

Chapter 6

The artistic ‘touch’: Moving beyond carceral boundaries through *Art by Offenders*ⁱ

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“The guilty person, the prisoner”, comments Ioan Davies, “everywhere across time and societies ... [is] not expected to write. They are expected to be written for [either by the authorities or by benefactors]” (1990, 7). However, in spite of this, there are many different ‘voices’ to be heard from inside the prison, which act as an “instance of ... resistance” (ibid). What then emerges are narratives where prisoners attempt to speak for themselves, producing “a new language of desire ... [where] they resist the image and the gaze that produces them as ‘others’” (Hugunin 1999, 418). These may include: demands issued by disgruntled prisoners; inmate-edited prison journals (such as the prison monthly from Iowa State Penitentiary at Ford Madison, the *Presidio*, and the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta’s *Atlantian*, both of which are no longer active); other forms of expression (e.g. inmate poetry, painting, photography, and recently, webpages such as *Ben’s Prison Blog*ⁱⁱ); and prison memoirs (written during or after incarcerationⁱⁱⁱ). These narrative or aesthetic practices resist the dehumanising, colonising practices of the visual gaze that prisoners so usually find themselves under (Camhi 1989). In many cases, the confinement of prisoners results in a production of rich outputs, including artwork. Indeed, as the foreword by Roger Cardinal in Kornfeld’s *Cellblock Visions*, states,

the artistic output of the physically and spiritually confined, achieved almost entirely against the grain of circumstance, forms both a substantial corpus and an admirable proof of the tenacity of the human urge to expression. (1997, xiii)

In this chapter, I draw attention to the annual Koestler Award scheme that actively encourages prisoners to not only produce art, but submit it for external scrutiny and possible commendation. I argue that this process of allowing ‘outsiders’ to interact with this artwork has a number of important purposes. First, as many of the pieces are for sale, prisoners contribute to a system of production and economic exchange. Second, as well as generating their own income, the celebration of these pieces, both in the gallery and through specific awards, helps in the self-production of creative individuals legitimised in the arts community and wider society. Finally, then, the production and consumption of this artwork may enhance prisoners’ ability to ‘touch’ the world outside of prison. Drawing on literatures concerned with ‘touch’ and hapticality, and taking particular influence from Emmanuel Levinas’s (1981) conceptualisation of touch as something more than simply physical, I consider how artwork contributes to metaphorical or ethical relations of ‘touch’ across the prison boundary.

Prisoners and art

Kornfeld (1997) argues that the art of prisoners has not been mapped as thoroughly as, for example, the literature narratives that Hugunin refers to above. This may be explained by the fact that ‘art’ by prisoners takes many different forms. Prison Art was first recognised as an artistic category by Hans Prinzhorn in his account *Bildneri der Gefangenen* (1926) (‘Artistry of Convicts’). It may also be likened to the category of ‘Outsider Art’ developed by Roger Cardinal (1972) to refer to art created outside of the boundaries of official art culture. Originating in the asylum art genre, ‘Outsider Art’ now encompasses a variety of art that transgresses expectations of mainstream society, including work by children and other marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities; those polarised by welfare systems (Zolberg

and Cherbo 1997); or by those experiencing other hardship such as mental illness, poverty or drought (Rubin 2004). Along these lines, early types of art produced within prison included coloured playing cards, water jugs scratched with letters and images, and sculptures of kneaded bread, amongst others (Kornfeld 1997, xviii). Envelopes are often decorated to send home as presents to the recipients (Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004); and handkerchief art, known as *Paño Arte* – *Paño* is Spanish for handkerchief – is another popular hobby (Kornfeld 1997, 25). There are often specific restrictions on art materials in prison, which explains the unconventional mediums employed. Much prisoner art represents necessity. It is made of materials that become available regularly as ‘waste’, or the more valuable ad hoc items become cherished pieces. This is similar to other situations, such as soldiers creating Trench Art using empty shell and bullet casings to fashion items (Kimball 2009, Saunders 2000, 2001, 2003). Other popular genres include ‘fantasy’ and tattoo art. In the latter, the skin becomes an obvious material for choice owing to its ready availability. Designs can be very rich, with images such as handcuffs, chains, bars, brick walls, barbed wire, clocks, hourglasses, eyes and tears representing imprisonment. Birds, wings, and scenes of outer space may symbolise freedom (Kornfeld 1997, 25).^{iv}

Contemporary scholarship has paid specific attention to the motivation behind prisoners ‘doing art’. Benchoam (1993) argues that prisoner art can be used as both refuge and protest. Those that produce ‘good art’ can earn themselves status, respect and friendship from their peers, who might pay or exchange items for commissioned pieces (Kornfeld 1997). Fox (1997) argues that art programmes can help inmates re-humanise those in the penal environment allowing others to view them as more than simply ‘inmates’ or a threat to society. For many, art is something that had never been a priority but by producing it they can contribute to a new creative life beyond prison (Liebmann 1994).

