary within the 'here and now' of the prison environment starts from a position where although it may be a challenge to all participants (be they experienced artists or new to the idea of being an artist) to create something of beauty which inspires and entertains, they have a shared responsibility towards trying to achieve this. In the process of making theatre and/or writing stories, there is the opportunity to develop a sense of purpose, a sense of discipline in respect of craft and a consideration for audience. The rehearsal room or the writer's page can function as a space in which there is a degree of creative

autonomy to construct a version of life as you see it. These creative spaces –
the rehearsal room, the writer's page - are not in any sense 'pure', on the
contrary what is more likely is that prejudices, preoccupations, inclinations to
censor and create stereotypes may be evident. This is not to suggest that
therein lies the primary value, but the actor or writer in creating character is
presenting an aspect of self to others and in doing so has the opportunity to
express, sometimes opaquely, sometimes transparently, a perspective on the
world that reveals something of themselves.

The learning process involved in the acceptance of critique as part of
improving the craft of acting or writing may also bring useful reflective skills. Yet
it is important that these skills are encountered as an intrinsic part of making
high quality work as opposed to being utilised directly as tools to improve, for
example, someone's self awareness.

Additionally, being part of a rehearsal process can also create a rare
opportunity for discussion and being listened to. Within the authoritarian culture
of the mainstream prison regime it can be rare for a prisoner to have their
experience or opinion valued, or received without the assumption that their
reason for speaking is suspect in some way. One of the teachings on the
Prisoner Awareness Training course, for example, was to question the
motivation behind any statement that a prisoner made to us. In contrast the
opportunity to be treated as a professional and to be regarded as someone
who has the ability to 'find answers', for example, in how a character might
respond in a particular situation, is a change to the usual culture of prison
where opportunities to be 'heard' or to present oneself in a 'new light' are rare.
This limitation on 'being heard,' or always being cast in a particular way, as the

'troublemaker' for example, may of course be experienced prior to incarceration but it is important to consider the extent to which prison then continues to develop and support such limited roles for prisoners to play.

The skill involved in acting: becoming immersed in a world and in doing so enabling the audience to do the same, the memorisation of lines, the nerve involved in giving a committed performance, are skills that when done well are much admired and celebrated in our society, with 'good' actors often enjoying high status. Similarly within the micro-society of prison, recognition of a 'good performance' can enable the performer to experience an increased sense of status that might not necessarily have been realised otherwise. During my residency the attempt to make work of the best quality resulted in positive responses from audiences and this meant that performers experienced the 'high status' feeling of the actor who has performed well. In a context where an individual may hold very little legitimate power, this can be significant.

People in prison may find various means to individuate themselves and not all of them will necessarily be positive, for example, acquiring a reputation as the person who can supply drugs on a particular wing. There are of course opportunities for more positive roles to be adopted through some of the job opportunities on offer or through volunteering roles such as the Listener scheme (where prisoners are trained by the Samaritans to support fellow prisoners by listening to their problems), but on the whole there is little the current regime offers which enables those imprisoned to construct or reconstruct a positive sense of self. Of course not everyone who experiences prison will necessarily want to question or change their sense of who they are and prison might even be perceived by some as inevitable. This may of course

be symptomatic of 'restrictive narrative identity' whereby limited options lead to limited choices.

In suggesting that immersion in a creative role can have an effect upon narrative identity I am indicating yet another potential use for arts in prisons. However, the key point I wish to make is that immersion in a creative process that focuses on developing the artwork, as opposed to directly focusing on the rehabilitation of the participants, is one that may bring about unexpected discoveries and changes. To try to plan a creative project in such a way that it focused on trying to 'broaden the narrative identity' of participants would be to miss the point. Rather, in adopting a specific role such as an actor or writer, and in working to produce the best work of art possible, a sense of identity other than *prisoner* is confirmed.

This process of 'role possession' may indeed be useful in so far as it enables an individual to develop an expanded narrative of who they are, yet if this were to become the focus and primary purpose then the creative process and the work produced would be shaped and arguably limited by this objective. However, where creative work is being produced in order to try and achieve the highest possible aesthetic value, and when individuals in prison are supported and respected as artists capable of achieving work of high quality, then the sense of what is possible for an individual may change. As one of the participants from the theatre group says:

I can see that I can do other things, things I've never thought about before and I would, you know, like to do it. If I was outside I would

definitely, definitely, definitely trying to be doing something like this, yeah without a doubt (*Scrooge-the cast 2005*)[326]

In an improvisation session whilst we were working on *Scrooge*, one of the actors, whilst 'in character' told another character to 'shush' – the improvised retort was immediate, 'don't shush me, I've been shushed all my life.' It was a telling moment – and there were many examples of this – where an actor 'in character' would say or do something that might not have come out in more ordinary circumstances. In my own work as a performer I have experienced moments in improvisation and performance where I have surprised myself with the expression of spontaneous utterances or emotions which a more 'managed' version of myself may not have so easily expressed. In other words, through playful, creative work that allows for spontaneity, the aspect of self that wishes to control presentation may be superseded if only momentarily by other aspects of self. This 'losing of control': when spontaneous expression 'takes over' can provide a respite from a self-imposed restrictiveness that can arise as a response to imprisonment.

> In an environment where it is difficult to express emotions and when survival often depends on 'putting up a front', writing affords prisoners the opportunity to set their emotions free, to be themselves, albeit through other characters, and to fulfill the creative urge (Broadhead 2006:p108)[327]

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[326] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005) DVD1 Katja Stiller, Valley & Vale Community Arts

Whilst the claim that emotions are 'set free' and that people become 'themselves' through creative writing or theatre performance is problematic, there is, in the creation of fiction, opportunities to represent aspects of self that might not ordinarily appear. A function of acting, for example, can be to provide a mask from which it is 'safe' to be more expressive.

In acting a role, no matter how apparently 'true to life' the performance, it remains acknowledged as just that, a performance, and what is more one that whilst ideally is seeking to convince remains in the realm of 'only pretend'. Shechner describes how the performer occupies a liminal space: "the actor is not Ophelia and is not not Ophelia" (2007:p72).[328] This caveat can be crucial in a context where there is a need to be wary of revealing oneself to others. The following statements from members of the theatre group attest to this:

> when you come into prison you've got to put a kind of front on or people will prey on you (*Scrooge – the cast* 2005)[329]

> in prison you're very protective anyway of the individual, this sort of brings you out a lot more (*Scrooge – the cast* 2005)[330]

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[327] Broadhead, J. (2006) *Unlocking the Prison Muse: the Inspirations & Effects of Prisoners' Writing in Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge Academic.

[328] Schechner, R. (2007) 2nd Ed, *Performance Studies: an introduction*, New York, London, Routledge

[329] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005) DVD1 Katja Stiller, Valley & Vale Community Arts

[330] Ibid

These comments, made by different individuals working on creative projects during the residency, suggest that the adoption of a mask or masks is necessary in prison, sometimes to present a particular image to staff and fellow prisoners or to cover up feelings of vulnerability, for example. Whilst the adoption of a mask or 'front' is of course not specific to prison but rather as Goffman (1959) has identified, is a strategy to which to varying degrees depending on situation and audience we all participate in, it is the case that in such an extreme environment the risks involved in dropping a particular mask of say 'toughness' and revealing vulnerability carries far greater risks than in more ordinary environments.

