SPECIAL ISSUE ON ARTS AND JUSTICE

Edited by Sarah Armstrong and Kirsten Sams
Theatre • Music • Writing
Sculpture • Film • Architecture

ALSO
Richard Sparks and Kirstin Anderson on Inspiring Change
Angela Bartie and Alistair Fraser on the Easterhouse Project
Kath Murray on Stop and Search in Scotland
### Theme: Arts and Justice

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- Should Prison Architecture Be Brutal, Bland or Beautiful? by Yvonne Jewkes And Dominique Moran
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- Responsibility and the ‘Real’: Sculpture and Environmental Art (SEA) Student Placements in Criminal Justice Settings by Paul Cosgrove
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### Interview

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WE ARE EXCITED to be a part of this issue and grateful both to SJM for inviting us, and to Creative Scotland for supporting this work through its arts and justice strategy. This special theme gives us the opportunity of sharing some examples of practice and to raise some important questions about arts and justice.

We have a number of aims as guest editors. First, we want to introduce readers to arts engagement in criminal justice and other marginalised community settings. Second, in doing this, we hope to suggest how creativity and the arts are playing a role in connecting people to each other and their communities, and in this way helping make possible processes of healing and reparation. Third, we want to remain alert to the risks and challenges of using the arts as a means of producing not only criminal justice but also social justice.

Perhaps the place to start is by noting that, in line with the focus of this journal, we speak from our location in Scotland. This is a significant point given the distinctive development and priority here of the arts, as well as the particular challenges Scotland faces in its pursuit of a just society. We are proud to note the importance attached to the arts by the Scottish Prison Service and the central role accorded to creativity in Scottish society generally. As one example of this, Angela Bartie and Alistair Fraser’s history of The Easterhouse Project (1968-1970) shows the long trajectory in Scotland of community-led efforts to connect arts and justice. Ruth Wishart has described Scotland’s current aspiration to ‘embed creativity in every aspect of our experience’ (Creative Scotland, 2013, p. 5): and ‘the ability to solve problems by approaching things slightly differently, the readiness to discover new things for yourself, an openness to new ideas – these are all aspects of creativity which stand people in excellent stead in their lives as a whole’ (MSPs Ewing, Hyslop and Allan in Creative Scotland, 2013, p. 7).

The point of the arts and of nurturing creativity is, and contrary to tabloid headlines, not about giving prisoners or anyone else a fun way to pass the time. Rather, art creates a...
space for us to look at and learn about ourselves and our place in the world. As Lesley Mc Ara writes so movingly, this may involve confronting profound, difficult and unsettling emotions in a way that would be impossible in a social work office or a research interview. Kate Hendry’s essay talks about the power of creative writing in developing a sense of empathy among prisoners. ‘How can we live honestly? How can we listen to each other? What kinds of change are possible?’ These are questions that might bring us face to face with trauma, both that which we have experienced, and maybe perpetrated.

The arts find their way into prison and other criminal justice settings in Scotland often through education programmes. Here they can reinforce the value of a liberal arts education as part of a civilising experience, one which broadens horizons and encourages critical thinking. Jess Thorpe’s development of theatre performance with prisoners suggests that giving people the power over creation produces an intellectual flexibility that supports not only empathy but also seeing different, and more positive, ways of doing things. Caroline Caccavale, founder of the French arts in prison collaboration, Lieux Fictifs, argues in this issue that without these insights increased literacy and vocational qualifications will have little impact on the lives of released prisoners. Understanding the centrality of creativity and the arts in human development helps us avoid the narrowing of education systems which see people increasingly and solely in labour market terms.

While Scotland has achieved much in its commitment to the arts and creative learning in all areas, there are particular risks of working within the structures of criminal justice. One of these is a tendency to instrumentalism, of reducing arts to an intervention which is ‘delivered’ by an expert to a non-expert in pursuit of a measurable outcome. Alison Urie’s work in community (Hot Chocolate) and prison-based (Vox Liminis) arts projects, exposed to her the crucial difference between doing justice to, and doing justice with people who are marginalised, guilty, in crisis. One way controls and denies agency, the other supports and provides resources to take on responsibility.

We are especially pleased to have coverage in this issue of programmes that focus on engaging women in creative practice. Those working in criminal justice well know the limited services available to women, and in arts provision we have seen historically a gendered approach to arts (as something for men) and crafts (for women). Kevin Harrison and Lorna Callery confront this issue head on noting there was only a single entry from a woman to a recent Koestler Trust exhibition compared to the hundreds from men. Their contribution, as well as that from Emma Wilson describing Apex’s unique Women Only Workshops, have identified the power of making art in generating a positive sense of identity and solidarity, important building blocks of strong societies and accountable individuals.

If we cannot reduce a given arts programme to its impact on reoffending, how should we value, and evaluate, the arts in justice? A large body of research has demonstrated beyond doubt the immediate impact of arts programmes through improved sense of well-being and confidence. But what happens after the song is sung, the film screened, the play performed? Kirstin Anderson and Richard Sparks, part of the team involved in one of the most comprehensive evaluations ever undertaken of arts interventions in the Scottish prison system, reflect on this issue. They point out that evaluations generally are not designed (or funded) to follow people through the gate to investigate the sustainability or effects of arts involvement in the longer term. A parallel issue is the lack of opportunities and resources for those leaving prison to pursue their arts practice in the community. The featured interview with Wullie Sinclair gives some sense of how one ex-prisoner is trying to keep up his painting on the outside.

Beyond an impact on individuals, we are beginning to understand how the arts cross barriers to connect communities across walls, neighbourhoods and nations. Paul Cosgrove shares his experience bringing Glasgow School of Art sculpture and environmental art students to work alongside those in prison, who discover in the process of doing and making together their own and each other’s value in being part of a joint creative process. Justina Murray, thinking about community justice and the arts, adds that integration ‘is not just an issue for prison leavers but for all those excluded from their communities through their crimes’, and we might add, for myriad other reasons. Community-based arts activity can connect people in with their geographical communities as well as communities of interest.

Finally, Yvonne Jewkes and Dominique Moran explore the role of penal architecture in communicating society’s values about punishment both to those on the inside and outside. Architecture tells prisoners what society thinks of them, as animals in a cage or as people capable of a positive contribution, partly through coordinating the possibilities for creativity. Most prisons in the UK are designed without performance or exhibition spaces. Contrast this with Tegel Prison in Berlin which has a theatre that regularly puts on performances for local people (bit.ly/1cDYgAr), showcasing an example of how the arts can bring prisoners and local communities together, reducing the isolation and ‘otherness’ of prisons.

What draws all of the pieces together is a recognition of creativity as an essential component of our humanity. Creativity is ultimately about human flourishing. It is not icing on the cake, a taxpayer funded luxury, something that happens only in a classroom. When we find new ways to ask questions, to communicate with other human beings, and ultimately to make sense of our acts and place in the world we have the possibility not just of living in a just society, but of building it. The following articles gather together just a tiny portion of the work being done in Scotland to realise this aim, and we hope they (and the extended content online) stimulate debate over the power of the arts for justice.


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