Argue et al. (2009) highlight an Inmate Mural Arts Program, where prisoners worked together to paint a large mural on an exterior prison wall, developing team building skills and mutual respect. Prisoners also gain a sense of confidence and respect for themselves too. Art therapy reduces depression in prisons (Gussak 2004, 2006, 2007). Similar results have been drawn from literature therapy (Cocking and Astill 2004, Daveson and Edwards 2001) and music therapy (Baker and Homan 2007). Cohen (2009) explains how choral singing has been used as a form of therapy that encourages self-esteem, increases social connections and builds trust. Other forms of arts-based education strategies can include focus on movement or creative writing (Mullen 1999), and dance (Houston 2009). In the following section, I focus attention on the annual Koestler award scheme, noting particular themes and patterns within the artwork that speak to wider issues of the prison/non-prison relationship.

The Art by Offenders Exhibition 2011

The 2011 Koestler Awards exhibited at London's Royal Festival Hall Southbank Centre from 22 September to 20 November^v. Open to prisoners, offenders on community sentences, immigration detainees and secure psychiatric patients in the UK, the aim is to motivate and reward artistic achievement (Koestler Trust 2012c). Arthur Koestler had a very personal reason for sponsoring this type of work. As a journalist covering the Spanish Civil War, Koestler spent three months in solitary confinement under sentence of death never knowing when the fatal summons might come. Ultimately, and thankfully, it did not; and 1962 marked the beginning of the Koestler Awards for Art, Craft, Music and Writing. Feeling so passionate about the miserable times spent incarcerated, Koestler initially funded the project himself, hoping to inspire creativity in the carceral world. Reflecting on the stifling nature of his time spent incarcerated, he wrote:

It is a peculiar mechanism, the brain; it manufactures only if a market through the medium of the word or the pen is assured beforehand. If there is no demand for its products, it goes on strike. (Koestler 1983, 118)

There are 59 different categories for submission and 2011 attracted 7,656 entries (an increase of 2,000 upon the previous year). 20 per cent won an award of between £20 and £100, with the highest prize being a Scholarship Award where winners received £150, art materials and a year's support from a Koestler mentor (Koestler Trust 2012b, no page). In this programme we can find similarities to US counterparts, such as the Angola Prison Arts and Crafts Festival (Schrift 2006, 2008); and the Prison Creative Arts Project^{vi}, which runs the Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners through the Michigan Prison Art Initiative. The South Bank exhibition entitled *Art by Offenders* was curated by 12 volunteers from the Magistrates' Association, who each bring their own perspective on the criminal justice system.

I visited the exhibition and carefully recorded all the entries, noting also the ones that were for sale and those that had already been bought by private collectors. The following section reflects upon my subsequent interpretation of the pieces, alongside publicity materials and other media reports of the exhibitions where possible. Some entries were displayed alongside comments made by either the curator or the artist themselves. I also engaged with free-flowing conversations with other visitors to the exhibits, where possible. Throughout this chapter I will make reference to a variety of different artwork from the exhibition. Due to the nature of the pieces often being produced by individuals who were subsequently released from custody, it was not possible to obtain consent to reproduce all of these images. I am grateful to the Koestler Trust for their assistance in contacting artists to gain permission from

the individuals they were still in contact with. All artwork mentioned in this is also exhibited via an online collection at the Koestler Trust website^{vii}.