It is worth mentioning the work of *Geese Theatre Company* at this point as mask features both as a physical device and as a metaphor in the work they do within criminal justice.

Mask is the central metaphor in our work and we use both full face and half masks as theatrical tools. We talk about the mask or front that individuals use when dealing with the outside world. We work with the notion that we all wear masks, all the time, some habitually, some self-consciously. In performances and workshops, audiences are invited to ask characters to "lift their mask" and can question them about the thoughts and feelings that inform their apparent attitude or behaviour...They enable us to explore how and why destructive coping

strategies may have become fixed and to explore the possibility of changing them. (*Geese Theatre Company*) [331]

The work of *Geese Theatre Company* directly addresses behavioural issues that contribute to offending behaviour and employs mask to illustrate ways in which people adopt certain strategies of identity. In doing so, they obliquely point to the problem of restricted selves, of limiting one's reactions and behavior according to a particular identity. Their work does not however extend to critiquing how prison itself might make the creation of masks necessary.

What I observed from the rehearsal process, and from working with writers, who began to take the act of creative writing seriously, was a re-examining of personal identity. This is something I observed during the residency but also something that I became increasingly aware of as I viewed documented interviews with the participants. Whilst every single person I worked with reacted differently to the experience of rehearsing and performing in shows, the impact of viewing themselves, even if only for a short period as a performer or writer, was something that impacted on their sense of self. I am not suggesting that the expressions of shift in self-perception, which are documented here, are evidence necessarily of a profound and long-term change. Rather, that within the period of making the work, a repeated theme emerged from participants: that they were doing something, which was changing their sense of what they were capable of and changing others' perceptions of them. I now want to focus on interview material recorded with

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[331] *Geese Theatre Company* (no date) [online] available at: http://www.geese.co.uk/HTML/index.html accessed 2nd December 2012

participants shortly after productions took place. Before doing so I will describe how the interviews were organised.

The production of *Snow White & the Seven Addicts* which was performed at the prison almost a year before I arrived had been recorded and there was one VHS copy which all the participants in the show had watched together. Seeing a recording of themselves performing was something they had enjoyed and valued as part of the process. There was therefore an expectation and desire that subsequent performances would be recorded. After gaining permission for an outside professional to come in to record performance work, I contacted a colleague, Katja Stiller, whose background was in making community video work. She proposed that we record at least one performance and give each participant a copy of the DVD and invite participants to be interviewed after one of the shows. I shared this idea with the core group who, being much more security conscious and experienced in prison rules than me, suggested I get permission in writing from a senior prison governor that each participant would be allowed to keep a DVD recording of the performance; this was agreed by senior management and the prospect of receiving something tangible which recorded their participation was greeted with enthusiasm by participants.

The filming of the first production I was involved with was the performance of *Scrooge* (2005). Having filmed the performance Stiller suggested she use the remaining time before 'bang up' to film interviews with the cast and crew. The cast agreed to this and, due to time constraints Stiller asked the group if they would be happy to be filmed together (in pairs and one group of 3). On the whole the group appeared to be more comfortable with this,

than with being interviewed separately. Stiller asked if I would be happy to ask questions. Given this 'spur of the moment' suggestion I did not give considered thought to the questions although by the time we interviewed the second or third group I had a clear sense of what I would ask.

Despite the improvised nature of the interviews, or perhaps because of it, nearly all the participants gave quite lengthy and expanded responses to my questions and I realised that being interviewed and having the experience of having their opinion sought was in itself something valuable. It gave the opportunity for some individuals to express a viewpoint beyond the immediate remit of the question, for example, to present a view on drugs or the experience of being a prisoner. The interviews were edited and cut together by Stiller and each of the participants were given a copy of this as well as the filmed performance. Stiller also made the DVD recordings of the performance of *Oliver the Twister* (2006) and produced a documentary incorporating sections of the show in rehearsal and performance as well as interviews with the cast: *The Production of Oliver the Twister* (2006).

I now want to refer to comments made by individual participants during the post show interviews conducted for *Scrooge-the cast* (2005)[332] and also the documentary*: The production of Oliver the Twister* (2006).[333] I also refer to additional commentary on the work in the form of letters we received from audience members that were published in the prison magazine. I then reflect

[332] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005) DVD1, Katja Stiller, Valley & Vale Community Arts

[333] *The Production of Oliver the Twister* (2006) DVD 3, Katja Stiller, Valley & Vale Community Arts

on some of the issues that can arise in inviting 'outside' audiences in to prison to watch people who are prisoners perform.

In the interviews conducted for *Scrooge-the cast* (2005) one participant compares the act of performing for his fellow prisoners as being similar to aid work, "I feel like I've achieved summat, you know, you get people who go to Uganda and help people like that, well, this is like what we're doing" (*Scrooge-the cast* 2005).[334] Whilst this might not be an obvious comparison to make, the fact that this person understood his act of performing a play to fellow prisoners in terms of 'helping people' indicates his identification with a positive role. Another participant comments: "you're giving them (fellow prisoners) something to look forward to" (*Scrooge-the cast*, 2005).[335] It is possible that the attachment of this project to a particular charitable cause – raising money for the local children's hospital - as well as the staging of the production close to Christmas meant that a context of 'social good' may have influenced responses.

In the interviews recorded during the production of *Oliver the Twister* (2006), a project that was not attached to a charitable cause, there was not so much emphasis on 'doing good' but more of an emphasis on overcoming the fear of performance. Whilst there is an evident difference in theme between the two recordings, which is in part a result of a particular slant taken in the editing process, there are also commonalities between the two sets of recorded interviews.

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[334] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005), Op.Cit.DVD1

[335] Ibid

Individual comments made in both sets of recordings relate to personal realizations and experiences of feeling different or changed as a result of being involved in the projects. Participants refer to changes in how they are perceived and changes in their relationships with prison staff. It is clear from the comments made that audience responses to the work carried significant power: in being both a source of anxiety, as the performers came close to the first performance, and a means of experiencing a broader sense of identity through being perceived differently. The performances in front of audiences presented both a threat and opportunity for the performer. The threat existed in the possibility of 'losing face', through the forgetting of lines for example and opportunity existed in the possibility of surprising others through demonstrating a capability that might not usually be displayed and, in doing so, revealing aspects of 'self' not ordinarily given recognition.

