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Special Edition
The Arts in Prison

Editorial Comment

The arts in prison

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Let us begin with a single image: Harou-Romain's Plan for a penitentiary, 1840.¹ If the reader is unfamiliar with the title, they may well know the image itself from the plate section of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. It depicts an imagined view from a cell within Bentham's Panopticon. The inhabitant of the cell—seemingly unaware of our presence behind them—is kneeling. They face outwards, towards the central observation tower. There are several ways in which we can read this particular image. For example, is the figure kneeling in silent penitence or are they engaged in some form of labour? On first being introduced to a poorly reproduced version of this image in an undergraduate lecture some years ago, it struck one of the editors of this special edition as the embodiment of Bentham's 'mill to grind rogues honest'.² It appeared as though the architecture of the building bore down upon the lone figure. It was the weight of both the physical and conceptual that had brought them to their knees. That editor has written elsewhere about the centrality of this image to their on-going research interests and projects, as well as using it in delivering their own undergraduate lectures.³ Hopefully the reader will forgive this initial burst of solipsism, but—simply put—you would not be reading this were it not for that image. Of course, it is a truism to say that art has the capacity to transform. We know this. We know that art can challenge and provoke. It can reveal the artist's self to others, as well as illuminate aspects of the audience's self to themselves. It allows us to express who we are and who we want to be. This then takes us to the theme of this particular special edition: the arts in prison.

If it is axiomatic to suggest that art can produce revelatory experiences, then its value to any system that seeks to rehabilitate should be equally as clear. Simply stating that this is the case is, of course, insufficient. There is a need for the careful,

considered evaluations set out by several of the contributors here. The central innovation that is important in all of the articles that follow arrives in Herrity et al's expression of art existing as a 'benign gateway'. This sees the transformative aspects of art being captured and made to cascade throughout other aspects of prison life. In their article, **Kate Herrity, Simon Bland, Ralph Lubkowski** and **Phil Novis** detail the 'Talent Unlocked' arts festival that ran at HMP Leicester in November 2017. For the authors, the festival acted as precisely this sort of gateway, providing benefits to staff-prisoner relationships, civic participation and educational engagement. As these contributors themselves note in the piece, 'the difficulty in capturing these processes in a measurable, quantifiable form was a source of frustration'.

The frustrations and difficulties of many arts-related schemes in a secure setting is similarly well-evoked by **Victoria Anderson's** reflection upon the monitoring and evaluation of Stretch Digital projects. Specifically, these saw the use of iPads to facilitate digital storytelling exercises. As Anderson notes, the cohort utilising the iPads were highly engaged yet possessed low 'digital literacy' and had little experience of using the internet. Despite the lack of internet access for the exercises acting as a hindrance, participants and co-ordinators were still able to successfully manoeuvre around these obstacles and utilise applications in their creative projects.

Turning to theatre, **Zoe Stephenson** and **Andy Watson** discuss the work of the Geese Theatre Company. Stephenson and Watson touch upon the importance of 'the Mask' and 'mask lifting' as a means to encounter the hidden thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs of a character'.⁴ Through this theatrical device—and an emphasis placed upon improvisation and interactivity—they unpack a

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1. Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish*. London: Penguin. See image 4 in the plate section.
 2. Bentham to JP Brissot to Warville, c. 25 November 1791 (The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, vol 4, p.342). London: UCL Press.
 3. Fiddler M (2011). A 'system of light before being a figure of stone': the phantasmagoric prison. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 7, 1, 83-97.
 4. This pre-figures a discussion in the interview with Edmund Clark (that concludes this special edition) regarding the mask-like elements of pinhole photographic portraits.

programme for female offenders. Moving outside of the prison and into the liminal space of prison transportation, **Aylwyn Walsh** discusses Chloë Moss' 'Sweatbox'. First produced on the festival circuit in 2015, this immersive production took audiences inside a prison van. Limited audiences would share these claustrophobic spaces whilst observing three actors through small windows as they recounted their stories. The discomfort of the staging viscerally drove home the themes of the play. The value of the performance itself is further explored in **Sarah Doxat-Pratt's** article 'Performance Matters'. This piece is based upon observations of work carried out by the Irene Taylor Trust. There were two main elements to this: a Music in Prison week and a Musician-in-Residence series of sessions. Music in Prison saw prisoners team up with professional musicians to write and record new music with the aim of performing in front of an audience. As Doxat-Pratt describes it, the performance is intended to serve as 'a milestone for those who have performed, evidence of the journey they have been on'. However, the difficulties of performance within a secure setting meant that—upon its cancellation—there was a great deal of distress and frustration.

Katy Haigh and **Laura Caulfield** also highlight the 'Good Vibrations' gamelan musical project. They similarly saw the creation of a professionally-produced CD to be given to participants at the close of the project. This provided a sense of achievement that could be shared with others. Indeed, the authors highlight the way in which the CD itself can provide 'positive discussion points for visits and communication with the outside world'. As with the other projects outlined here, the authors also suggest that it could serve—in Herrity et al's phrasing—as a benign gateway to other treatment programmes.

We return to **Kate Herrity's** research in her innovative practice of 'sound walking' and 'aural ethnography' within prison. The soundscape of the carceral is often discussed in prison ethnography, but has—heretofore—not been examined in a sustained manner. It often appears simply as a descriptive backdrop to other discussions. Here Herrity frames

music as important in identity work. The playing of particular pieces can serve as De Certeau⁵ 'spatial tactics' for navigating everyday life. It can reaffirm 'self' whilst also maintaining connections to the outside.

The final section of this special edition focuses upon the work of artist Edmund Clark. Edmund's award-winning work has been exhibited internationally. Often commenting upon carceral spaces, he has recently concluded an artistic residency at HMP Grendon. The work that was developed during this time was exhibited at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham in a show entitled 'In Place of Hate'. **Yvonne Jewke's** commentary discusses the themes of the show, in addition to the work of the residency itself. In particular, Jewkes points to an implicit focus upon temporality, as well as the (in)visible within the pieces: they are redolent of 'repetitiveness, tedium; trauma; torture; absence; fear; seeing; unseeing; and being seen'. **Elizabeth Yardley** and **Dan Rusu** discuss their evaluation of the artist-in-residence programme at HMP Grendon. They point to pre-existing research that demonstrates both psychological benefits to participants, as well as increases in their receptivity to further activities. This is a potential pathway to a profound impact upon incarcerated lives. Indeed, as they state, Edmund's residency has 'complemented the therapeutic regime at the prison and facilitated the process of identity reconstruction'. We conclude with **Michael Fiddler's** interview with Edmund Clark. The interview was conducted shortly after the opening of 'In Place of Hate'. In the interview, Clark discusses how 'My Shadow's Reflection'—a book that collected work carried out during the residency—was due to be sent out to opinion formers, policy makers and political commentators. As he states, 'maybe it will bring them a little closer to their own shadow's reflection'. And that is the hope of this special edition. It provides a partial snapshot of the vital and important work being done in the arts both within and outside prisons. If you are new to this area, our hope is that for you, the reader, this will act as a point for reflection and, potentially, a 'benign gateway'.

5. de Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. London: University of California Press.