As Kornfeld explains, “the prison environment limits artistic subject matter” (1997, 10). Prisoners often copy from photographs or books, such as the *National Geographic* with its exotic colourful imagery. In terms of real-life subject matter, the revelation of anything personal can be too risky particularly because of the destructive emotions it may bring up. However, “horrific images of the general evils of incarceration are quite acceptable, because they are commonly understood” (ibid). Each piece in this exhibition highlights fundamentally different, but highly-charged emotional responses to the prison environment – often literally painting a different representation of the ‘inside’ from within. Many pieces attempt to represent the frustrations, anger, and loneliness of prison, grasping at the fragile and destructive life that many of them lead (Fieldwork Diary Entry, 20 October 2011). Yet, violent art is often prohibited and images of buildings or reproductions of the prison layout is prohibited (ibid, 12). One example is *My Pad* by Claude Chain of HMP Wolds, which depicts the bare bricks of the cell, over-emphasising the dirty-looking toilet and steel door. The artist here draws inspiration from the meagre surroundings, perhaps making a more serious point about its sparseness. *My World* and *Life on the wing on the inside* both follow the theme of illustrating prison landscapes, such as the prison landings and the everyday items that represent prisoners’ slim collection of possessions. *Death in Custody* (see Figure #.1) addresses the topic of prisoner suicide. At first glance, it may seem pertinent to recognise a potential negativity of prisoner artwork in the production of such powerful emotive responses by artists. However, much literature supports a converse response to such reactions – the therapeutic function of engaging in art. Indeed, as Johnson explains, “feelings that one may be uncomfortable expressing outward or are hard to put into words can be externalized through visual images” (2008, 103). Subsequently, art provides a vehicle for expressing

things that one cannot, or should not say ‘out loud’ or that might put them at threat from their ‘environment’ (Gussak 1997, 61).

< **Figure #.1:** *Death in Custody* Anon., (HMP Bullingdon) Bronze Award for Portraits

Source: by artist’s permission *about here* >

Other pieces incorporate traditional prison art emblems. For example, *Tapping and Reflection* appears very innocuous to the untrained eye. The piece, commended for drawing, comprises a pencil illustration of a tap and harnesses the three-dimensional elements of the object and its metallic surface with fine detail. However, although the image simply appears to be of an everyday object, the single droplet of water dripping from the spout is very similar to the teardrops found in many prison tattoos, a popular symbol of imprisonment as noted by Kornfeld (1997). In a different register, *Constant Observation* uses the metaphors of isolation, vulnerability and surveillance that the prison can conjure up, representing incarceration by illustrating a man, curled up, naked inside a fish bowl. The sombre nature of the theme is symbolised by the use of blue and purple tonal pastels.

Aside from providing some inspiration for content, it is clear that the physical landscape of the prison has a bearing on the content and characteristics of the art. Inmates are often forced to work in poor lighting conditions and often sit in close proximity to their pieces due to the small dimensions of their cell (Kornfeld 1997, 22). For example, artists used fine biro- and pencil-lines to create an attention to detail. The creator of *Not so amazing* has represented prison as a maze – a space of confusion – and minute details have been included such as graffiti on the walls, despite this being a very large piece overall. Although operating at a much smaller scale *Birds of a Feather* depicts tiny, but intricately-detailed portraits of

different birds on false nails; each requiring a great deal of patience, dedication and restraint when working with such a delicate medium.

Much of the work on display at the 2011 awards reflected the traditional ‘prison art’ that was defined by Prinzhorn at the start of the twentieth century. Soap has long been a popular material for sculpting due to its relatively-easy accessibility and its malleable properties. Daniel Ashcroft from HMP Garth has carefully sculpted a man fishing in *Japanese Pleasures*. Similarly, matchsticks have featured highly in arts and crafts production by prisoners. Gradually replaced by prison-issue lighters, and potentially due to the recent downturn in the numbers of Britons who smoke, the match is less readily available in such large quantities. However, the value of tradition has been sustained in the Koestler Trust developing a separate award category for Matchstick Models. Matchsticks certainly convey a sense of time in the number of hours taken to construct even the smallest piece. This category features the likes of *Solitaire Game*, where the details of the playing pieces would have required countless hours to achieve the meticulous detail; or the real-life sized shark head of *The Great White Shark*, where sheer scale dictated the length of such workmanship.

However, whether it is the extreme detail incorporated into the artwork, or the content itself, it is clear that time plays an important role in the prisoner artwork:

Everyone likes the finer things in life but they come at a cost and for me it’s time; time away from my wife, time away from my family, time away from my real life, dead time. (David Franklin, HMP Lowdham Grange)

David Franklin’s piece *Dead Time* uses mixed media and depicts a multi-coloured skull overlaid upon a collage of many different images of watches. The caption provided by the author himself alludes not only to the significance of the temporal divide between prisoner

and the outside, but also alludes to his belief that the life of the prisoner is somehow fabricated, unlike his 'real life' on the outside. Sparks et al. note that "time is the basic structuring dimension of prison life" (1996, 250). Moran argues that these varying attitudes and experiences of time are particular to the specific relationship that prisoners enact with the spaces of incarceration that they occupy. She considers particularly the embodied relationship between prisoners and time-space (Moran 2012b). Furthermore, prisoners often reveal different senses of time within prison (Moran 2012a). These are namely: stasis (with time seeming to stand still); flow (with time seeming to pass more quickly than on the outside); or biology (through their own physical deterioration). Other scholars focusing on migrants and detained individuals have also noted the significant bearing that their liminal status manifests a sense of waiting that can have upon the performance of everyday lives (Conlon 2011, Gray 2011, Hyndman and Giles 2011, Mountz 2011, Schuster 2011).