The performances for fellow prisoners and staff also provided an opportunity in which to give and receive praise. For some members of the theatre group, the applause and praise provided respite from a low-status identity as is evidenced in the following statements:

> The boys come up to you: 'well done, it was a good show'
> (The Production of Oliver the Twister)[336]

> Surprised me because it was a well thought out play and it did shock me to be honest, it was real good.
> (*The Production of Oliver the Twister*, 2006) [337]

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[336] The Production of Oliver the Twister (2006) Op.Cit.DVD3

[337] Ibid

I wrote one or two poems since I been in prison and I found that difficult

but for him to write a whole play, it's a tap on the back to him

(*The Production of Oliver the Twister*, 2006) [338]

I only got into it to boost my confidence because being laughed at is

something I've never been able to take to lightly but now it's OK. I can

have a crack and a joke and people can laugh at me all they want. It felt

like I was being laughed at but during the play people were laughing with

me, you know, I was making them laugh rather than just them taking the

piss. (The Production of Oliver the Twister, 2006) [339]

Participants reported receiving praise not only from other prisoners for

their performances but also from officers who appreciated the work they had

put in and the talent that they had shown. Some officers also spoke to me

about the impact rehearsing and performing seemed to have on prisoners that

they were familiar with, noting for example that one participant who suffered

from depression 'came out of his shell' when working on the shows. The

involvement of members of staff in the productions was also an important factor

in creating a group identity that functioned differently to prison culture. The

comment below made by one of the officers who performed in the production of

Scrooge illustrates a shift from the usual power relations between officer staff

and prisoners.

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[338] *The Production of Oliver the Twister* (2006) Op.Cit.DVD3

[339] Ibid

you're relying on those guys yourself otherwise you're going to look a real fool, strange situation for an officer to be in really, to trust anyone to do anything once they're actually in a prisoner's uniform*.*

(Scrooge – the cast 2005)[340]

The prisoner participants also referred to how working with staff in this context created, even if only temporarily, an opportunity to experience a shift in the status of relationship implicit in the divide between officer and prisoner.

(the) way we are behind there with Mr. B, 'Mr. B get over there quick!' you could never say that on the wing you know we had to. It's nice to be able to escape from it for a bit. Speaking to M (says the officer's first name, then corrects himself) uh Mr. B yesterday it's like M remember to do this, remember to do that and he's like 'oh' - it's like a role reversal- me telling him what to do. (Scrooge – the cast 2005)[341]

With all the productions, it was arranged that at least one performance would be for family and friends, and the positive feedback received seemed important, adding to the sense that they were doing something positive with their time in prison:

My parents come down to see it. They thought it was good real good.

(*The Production of Oliver the Twister* 2006) [342]

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[340] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005) Op.Cit.DVD1

[341] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005) Op.Cit. DVD1

[342] *The Production of Oliver the Twister* (2006) Op.Cit. DVD3

And I'm under strict instructions from my fiancée: 'you're doing this again (acting) when you get outside'.[343]

(*The Production of Oliver the Twister* 2006)

In addition to family members I also invited colleagues from the outside, who worked in the arts, to come in and see the shows and meet the cast and crew. The praise from outside professionals was undoubtedly a boost to participants and particularly significant for two individuals who were beginning to view themselves respectively as a writer and an actor. For these participants the praise of those already working within the arts sector acted as a validation of the quality of work they were achieving.

Several of the arts professionals I invited in subsequently wrote responses to the productions that were then published in the prison magazine. Here are some of the comments taken from these letters: the first is from an actor and writer who came to see *Little Prison* (2005), the second is by the Artistic Director of a dance company who came to see *Measure for Measure (*2006)

I've been writing and performing comedy for some years and fully understand the painstaking effort it takes to put together two minutes of material, let alone a full show… I just want to congratulate you all on what I consider to be a fantastic achievement. (Munn 2005)[344]

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[343] Ibid

[344] Munn, C. (2005) 'To All Involved in Little Prison' in *The Knox* Issue 15

Human beings have great capacity and often all that is missing is the

opportunity to plumb the depths of what they can understand, enjoy and

convey. This was so evident in the performance of *Measure for*

Measure; all the performers were completely engaged and focused.

Their understanding of the text and their enjoyment in its performance

was a joy to watch. (Brown 2007)[345]

When I first proposed to the group that I would like to invite colleagues

involved in the arts to see the work one response from a core member was that

he did not want them to come in and observe something which was "quite good

given that we are only prisoners", in other words he wanted the work to be

viewed on its own merits. This point regarding perceptions of prisoners within

the public domain that casts them in a certain light is an important one. Many of

the men I worked with were aware of and keen to challenge assumptions

associated with the label *prisoner* and the desire to be seen as an individual

and to find ways in which to express this seemed important. Yet at times some

of the men expressed support for a negative view of prisoners.

The desire to be seen, as 'not like the rest of them', in itself indicates the

powerful stigmatised identity of *prisoner*. Throughout the residency I

encountered examples of individuals keen to distance themselves from what

they perceived as 'typical *prisoner* behaviour': "like most boys wouldn't get

involved in something like this they just spend time in their cell and rot their way

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[345] Brown, C (2007) 'Measure for Measure' in *The Knox* Issue 15

through their sentence" (*Scrooge-the cast* 2005).[346] This kind of statement can be understood as a wish not to succumb to becoming *prisoner*. For some men, particularly those serving long sentences, there was anxiety expressed of how imprisonment might come to affect their sense of self and several lifers stressed to me how their sentence would 'not break them' which seemed to suggest a fear that a loss of self could come about.

I encountered this need for distance from the identity of *prisoner* in the first few weeks of my residency where, because of my unfamiliarity with the regime and roles and responsibilities, I assumed that two of the lifer prisoners I met were members of staff. Lifer prisoners wore their own clothes and those in 'trusted' positions, for example at the chaplaincy or in the gym, greeted me and showed me around in a highly professional manner. Their delight when I asked them how long they had been working at the prison made me grateful for having made the mistake. Being taken for a civilian and not a prisoner (particularly as both of these men had already served 8 and 10 years respectively) seemed to act as a confirmation that they had retained a sense of who they were prior to receiving life sentences.

"You don't have to stick to the clichés, not everyone in prison is thick" (*The Production of Oliver the Twister*, 2006)[347]

This statement, made in relation to the production of *Oliver the Twister*, refers to the more complex storyline developed by the writer for this particular

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[346] *Scrooge – the cast* (2005) Op.Cit. DVD1

[347] *The Production of Oliver the Twister* (2006) Op.Cit. DVD 3

production compared to the previous one he had written. During workshops I had introduced the group to the work of playwrights such as Harold Pinter and Caryl Churchill. The exposure to different types of theatrical language as well as their desire to challenge themselves resulted in each project aiming to be more ambitious than the last. Various members of the group expressed the opinion that 'as prisoners' there were sometimes assumptions made about what they were capable of, for example, in the level of courses that were offered to them by the Education Department. Yet members of the group who were themselves critical of the ways in which the prison regime seemed to underestimate and limit their potential made statements which indicated beliefs about the limitations of prisoners:

> Most prisoners they want to be you know you feel like you've got to
> entertain them and so to entertain them it's got to be funny and when
> you're drawing on serious subjects like we did in this one and they're
> coming along expecting to see a pantomime.[348]
> (The Production of Oliver the Twister, 2006)

For some participants the extent of the praise they received resulted in a reconsideration of future life plans, with two of the lifer prisoners committed to trying to find ways that they would continue developing their writing and acting skills in the future, but for the majority, whilst involvement in the work did not necessarily mean a re-configuration of any life plan, the work nonetheless appeared to impact upon their sense of identity in the present:

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[348] Ibid

since I've been doing this whatever people say to me goes over my head. I'm not putting on a front anymore, I'm more confident because I'm just who I am, and on the wing, staff and inmates are seeing that. (Tickle, 2006)[349]

What created particular value for participants involved in theatre productions was the opportunity to work closely with a range of outside professionals, these included actors and stage managers. The involvement of outside professionals helped to generate a seriousness of purpose about the creative projects and helped those involved from within the prison community to feel that their work was being valued. For those arts professionals who were coming in to make theatre in prison for the first time it was a valuable opportunity to dismantle assumptions about prisoners and to learn to rehearse and perform in highly restrictive conditions. It was interesting to observe the transition experienced by these artists involved, from first day of rehearsals and feeling intimidated by the environment, to the second or third day of rehearsals where connections had been formed with their colleagues in prison:

The relationship with the guys in the show has just been as you know work colleagues, just the same as anywhere else. You all muck in together and get the job done.

(*The Production of Oliver the Twister* 2006)[350]

[349] Tickle, L. (2006) 'Rehearsing for the Future' G2 Section of *The Guardian* 28th November

Unlike an audience coming in from outside, watching a performance and then leaving, the actors and technicians coming in to work on projects had the benefit of a process of habituation so that the security rituals became familiar and they were able to build meaningful connections with their colleagues in prison. They had the opportunity (similar to my own) of working day in and day out with the group so that preconceptions and fears stimulated by the restrictive narrative identity of *prisoner* could be dissolved.

I now want to talk about some of the issues that can arise with bringing in outside audiences into see prisoners perform. Context is of course very likely to affect the way in which we receive work and the experience for audience members of simply coming in to the prison was a significant one. Ordinarily going to the theatre we witness people who we may know very little about representing some aspect of life to us. Whilst similarly we may know very little if anything about the prison actor performing a role the knowledge of the person as a prisoner remains a presence. The following comment made by an Arts Council Officer who came to see *Oliver the Twister* (2006) is interesting in that it highlights both the power of performance to bring about a transformation in perspective but also how the context of prison and the knowledge that the performer you are watching is a prisoner remains present in how the work is viewed:

> The honesty of the piece and the ensemble teamwork of the actors
> moved us both greatly. These actors, who for the length of the piece

[350] Ibid

were no longer prisoners in our eyes, were clearly enjoying their creation as much as we were. (Wynne 2006)[351]

Of course our view of others is never 'innocent,' we see and interpret from our particular 'situated perspective' but, in the case of audience coming in to prison to watch prisoners perform, there is likely to be a pre-scripted mediated impression of *prisoner*. In a production by the Italian theatre group, *Compagnia Della Fortezza,* the director Armando Punzo seems to directly acknowledge this when, at the beginning of one production, the actors (who are also prisoners) sit still in a row surveying the audience. After a few minutes one of the actors speaks to the audience, "We're looking at you, looking at us, wondering what it is we have done".[352] This statement at the beginning of the performance, the point at which the audience has yet to become immersed in story and character, acknowledges the identity of *prisoner* and the thoughts and questions that such categorisation provokes.

It seemed that for outside audiences coming in to watch a play in prison performed by prisoners that a process of negotiating identity was taking place, particularly when after the performance there was opportunity for the cast and audience to meet each other. For both communities it seemed the experience was entirely positive: for the performers there was the chance to share the 'high' of performance communally and for audience members, who were unfamiliar with prisons and people incarcerated within them, there was the

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[351] Wynne, S. (2006) 'Please Sir May We Have Some More' in *The Knox*, issue 9

[352] I Pescecani 24th March 2005 *Compagnia Della Fortezza* available at: http://www.compagniadellafortezza.org/schede_spettacoli/pescecani.htm accessed 30th May 2013

chance to see beyond the label. Yet it was also difficult to avoid creating an experience whereby the theatrical entertainment was not confined to the theatre production itself. In other words the whole process of entering the prison for an audience unfamiliar and ordinarily disconnected from this world was that it could be experienced as part of the evening's 'entertainment'. The security checks, razor wire, sniffer dogs, the process of being led through a labyrinth of locked gates, all serve to underline the dangerousness of those who are kept in such conditions. By the time the audience had been processed from the gatehouse to the chapel, where the performance was taking place, they had undergone an experience that emphasised the difference, not only between their world and the world of the performers, but implicitly a difference between themselves and those who they were coming to see.

A means by which this context of difference could be limited was in providing opportunities for the cast and audience to meet and interact post-performance. By meeting one another after the show, performers and audience members had a 'common ground' from which to connect with one another. The creative work functioned as a means through which individuals, who had not met before, could connect and have a discussion about the work person to person. This is not to say that awareness of the prison context was removed or that the label of *prisoner* completely dissolved but the shared exp erience of the theatrical performance provided another relationship context: that of performer and audience member. This experience of being spoken to as an actor, being responded to as an actor, as opposed to 'just another prisoner', has implications for how the person, who has performed this role sees themselves:

"It's so nice to be called an actor instead of a prisoner" (*Synergy Theatre Project*).[353]

During the run of *Measure for Measure,* because of the length of the performance, or rather because of the rigidity of the regime timetable, it was not possible for the actors to spend any time with the 'outside audience'. This made me realise the importance of ensuring such opportunities in future productions, not only to provide opportunity for the actors to experience being received as something other than *prisoner* but also so that the 'high' of performance was not immediately followed by the 'low' of 'bang up'.

I want to discuss briefly the final project I was involved in as a Writer in Residence at this particular prison that comprised of a series of workshops on Shakespeare culminating in a production of *Measure for Measure*. Prior to my contract coming to an end with the Writers in Prison Network, the education department of the prison has received a grant from the European Social Fund of which part was to be used for creating arts activities in the prison. The Head of Learning and Skills asked if I would stay on to facilitate a project on Shakespeare. This was the only time whilst working as a Writer in Residence that a senior member of the staff in the prison asked me to produce something where the creative parameters were largely set. I had reservations about taking the project on, partly due to lack of experience on working with classic texts but also because it would be the first time that I was going to the theatre group with an idea from 'on high'. The response to this suggestion, however, from the core members of the theatre group was enthusiastic and I was persuaded to go ahead. Work on this project began with a two-week exploration into particular

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[353] *Synergy Theatre Project* (no date) [online] available at:
http://www.synergytheatreproject.co.uk/index.php?maincat=3 accessed 15th December 2012

sections from several texts including *Measure for Measure*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*. At the end of the two-weeks we decided that Measure for Measure would be our chosen text to perform. What was revealed to me working on the Shakespeare project is that the 'cultural status' of Shakespeare had a value that was particularly important in a prison context. The reputation of Shakespeare as 'difficult' and the idea of the plays as being texts which you had to 'be clever' in order to understand meant that when participants found themselves understanding very well the motivations and emotions expressed by characters such as Mark Antony and Macbeth they experienced a recognition of their capacities beyond *prisoner*. In possessing fluency in a language or rather a body of work associated with 'high art', there was a sense of having gone beyond the narratives of limitation commonplace in prison.