Another area of interest lies in the reliance in some artworks upon the creation of parody. The creator of *Bend, Squat, Leave* has used acrylic paint to capture a bar of soap on a shower floor. The soap lies on the tiles in a pool of water with the lather gathering around it as its owner has no apparent desire to bend down to retrieve it from the floor of the shower. This is based upon the outsider joke about the dangers of 'dropping the soap', but the reality of the painting – and its inference of sexual violence – for a prisoner is much more serious. Other pieces parody famous artwork to produce intertextuality (Shurmer-Smith 2002) with other media images. In this case, intertextuality refers to the complex relationship between a text and other text or object, with the relationship necessary to generate an attachment and meaning in order for it to be interpreted. For example, *No Chips, again!* is a parody of Munch's *The Scream*. Whilst it is clear that Pedro Murray's colourful acrylic portrait of a man screaming is supposed to be a joke, it also reflects the exaggerated response that can

occur when things that are taken for granted on the outside, such as choice and quality of food, shape daily life within a prison..

Other inmates focus concentration on important occasions within the daily life and running of the prison. The anonymous artist of *U Got Mail* explains his reasoning behind capturing the event of a prisoner receiving and reading his mail:

The intense moment when I read my letters is one in which I feel a direct connection to the sender of the letter. Sometimes each word feels like it is being branded onto my skin. This is expressed by the post mark of my local area across the figure in the painting.^{viii}

< **Figure #.2:** *The Visit* Anon., (HMP Shepton Mallet) Paul Hamlyn Foundation Bronze Award for Oil or Acrylic **Source:** by artist's permission *about here* >

The Visit (Figure #.2) pays particular attention to the importance of prison visits by illustrating the variety of activities that take place during this time. As we might expect, in the foreground two people appear to be chatting and drinking hot drinks. However, one man has covered his mouth with a hand, perhaps trying to conceal the conversation or the transfer of contraband. He is observed intensely by one prison officer, who is carrying off another inmate, who perhaps has already been caught. Another inmate carries a sandwich and a couple embrace in front of a suited man – perhaps a lawyer – waving desperately to be seen amongst the chaos. For the artist, a visit can be hectic and multi-purpose, where relationships are often controlled and strained by constant surveillance.

This binary opposition is apparent in many features of this artwork. For example, in *The Dallery* the solitary figure representing the lonely prisoner is painted in monochrome,

with the landscape outside vividly coloured. This displays what can be recognised as an intertextual reference to the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. While Dorothy is in Kansas, at a home she considers boring, black and white film is used. Once she escapes over the rainbow, colour film is used. The inside/outside boundary is also reinforced by direct juxtaposition within the images themselves. *The Lost and Forgotten* links the title to an image of a sombre, yearning figure staring out of a cell door peep-hole, denoting how the artists believes the outside world views prisoners.

The 2011 exhibition, as described, encompasses a range of artwork demonstrating a variety of themes and mediums. As I have discussed, many of the themes, such as prisoners' depiction of time or the binary opposition between prison and outside, resonate with work currently on-going within carceral geography and by prison-art scholars. However, for the remainder of this chapter, I turn attention to the consequences of this type of production – both in terms of the prisoner as a useful, creative individual and upon the relationship that inmates create with the world outside. In the following section, I attend to the way in which this prisoner artwork acts as a type of production: first in an economic relationship with the outside world, and, second, as a means for prisoners to produce themselves as creative individuals.

(Self)production of a 'creative' and 'useful' Individual

The Koestler Trust also gives award-entrants the opportunity to sell their pieces to members of the public. Entrants to the competition usually receive modest sums of between £20 and £30 for their artwork.^{ix} Sometimes, a piece of artwork of considerable size or quality may raise a larger sum. For example, *My World* was advertised for sale for £300 and *Alpha Wing* for £360. Koestler has some distinct reasons for vindicating the sale of artwork. 25 per cent of the sale price goes to the Koestler Trust themselves, and 25 per cent to Victim Support –

specifically helping those who have been victims of crime. From the point of view of the inmate, the benefits are numerous. 50 per cent of the sale of artwork goes to the artist. It is paid into 'private cash' that is held for each inmate by their governor.^x In this case, the prison managers will decide what to do with the money. One outcome is to open a savings account for when the offender is released. Another is to use some of the money for materials for the prison art room. Other entrants donate their proceeds to the Koestler Trust.