This discovery on my part is something that has long been appreciated by Bruce Wall, founder of the *London Shakespeare Workout Prison Project*, which aims to bring Shakespeare to prisons based on the idea that access and interaction with dramatic poetry cultivates self-belief, broadens self-expression and develops self-esteem. However in recent years the company has been increasingly working abroad and Wall states that the problem in the UK is that:

> the idea that prisoners should have access to art for its poetry, its beauty, its complexity, for example, is not considered an acceptable argument as far as Government and the media are concerned. (Wall 2012)[354]

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[354] Wall, B. (londonswo@hotmail.com) 2012 *Re: Follow-Up* Thursday 27th September to bkeehan@glam.ac.uk

I now want to introduce several individual Case Studies to illustrate further the ways in which writing and performing provided a means for experiencing a broader sense of identity.

Case Studies

The purpose of the following case studies is to provide a more specific picture of the impact that adopting creative roles had on particular individuals. I have selected three individuals (Jim, Ed, Al – names have been changed in order to protect anonymity) on the basis that they played a significant part in the core group as actors and writers. One of the participants, Jim, as a result of his involvement in creative activities began to identify himself as a writer. For Ed and Al the experience of being involved in writing and performing seemed to bring 'respite' from the role of *prisoner* and enabled them to display broader aspects of their identity through creative work. All three were lifer prisoners with tariffs ranging from 3 to 18 years.

JIM

Jim was in his early forties when he first became interested in theatre after watching a pantomime performed at his previous prison. He then got involved in rehearsals for the next production at that prison but was transferred to HMP K before the production happened. On arriving at Prison K he was 'determined to try and get a play put on' and over the course of eighteen months he elicited the support of an officer to help him do this. In 2003 Jim achieved his goal of

getting 'Snow White & the Seven Addicts' produced. The production has positive responses from fellow prisoners and staff and this was cited as a reason why the prison wished to appoint a Writer in Residence. Jim was therefore one of the first people I met at the start of my residency.

In my initial conversations with Jim he told me that before writing 'Snow White & the Seven Addicts' that he had never written any scripts or stories before. He strongly emphasised that he did not take it (writing and acting) seriously, that writing the script and performing in the play was 'just for a laugh'. He agreed to support the prison magazine as wing representative for the lifer wing but stated that he would not be able to give too much of his time as he was busy with other responsibilities; he worked as a Gym Orderly and was also a Listener. Although clearly intelligent and articulate, Jim had no formal educational qualifications. He had left school early and become involved with crime from an early age and had been in and out of young offenders institutions and then prison for most of his adult life. In our initial meetings I asked if he had ever considered studying and undertaking an Open University course. He was adamant that this was 'not for him.'

By the end of the residency (January 2007) Jim regarded himself as a writer. He had begun an Open University degree in the Arts & Humanities and had opted to take creative writing as an option in his degree scheme. He had given up his job as a Gym Orderly (a sought after job within prison) and was now employed as the Editor of the prison magazine. He had written 4 plays and several short stories and had contributed numerous articles to the prison magazine. In 2007 he was transferred to a lower category prison where he has continued his studies and his writing.

The shift Jim underwent from viewing writing as something he did 'just for a laugh' and not something he took 'seriously' to taking on the role of Editor of the prison magazine and embarking on studying literature and creative writing at degree level was as a result of opportunities being made available to him. These opportunities allowed him to actively engage in writing over a significant duration, which then became part of how he saw himself and described himself:

> I can see that I can do other things, things I've never thought about before and I would, you know, like to do it if I was outside. I would definitely, definitely, definitely trying to be doing something like this, yeah, without a doubt. (The Production of Oliver the Twister 2006)[355]

ED

Ed was in his early 20s and although he had been given a life sentence he was on a short tariff which meant that unlike most of the Lifer prisoners I worked with he was focused on his plans for release. Therefore, concern about the work he would do on leaving prison was a regular topic of conversation. Ed had left school early and had very little in the way of formal qualifications. He was quick witted and had a low boredom threshold. His plan for his release seemed clear, he was going to try and get an apprenticeship as a plumber but he also expressed anxiety that this would not be enough to occupy him and he was

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[355] The Production of Oliver the Twister (2006) Op.Cit.

concerned about getting bored. He shared that previous to his conviction he had worked as a roofer and that the adrenalin this had given him was similar to the 'buzz' he experienced from performing. Initially he told me his reason for getting involved in productions was to 'have a laugh' but he also expresses in an interview how performing has given him a chance to express something of his identity beyond being 'just a number':

> A lot of people think, you know: 'I didn't know you had it in you'. Before we're just numbers, aren't we, and when with this now, we're actually people who've done something worthwhile in here.
> (Scrooge – the cast 2005)[356]

AL

Al was a Lifer with a tariff of 11 years. He was in his early 20s when I met him and he had recently moved to HMP K from a young offender's institute. He was encouraged to get involved with the theatre group by one of the Lifer officers who explained to me that Al was something of a loner. Al had recently converted to Islam and his connection to his faith community was clearly very important to him. He told me that whilst he was keen to get involved in the theatre group's next production he needed to ask the permission of the Imam first before committing himself. The Imam, who was very supportive of the theatre group, encouraged Al to join and from that point he became a very

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[356] Scrooge – the cast (2005) Op.Cit

committed member. In the next production we did, *Measure for Measure,* I cast Al in a significant role, the part of Angelo, and he proved to be extremely dedicated in his preparation and worked very hard during rehearsals. He was highly praised for his acting skills by other members of the cast and his confidence quickly grew.

Following the actual performances he received further praise for his acting ability from audience members including officer staff from the Lifer wing and he asked me whether I thought he had the potential to become an actor upon his release. I had no hesitation in encouraging him on the basis of his talent and work ethic but was quick to emphasise the 'real world' challenges of being an actor. He was quick to grasp the difficulties that acting as a career might pose but was gladdened to hear of my 'faith in his ability'. Like many of the men I met, Al was keen to try to find ways in which he could put his life to some use whilst serving his sentence and perhaps like many people in their early 20s, still trying to discover who he might become.

> Jail is a lonely place, and you always feel like you're being forgotten. But this (*Measure for Measure*) it's exciting, you're learning, and doing something you can be proud of. (Tickle, 2006)[357]

The portraits of three of the individuals I worked with reflects that theatre acting and creative writing in prison may bring about changes in how someone perceives themselves in 'doing something you can be proud of', but that this is as much about intervening in the prison regime which as yet does not provide

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[357] Tickle, L. (2006) Op.Cit.

enough opportunities for people to see that they are more than 'just numbers'. For any writer it can be a tremendous boost to see your work performed or in print for the first time, it can affirm the sense that you are a writer. Similarly for an actor, the process of rehearsals but especially the act of performing in front of an audience as a character can provide an affirmation in being an actor. The audience's reception to the work also has a power in confirming the role of 'actor' or 'writer' on the person who has performed or written. With the opportunity to perform new roles there is the possibility to experience a broader sense of narrative identity.