The sale of prisoner 'products' is not new. In the US, prison craft shops offer inmates opportunities to showcase their art, or build up a form of business for themselves (Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004). Schrift (2006, 2008) details the Angola Prison Arts and Crafts Festival, through which inmates can sell their crafts to visiting members of the public (though they remain behind a fence with a trustee carrying out the transaction). Whilst the officials plan the festival, the types of art on sale ranges from formal pieces constructed with traditional art materials, to prison 'waste' products such as bird houses made from worn-out prison issue boots or purses made from empty cigarette packets. Here, hobbies done to pass time, or using by-products of the regime, result in purposeful crafts with a re-sale value. The unique nature of *where* the item is produced can contribute to their appeal. A recent Channel 4 documentary *Gordon Behind Bars* (2012) saw television-chef Gordon Ramsey try and seduce the British consumer with the trials and tribulations of the HMP Brixton, UK inmates who produced his baked goods to be sold on the 'outside'. According to the Koestler Trust (2012b), allowing the sale of this artwork is justified by the prison authorities for several reasons. First, they claim that it is an extra incentive to participate in the arts. Second, although income is generally modest, the extra spends are extremely valuable and allow prisoners to purchase items within prison such as toiletries and snacks that they might otherwise rely upon relatives to fund their personal account to pay for. Finally, there are also other skills that can simultaneously be developed. For example, inmates learn to focus on the

audience, developing marketable skills: what kinds of people might buy their work? What kind of content and techniques sell well? The most interesting point on the manifesto surrounds the desire to facilitate “bringing offenders’ artwork to the attention of the wider public – *and into people’s homes*” (Koestler Trust 2012a, no page, emphasis added). Here, the production of the prisoner as a viable economic citizen is promoted. Prisoners who participate in these kinds of activity generate rewards for themselves inside prison, but also access skills that might be useful to them when seeking employment upon release.

For others, it is the creativity and not the economic potential of the artwork that alludes to the creation of a prosperous future in both the immediate prison surroundings and the outside world. Richard Gordon from HMP Lindholme comments: “I find comfort in my art and it’s the only thing that gets me through” (artist comment alongside exhibition piece). Another prisoner admitted that “art saved me from myself, gave me a direction and purpose to live again. I was getting a new buzz without the aid of drugs or alcohol” (artist comment alongside exhibition piece). This kind of possibility is embodied by an award-winning entrant, who writes:

I have been very lucky over the years at the Koestler Awards. Apart from selling almost all of my work I have also received the full range of awards ... You know it has been great winning awards and selling my work but the event gave me more than that, it provided me with something positive to talk about with my family and another stepping stone to help me through my sentence. Who knows what will happen with my art when I get out? (Koestler Trust 2012d, no page)

Former prisoner Erwin James highlights the significance of the Koestler Award, and other outside feedback on pieces, recognising that “in prison, a little praise goes a long way”

(James 2010, no page). For some, just having their work seen or read by others is reward enough:

It let me know my voice had been heard, someone had valued my opinion and contribution, and made me feel less alone and afraid and hopeful that perhaps there is still a place for me in society. (Brine 2011, 7)

For others, creating an art-focused future for themselves is important. In a report by the Institute of Education at the University of London, Hurry et al. concluded that “recognition from outside bodies for work achieved, such as the Koestler Trust, all act as motivating factors for the learner” (2012, 26). Indeed a former detainee highlights the impact of the scheme in creating new avenues of possibility in his creative repertoire:

Without Koestler ... I would never have exhibited or been bought by influential people, never reviewed or written up. (Peter Cameron (Koestler Trust 2012a, no page))

Such a practice is predicated upon the individual’s ability to harness productive change. Foucault defines these as ‘technologies of the self’, which encompass methods that individuals may, either through their own means or with the help of others, operate their thoughts, actions, bodies and souls to transform themselves in order to attain certain desires. For Foucault (1988), that might be happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. However, this self-production problematically involves individuals recognising the self as flawed or incomplete, and identifying potential areas for transformation (Maguire and

Stanway 2008). As such, this transformation becomes a do-it-yourself project (Hitzler 1988 in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 3).

< **Figure #.3:** *Behind Me (Self Portrait)* Anon., (HMP Lowdham Grange) The Co-operative Chair's Platinum Award 2011. **Source:** by artist's permission *about here* >

However, attempts are also made, where possible, to give written feedback to entrants to the Koestler Awards. Judges are often experts in each artistic field, and make comments about style, content and technique. The number of pieces appreciated for their "great technical ability" is vast (personal correspondence, prison sculpture class facilitator, 18 November 2011). *Behind Me (Self Portrait)* (Figure. #.3) reflects some of the exceptional quality of prisoner artwork. The portrait expresses the artist naked and free on a beach, perhaps portraying how he desires himself to be. The oil painting captures an incredibly life-like expression of its subject, in particular in the depiction of the facial expression, and tone of the skin and muscles. *Through the Funnels* by an anonymous artist from HMP Wandsworth, has been commended for its proficiency in the use of watercolour as a medium. It depicts a historical view of the infamous ocean liner HMS Titanic with a flawless appreciation of perspective and depth of tone. 68 per cent of those responding to a 2010 entrant survey received feedback. On average, 94 per cent of those who received written feedback found it either helpful or very helpful, which clearly demonstrates the value of feedback being provided (Brine 2011, 4):

Seeing people's reaction to my work was amazing. (Anonymous artist, HMP Whatton)

I cried when I won a Koestler Award. It was the first time in my life I'd been told I'd done something really well. (Inmate of HMP Whatton (Elliott 2012, no page))

Some of the prisoners seem to express distinct emotive reasons for selecting the content of their artwork. The portrayals often represent a possibility of gaining access to an outside world where they transform themselves into more successful individuals. For some, this world is in the past. A selection of the artwork appears to suggest a longing for happier times, and the reliving of past happy memories. For example, *Family at the cottage* is a pastel drawing of a man, woman and two small children. In the composition, the couple are walking through woodland towards a cottage with the children skipping around them. The piece leaves the observer to wonder whether this scene is one that the inmate conjured from a wealth of bygone experience. Similarly, *Bridge over troubled water* uses acrylic to paint a rich red sunset behind a silhouette of a pier. Its creator, Lee Colin Edwards, writes in his comment alongside his piece:

This piece was meant to be Blackpool Pier with a bit of night life going on and the calm and peaceful drifting ocean. If I could capture a moment in time this would be it. When I see the picture it reminds me of an open free place.

Edwards' comment also captures this certain ambiguity. Does this artwork allow prisoners to generate attachment to 'what has gone before', or is this a fabrication of 'what might be'? Thus, we can question whether these two artists have projected their idealised experiences. The pieces can display a tangible representation of a different space and time where identities and emotions are also different. For example, *Hope!* is an intriguing piece. It depicts an ultrasound image of a foetus marked out using coloured pencils on a black background. One

of the exhibition's curators, Mary Brodrick writes: "this piece resonates with me particularly because I have just heard that my first grandchild has been born" (curator comment alongside exhibition piece). A new baby is hope, and this image may suggest the joy that an artist may feel about the approaching birth of a child, but the analogy extends further than this. The identifying label next to the image of the ultrasound tells us that the subject is a male, of category C status, with nine months remaining on his sentence. Perhaps this artwork symbolises artist Richard Carew's hope that he may be reborn as a new ('law-abiding') person or for his re-birth as a father once he is released from prison. These ideas corroborate with the work of Gooding-Brown (2000) who explored similar transformative properties of art when she investigated how students were able to use art in an educational setting as a means of appreciating different cultures and produce themselves as empowered individuals.

Identity formation is a lifelong process and much literature surrounds the significance of how self-production is linked to people's affinity with particular types of 'ideal' identities (Cherrier and Murray 2007). Certainly, as Maguire and Stanway note, "self-production is the mundane work of everyday life" (2008, 76). In this way, it often becomes taken for granted and the complexities of it are rarely explored. Furthermore, as Cherrier explains, the key reference point for identity construction comes from both the inside (the self) and those on the outside (collective identity) (2007, 323). This relationship has direct consequences for prisoners. It is the collective construction of the 'ideal' prisoner-citizen that shapes rehabilitation programmes designed to reintegrate offenders into outside society. In their desire to produce themselves as valuable members of a creative community, prisoners also exhibit a certain relationship with the world outside of prison. This performs a certain type of interaction with the boundary between prison and non-prison. As such, I therefore use the final section of this chapter to attend to the ways in which this artwork facilitates the construction of a more tangible relationship for prison inmates with the world outside of

prison. In doing so, I consider that notions of touch and hapticality provide a useful framework for understanding relationships of purpose and creativity in new ways.