I will now describe my experience as a family visitor to prison and contrast the experience of entering prison in a personal capacity to that of entering prison in a professional role. The way in which I experience my sense of identity in crossing the prison threshold as a family visitor has been a factor in my conception of the idea of restrictive narrative identity and therefore seems important to include. I began my visits as a family member two years before beginning my residency. From 2002 until the end of my residency in 2007 I had visited my relative in 5 separate prisons as he 'progressed' through the system. Whilst each establishment has its own particular atmosphere and each visit is distinct, the rituals of being processed through the gate are much the same. I now want to describe the ritual of the prison visit and how my experience of it has contributed to the formulation of key ideas expressed in this thesis, namely the idea of restrictive narrative identity.

From my door to the prison gate takes 4 hours, I do not drive and most prisons I have visited are set in semi-rural locations so the timing of public

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transport with visiting hours is always something of a challenge. I mention this because the effort involved to see my relative for 1 hour 45 minutes is quite draining and it is hard not to feel 'punished' by the time you arrive at the gate. I experience a degree of stigma attached to being a family visitor, which manifests in a number of ways. Some prisons carry particularly negative connotations because of the types of crimes that some members of its population have committed. At the time of the residency my relative was held in such a place, and getting on the bus, which takes me close to the gate I am careful to ask for a return fare to the nearby hospital rather than mention the name of the prison. Standing outside the gate can also induce feelings of self consciousness especially when the prison is on a thoroughfare, the usual process involves knocking on the gate, handing your Visiting Order to the Prison officer at the gate who then shuts it whilst your paperwork is checked and you remain outside until the gate is opened again and you are called in to the holding area. However this particular prison is tucked out of immediate sight of the main road and once you turn into the driveway towards the visitor's gate the people you see are generally other visitors as well as prison staff. Once I reach the visitors holding area I present my visiting order and my passport to the officer on duty. The reception area of this prison is quite small but my visits tend to be mid-week and so I don't experience the jam-packed experience that tends to be part of the weekend visit. Having submitted the paperwork and my ID to the officer I am given a number and told to lock any personal items away in the small lockers provided for visitor's personal belongings. All that is permitted to be brought into the visit's area is loose change under £5 so as to buy tea and biscuits from the kiosk in the visits room. I sit and wait, sometimes

patiently, sometimes not. My visiting order and the prison service website state that the visit will start at 2 pm but invariably it is around quarter past two before I see my relative and fifteen minutes can seem a long time set against the short slot of the of visit time 2-4 pm.

When it is time for the visitors to be processed from the reception to the visits area a prisoner officer appears on the other side of a glass door that divides the visitors reception from a stairway that leads to the search area. The glass door-divide between us, (the family visitors) and the officer, slides open and he – and it has always been a male officer I have witnessed performing this particular function - calls out a visitor's number. Whoever is the first number to be called out joins the officer and the glass door slides shut as the officer leads the visitor to the search area and so the process is repeated again and again as each visitor is moved through the prison closer to the visits area. Children are allowed to accompany parents.

Whatever number I have been allotted that day is called out and I join the officer behind the glass door, mentally checking for the umpteenth time that all I have in my pockets is loose change. The officer who takes me up may be somber or smiling but either way it is not an environment that encourages small talk. On arriving upstairs I sit and wait in a sparse square room pasted with posters warning of the consequences of smuggling in contraband, I am then called through to the search area. I am instructed to take off my shoes put them, my locker key and tea money in a tray. I step on to a platform and stand with my legs and arms wide so that the female officer can give me a pat-down search. She also uses a hand held body search metal detector. After this part of the search is complete I am told to open my mouth and lift up my tongue so

she can check if anything is hidden there. Then I am told to lift one foot at a time so they scan the sole of my lifted foot and then the other. Having passed this stage I am reunited with my personal belongings before being told to stand on a particular spot mark on the floor so that the sniffer dog and handler can approach me and check again for drugs or mobile phones. The sniffer dogs always appear very friendly and it is hard to resist patting them but having been told off for this previously I now know better. This final search takes a matter of seconds and once I am given the all clear I walk towards the door to the visits hall where an officer lets me in then shuts the door behind me until the next visitor makes it past the drugs dog. As you enter the hall you are asked by another officer who it is you have come to see, you give the name and the officer gives you the table number at which your relative is sat. This visits hall at this particular prison is quite small and my relative is easy to spot, and so at last our visit begins.

I now want to describe my experience of entering prison as an employee: I arrive at the main reception usually by 9.00 a.m. and place my mobile phone in a locker at reception. I then present my keys tally to the staff at reception and the first door slides open to let me into the 'sterile area' - the sterile area refers to the space between the outside wall and the perimeter fence - where no prisoners are allowed. The officer operating the doors checks that she recognises me before activating the door to sliding open on the other side. Here I hand over my tally in exchange for my keys. I clip the keys to the chain attached to my key belt before heading down the corridor towards the perimeter gate: the journey from reception to inside the prison takes about five minutes.

There are many differences between my experience of entering the prison in a personal capacity and in my professional role. One difference I experience is the degree of control I have over the space and time in which I move. In entering the prison as a family visitor my movement through physical space, and the actions I am required to perform are tightly controlled by others: 'stand still on this spot, lift your tongue'. The reason for these security rituals is not my concern here but rather the impact that my performing to the requirements of others has upon my sense of self. As a family visitor I am dependent on others for movement, without keys, I am directed where to go by officers and this experience as well as the security tests that are required creates a sense of subordinated status. As a Writer in Residence entering the prison my identity as someone who is there because of her writing means that I carry an identity into the prison that is of my choosing and which is acknowledged by others; whereas my sense of identity in entering as a prisoner's family member feels generic and impersonal. Whilst my exposure to this security ritual is not of course the same as that of being a prisoner it does provide some insight into what it is like to have one's identity restricted by a performed ritual of power. And, what often comes into my mind as I journey through the constipated process of the prison visit, is an opposite experience of prison: the playfulness of the rehearsal room, the speaking of poetic text, the singing and dancing in our performances, the connectedness of the ensemble of actors taking a bow and smiling and laughing as the audience applauds them.

Chapter Six

Limitations on the Arts in Prison

This final chapter of my thesis draws together some of the key arguments made in previous chapters. I discuss how the *Arts Alliance*, the representative body of the arts in criminal justice sector, is responding to recent policy on prisons, in order to illustrate the current direction of the arts in criminal justice. In concluding I address some of the key points that have emerged out of this research and suggest further areas for investigation.

In this thesis I have demonstrated that the arts in prison are being significantly impacted upon by an instrumentalist agenda, which is limiting the scope of artistic practice in prisons. The extent to which arts practice in prison has become meshed with a rehabilitative agenda suggests a restrictive and limited employment of the arts in prison. In order to ensure an avoidance of 'artistic division', because it is both symptomatic and supportive of social division, it is important that prison is not a place in which only a 'particular kind' of art happens. In making this point I am not talking about art form, it is clear from the many diverse companies creating work in prison such as, *Dance United*, *Good Vibrations, Geese Theatre Company* and the *Writers in Prison Network* that a range of arts forms are offered in prison, however, my research has shown that the pressure to prove the arts 'work' in terms of rehabilitation has impacted on arts companies working in prison.

The examples of *Safe Ground* and *Escape Artists* illustrate this point. Both companies began their work in prisons creating theatre performances inspired by 'classic works of literature' and producing plays by Orton, Beckett

and Pinter. This early work could have been used in any number of contexts, and was about engaging with texts of a rich and varied subject matter. The work they subsequently went on to develop: drama based programmes addressing issues such as family relationships and employment, exemplify an arts practice that has responded to an instrumentalist discourse that situates the arts in prison as a tool for rehabilitation.

This thesis examines the wider cultural context that has supported this role for the arts in prison. In examining the instrumentalist debate over the arts beyond the prison context, I have presented critiques by commentators such as Belfiore, Selwood and Holden who have challenged the 'evidence' that the arts can transform lives and communities. It is clear from their work that similar challenges could be brought to bear on current research advocacy that claims arts practice in prisons can help to bring about rehabilitation. The persuasive arguments such commentators have made, against the arts being seen in such instrumentalist terms in wider society, has highlighted the lack of a dissenting discourse around the instrumentalist view of the arts in criminal justice. A similar call for a broader approach to the importance of valuing the arts beyond what they might be able to contribute towards the rehabilitation of offenders is needed.

In engaging with the 'What Works?' debate I have shown the difficulties involved in proving conclusively that even specially designed Offender Behaviour programmes are consistently capable of bringing about rehabilitation. I have also presented evidence that shows such courses contribute to a 'restrictive narrative identity' of *prisoner*. Through highlighting the tensions that exist for prisoners in needing to prove they have 'rehabilitated'

in order to progress through the prison system, and in examining the pressures on prisons to 'perform well', I have drawn attention to prison as a context riven with performances of reform. Employing the theories of Foucault and Goffman I have shown how institutions and the discourses which enable their function are still limiting, labeling and acting upon identity, and that the arts in prison in seeking to be part of a rehabilitative agenda are implicated in such practices.

Within research advocacy that has sought to prove that the arts help to bring about rehabilitation, there has been little or no critique of the context in which efforts to rehabilitate prisoners are made. The restrictive narrative identity of prisoner that is embedded in prison culture and wider society also needs to be challenged. It needs to be acknowledged that arts based programmes, which claim to develop self-esteem, for example, are operating in a context that, for the most part, contradicts their objectives.

This last point relates to an important issue: that of competing discourses, which surround the function of prison in society. Although not part of a declared remit, prison is still perceived as needing to punish the offender as well as the declared objective of helping prisoners to rehabilitate. The project of rehabilitation in prisons is not somehow neutral and it is not something which "has been designed by prisoners for prisoners," it is part of a cultural hegemony that situates the prisoner in need of being educated into certain cultural values that support dominant interests in society. Linked to this and of significance are the narratives about prisoners that inform prison culture. As I have shown, staff training in the form of Prisoner Awareness Training presents the prisoner as 'other' and similarly narratives perpetuated through

tabloid media present the prisoner at best as a 'pampered lag' and at worst as an 'evil monster.'

Through the example of *The Comedy School's* experience at Whitemoor prison and the subsequent political reaction, I have shown the power of the media in impacting upon arts practice in prisons. The defence that has been created by the arts in criminal justice sector against such attacks, and evident in this particular case, has been recourse to the narrative of rehabilitation. There is almost a naivety in the idea that if only the sector can produce enough satisfactory evidence of its role in rehabilitation that it will be able to fend off such criticisms. This is unlikely and the example of *The Comedy School* illustrates this.

Another problematic aspect to the arts in criminal justice, seeking to embed itself as part of the system of rehabilitation, is that the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model, which underpins rehabilitation programmes in prison, is based on the assumption that the prisoner is a risk. The objective of the rehabilitative agenda in prison therefore is to identify and then seek to limit those risks. Arts projects in prison, which aim to use the arts to rehabilitate, do so in conjunction with a rehabilitative model that has formed a narrative of the prisoner as a series of problems that need to be addressed. In using the arts to work with the problems and deficits of the *prisoner,* the arts become complicit in supporting a 'restrictive narrative identity'.

In accepting the reason for their presence as 'to rehabilitate' it is crucial that arts organisations and practitioners unpack such terminology and question what this means to participants in such projects. How might a theatre project usefully interrogate what such a concept actually means to participants in

prison? There needs to be a critically alert opposition to the notion that only a certain kind of arts practice is appropriate for making creative work in prison, or for that matter any other context. Currently transformation through the arts in prison is focused on the need for transformation of the self and not the social circumstances that have been a factor in shaping the sense of self, as 'criminal'.

My research into prison culture and the role of the prison officer has demonstrated the difficulties of trying to create artistic projects in prison, particularly those that do not fit with the standard regime and follow an Offending Behaviour Programme model of delivery. It has identified that there is no provision in the training of key staff such as prison officers to comprehend the value of the arts in prison. This adds to the pressure for arts practitioners to present their work as being there for the purpose of rehabilitation.

The discourse of the arts and rehabilitation connects with other powerful discursive formations such as the discourse of performance management. The language of objectives, targets and cost effectiveness can be applied to an arts programme in prison with clearly defined outcomes as much as it can to an Offending Behaviour Programme. With the Coalition Governments' emphasis on prisons becoming places of 'hard work and industry' and with the implementation of payment by results, the arts in criminal justice sector is similarly embracing the language of business: aiming to prove they are a 'cost effective' solution to the problem of re-offending.

In a number of measures designed to reduce public spending on prisons the Government has made cuts to the Ministry of Justices' budget and has contracted out both the management of prisons and the delivery of services

including rehabilitation programmes. There has also been a shift in terminology that reflects the move away from a public service that is the responsibility of Government to an industry that operates according to the principles of the market place. Rather than the prison service we now have the prison industries and the "Ministry of Justice's ambition is to transform prisons into industrious places of productive work." (Ministry of Justice 2012)[358]

The language of business is also apparent in the payment by results scheme, which ensures that providers of rehabilitation programmes are incentivised to produce results and meet their targets. The introduction of payment by results is a means to try and ensure that interventions to rehabilitate prisoners (and those recently released from prison) 'work' by tying together the performance of the intervention to payment. The intervention must prove to be effective before those providing it will receive full payment. This marks a new development in a market-driven approach towards the rehabilitation of offenders, which the arts in criminal justice sector are being invited to respond to. Not only will they need to prove they are effective in reducing re-offending but also that they are able to achieve this within a certain time limit in order to be economically viable. I now want to consider the ways in which the representative body of the arts in criminal justice, the *Arts Alliance,* is responding to these recent Government initiatives.

The *Arts Alliance* seems to have adopted the position that it is not aiming to shape or challenge policy but rather aiming to perform well in response to the Government's agenda and to function as primarily a one-way

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[358] Ministry of Justice (2012) 'Working Prisons' [online] available at: http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/noms/working-prisons accessed 3rd June 2013

channel of communication from the Ministry of Justice to the arts in criminal justice sector. The *Arts Alliance* is pro-active in making the case for the arts in prison on the grounds of their use as a rehabilitative tool but does not sufficiently address other possible reasons for the arts in prisons, the idea that they should be there as a basic human right, for example. This approach is one that ultimately means a significant limitation on the arts in prison. In exploring this point further I want to refer to a panel discussion organised by the *Arts Alliance* in 2010, which posed the question: are the arts essential to rehabilitation?