Touching the outside

It may well be the first prize an inmate has ever won, and the annual Award exhibition offers a chance to reach out beyond the walls of his incarceration, to be seen and judged by the public and to sell work in an open market. That, for many, is the greatest prize of all. The works ... are seen and purchased by a discerning public: they form a link, presumably a bond of empathy, between maker and buyer. And they communicate the artist's vision, whether bleak or elegiac, to the wider world. (Bankes 2004, 60)

Touch is arguably a reciprocal action that relies on a physical relationship between two objects. As Rodaway suggests, "touch is above all the most intimate sense, limited by the reach of the body, and ... to touch is always to be touched" (1994, 41). There is a greater complexity to this literature when we consider it in direct relation to the prison environment. Processes of developing spatial connections are no doubt problematic for those who are incarcerated. 'Touch' is frowned upon within the prison environment, particularly as it may be associated with homosexuality or sexual abuse, and can be a threat to masculinist self-image (Houston 2009, 97-98). As discussed in the contextualising literature, prisons have traditionally existed on the periphery of society, creating a literal distance and as such force a more metaphorical attention to the concept of 'touch'. Inmates themselves may be considered to be 'out of touch' with society. This 'taboo' renders prisoners untouchable. Yet the importance of for prisoners of 'keeping in touch' with family and friends is massive. Farida Anderson illustrates how literacy becomes a problem for maintaining communications, and

there is “the price of keeping in touch”; with monies needed by prisoners to fund telephone calls and extra stamps, and by prisoners’ families for transport to visitations (Anderson 1992, 21-23).

Touching has the propensity to make things proximate, dissolving these boundary productions (Irigaray 1990). Beyond that, following a combination of contact of the skin with an environment (and a bodily perception of motion) touch generates a specific relationship with the environment, in which the distinction between subject and object is blurred. Following a similar argument, resting on Anderson’s examination of the affective qualities of music and spaces of boredom (2004a, 2004b, 2006), Adey also posits that, because of the attention to mobility, “affect does not reside in an object or a body, but surfaces from somewhere in-between” (2008, 439). Thus, I argue that emotions, feelings, and sensations are equally mutable, particularly in the concept of imagined touch. Levinas (1981) considers touch as an affective involvement with others. In this case, if prisoners can generate emotional attachment, by definition they can ‘touch’ or reach spaces outside of their physical proximity. It has indeed been argued that touch is a combination of two faculties of the body: the contact of the skin with the environment, and Kinaesthesia, the ability of the body to perceive its own motion (Rodaway 1994, 42). However, if the body can engage with this “perceptual domain” (Vasseleu 1998, 98), it may perceive motion, and tactile receptivity can therefore still arguably occur. The knowledge of that the artwork may be ‘touched’ by the outside, can help simulate Kinaesthesia – prisoners can perceive a motion of the body (through art as an act of the body) across the prison boundary.

For many artists, images are clearly fabrications from memory, or idealised constructions of the ‘outside’ that attempt to touch or reach into a peripheral world that they can no longer belong to. For example, the artist of *Disaster/Famine* expresses an awareness of suffering other than the prisoner’s own in their watercolour painting of an African family

in despair. Indeed Kornfeld found a certain amount of ‘artistic license’ in her study of prisoner art. As “prison is the opposite of colourful”, she writes “artists have been able to travel so far from the realities of their ugly world that they fairly explode with vivid imaginings” (1997, 44). Yet, without being too harsh a critic to the prisoner artists, this ‘awareness’ could have simply been a copy of a photograph from the *National Geographic*. The challenges of grasping outside knowledge and even materials for an art project is exemplified here by the piece entitled *Crime or Just Punishment*, depicting a court room with the defendant mounted Jesus-like on a cross instead of sitting in the dock. The artist states:

The original concept for the piece was based on Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. I developed it including my own experience of the judicial system. I built up a library of pictures from papers donated to me by other inmates. A prison officer helped me to translate my title into Latin so I could include it in the composition. (artist comment alongside exhibition piece)

Here, we can draw upon the work of scholars who attend to the importance of touch as a powerful vehicle to material memories. Describing the ‘motility’ of touch, Stewart explains how bodily movement “transverses the boundary between interiority and externality and reciprocally returns to the agent of touching” (1999, 35). This is because touch is more than simply making contact between the hands and fingers and a surface. Touch involves the whole body reaching out to things, or that environment having contact with the body itself (Boring 1942, in Rodaway 1994, 44). In this way, tactility is fundamentally based on the ability of objects to act as ‘anchor’ points – particularly when related to memory (Krasner 2005). For example, Rowles (1978) explains how the ability of the elderly to physically touch often becomes diminished, so photographs and other keepsakes become ever more important

prompts for memories that instil a sense of self. This is the same for prisoners, who often create keepsakes of the outside from the most unlikely of objects, in this case empty toiletry bottles (Baer 2005).