The panel included the Minister for Justice, at that time, Crispin Blunt, criminologist Professor Alison Liebling, Lorraine Maher, a community arts practitioner, Owen Sharp, Deputy CEO of Victim Support, Phil Wheatley, former Director General of NOMS and David Yelland, former editor of *The Sun* newspaper. The audience attending was largely made up of criminal justice practitioners.

Whilst the question produced a variety of responses ranging from the affirmative to demands for evidence, the conclusion of the discussion is best summed up by this statement from Owen Sharp: "if that is true (that the arts are essential to rehabilitation), you've got to prove it". Further emphasis given to this point of proof was also made by the then Justice Secretary Crispin Blunt:

> If you have an effective role to play in the rehabilitation of offenders my job is to try and engineer the system that allows you to play that role. In

the end we want to get this right, get the work done on the basis of the evidence. (Arts Alliance Conference 2010)[359]

This exemplifies power relationships at the heart of the arts in criminal justice: a limitation is imposed upon the arts in prison. Only if they have an effective role to play can they operate within the criminal justice system and their performance in this regard will be based upon the evidence produced. Implicit in this is a rejection of the idea of art as a human right, yet rather than address this the sector seems largely willing to accept the limitations imposed. In accepting this as the case, arts organisations working in prisons and their lead body the *Arts Alliance,* are spending the limited resources they have on responding to what the Government wants, which may not be the same as what the people they are working with in prison and probation settings want.

What this shows, and which I have demonstrated in this thesis, is that the arts in criminal justice sector is shaping its work in response to a particular authorative discourse. In doing so it is contributing to and consolidating a limited narrative of purpose for the arts in prison. It is in effect helping to create a 'restrictive narrative' of purpose for the arts in prison. A fundamental shift is required from performing to a particular political agenda, to one of advocating a plurality of perspectives on the practice of art in prisons.

In focusing almost exclusively on proving the contribution the arts can make to rehabilitation other possible value for the arts in prison are being ignored. Artists need to create a more questioning and interrogative practise of

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[359] Arts Alliance (2010) 'Are the Arts Essential to Rehabilitation? [online] available at: accessed 3rd June 2013 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7AehtrhfTc

art in prison, for example, to argue the need for the arts in prison on the grounds that they contribute to a more humane prison system. In relation to this point I want to return to the *Arts Alliance* panel discussion where this issue about the contribution the arts can make to a more humane prison system was raised. Phil Wheatley, former Director General of the Prison Service, described arts activity in prisons as something that: "should be there anyway… the arts is a way of fulfilling yourself even if it does not reform you, it's right and proper and part of decent imprisonment. " (Arts Alliance Conference 2010) [360]

This idea of including the arts in prison as part of the decency agenda connects to the notion of art as a human right and is sometimes described as the 'human rights model'. This position is explained in a report produced by *Escape Artists*:

> The human rights model looks at the arts rather differently. It says we don't mind what the benefits are. They may be difficult to prove anyway. It is a right for everyone to take part in the arts and in creativity. And in a way the rehabilitation of offenders depends not just on them changing as individuals but also on us changing, on social and cultural attitudes to offenders changing. They can reform themselves and have all the best skills and all the correct attitudes that we might want them to have, but if society does not make its educational, employment, community, family and other opportunities available to them, because it caricatures them as

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[360] Ibid

monsters, as some sections of our media would do, then they can't

rehabilitate. (*Escape Artists* 2006)[361]

This view, that in order to increase the likelihood of rehabilitation wider society

needs to reform its attitudes towards offenders, is a difficult one for an arts

body such as the *Arts Alliance* to adopt in the context of a largely hostile media,

but it is nonetheless a crucial point which needs to be made.

The arts in criminal justice sector can either continue attempting to prove

it can help towards the rehabilitation of offenders in a context in which they are

subjugated and often demonised or, it can develop and strengthen other

arguments for the importance of the arts in prison. This development might take

a number of forms, on the level of debate, through bodies such as the *Arts*

Alliance, but also through a focus on the humanising aspect of art practice in

prisons, the contribution that an arts culture may bring to prison culture, for

instance; through seeking out a range of theoretical models, which might offer

different perspectives on what the arts can contribute to people's lives, but not

accepting that any such model then becomes a means to justify the arts.

In engaging with the work of criminologists such as Ward and Maruna I

have shown that there are various points of connection to be made between

the processes and actions involved in putting on a play which have implications

for narrative identity. Their argument that there needs to be a greater range of

'narrative opportunities' for those labeled as *prisoner*, and greater support in

making a transition from the identity of criminal to that of non-criminal, connects

with some of the processes involved in theatre production. Through the

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[361] Escape Artists (2006) *Barred Voices*, Op.Cit.

examples I have used from my own creative practice, and from the comments made by those involved, it is possible to see that creating artistic opportunities in prison enables a broadening of narrative identity. Through the creation and performing of characters and stories, and through the inhabiting of a role such as actor or writer, a sense of self beyond *prisoner* is experienced and embodied. In the showing of the work both within the prison community, but also to communities from outside prison, the experience of being viewed in the creative role creates respite from being viewed as *prisoner*. This is an interesting area for further research but it is not offered here as a justification for the arts in prison.

I want to conclude by outlining some idea for further research. Obviously my research is limited in so far as it is working primarily with material created during my residency and the responses of those involved. Nonetheless it does illustrate how a broader sense of narrative identity can be experienced through a creative role. For future research it would be important to draw upon the work of a wider range of arts companies working in prisons, particularly further afield where long-term creative practice exists. The work of *Compagnia Del Fortezza* in Italy, for example, with its emphasis on creating high quality theatre performance might well prove a useful resource for further research into this area. In the UK it would be valuable to try to establish a similar model to see what the impact of having a full-time professional theatre company operating within a prison might have. Other research possibilities, to establish how involvement in creative roles might bring changes to narrative identity, could involve the analysis of testimony from former prisoners who have subsequently established themselves as artists. This might enable greater understanding of

how involvement in the arts in prison may have brought about a reconfiguring of narrative identity and desistance from crime. A further question, which springs from this research, is how might arts culture impact upon prison culture? In involving art in staff training, for example, how might this impact upon a culture in which "nothing can go wrong." (Justice Committee 2008-9)[362]

In conclusion I have demonstrated the need for arts practitioners working within the criminal justice sector, to create a more varied discourse around the function of the arts in prison. There is a need for a politicised discourse around the arts in prison: one that interrogates and debates the relationship between rehabilitation and the arts in criminal justice. Without such a questioning and review of arts practice in prison, its aims and its value(s), arts practice in prison risks contributing to the restrictive narrative identity of prisoner and merely enacting performances of reform.

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[362] Justice Committee, 'Role of the Prison Officer' HC (2008-9) 12, (157-8) [online] available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmjust/361/36106.htm

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