This generates interesting ideas surrounding the physical relationship between the body and the art materials. Bingley (2003) claims that sensory experience is an important element of perception. For example, a child's simple sand play is tactile. We must not ignore the importance for prison inmates of touching items that have come from the outside. Following Bingley, interaction with these materials allows for a perception and experience of the outside world. Jane Samuels (2008) exemplifies a programme where The British Museum brought items to exhibit at the chapel in Pentonville Prison. Describing the enthusiasm of prisoners who commonly spent up to 23 hours a day in their cells, she writes:

this multisensory dimension to the project was key to achieving its objectives ...
touch is a powerful medium, and in this context the use of objects and other
equipment helped the prisoners to open up and communicate with one another.
(Samuels 2008, 259-260)^{xi}

Similarly, Phyllis Kornfeld describes the occasions where she brought everyday items into art class:

Simple things, so easily available on the outside, could produce rare magic. Someone living for years in prison, whose choice of fabric is either white cotton, khaki, or blue denim, whose array of things to look at consists of a bar of soap, a hairbrush, and a shampoo bottle, can be intensely moved by a tangible reminder of the world beyond the walls. I brought shells, fresh from the beach, still sandy and smelling of the sea. I

remember greedy hands pouncing on a table strewn with autumn leaves and somebody said, ‘Jesus, I haven’t seen a leaf close up in years.’ More than one inmate became dizzy and almost fainted at the scent of a sprig of lilac or honeysuckle. (1997, 5)

The skin is the main interface between a person and the world around them. Touch is an ‘exploratory sense’, meaning that sensations felt by the skin can have strong motivational properties – stimulating behaviour or activating memories (Critchley 2008, 61). More than this, what is termed ‘hapticality’ refers to something which encompasses more than touch; a sensuous experience that also involves orientation, balance, and movement. For Dixon and Straughan, this allows a ‘re-enchanting’ of the everyday – a renewed focus upon the mundane hapticality of interactions with everyday objects (2010, 454). Reactions to such items include studies on handling tourist souvenirs (Ramsay 2009) or family photographs (Rose 2004). In the latter, the tactile process not only allows a sense of self, but that of family ‘togetherness’ (2004, 558).

As well as receiving written comments about the work, many artists choose not to sell their pieces and asked for them to be returned to them. However, 18 per cent of respondents criticised the handling of their artwork during its submission for competition, gallery display and return to prison (Brine 2011, 9). As well as indicating the pride felt for their personal masterpieces “which entrants often see as valuable or irreplaceable belongings” (ibid, 14) it may allude to a desire to see items returned to their private collections in the knowledge that they have been viewed and admired by the outside world. In similar vein, Moran (2013) notes the significance of tangible interactions with objects brought from the ‘outside’ into prison. In this way, the artists are free to view them as visitors to the exhibit may have or handle them in the same way that the judges did.

< **Figure #.4:** ‘Please do not touch’ sign alongside exhibits at the *Art by Offenders* exhibition

Source: Author’s Collection *about here* >

Interestingly, although I have mentioned the process in which prisoners ‘touch’ the materials and provide a tangible link to the outside, we as visitors to the exhibition are not allowed to do the same to the materials (see Figure #.4). With the exhibits kept behind glass, cordoned off, or bound by the unwritten rules of gallery spaces, they continue to remain ‘untouchable’. Although the argument could be made that most visitors to any art gallery would be unable to touch the pieces, there is an increasing trend that questions the ocularcentric bias of museum spaces – particularly for blind visitors, for example (Candlin 2004). For Candlin, changes in the way visitors engage with exhibits enable museums to prioritise engagement, learning and expertise above preservation. This bias is compounded when we consider the exhibition of artwork produced by inmates as it replicates the inability of non-prisoners to ‘touch’ prison spaces themselves. This places a greater emphasis on the need for artists to connect with the audience by other means – whether this is emotionally, using empathy, or other kinds of metaphors. Promoting an emotional response to the work is one way in which artists can achieve ‘reach’ inside the bodily surface of the viewer. Physical tangibility between artist and viewer is beyond the capabilities of the prisoner. Indeed for most people, a literal connectedness to other people and places is infrequent, with most people ‘keeping in touch’ via letter, telephone, or nowadays more commonly, social media. Thus, what Rodaway (1994) conceptualises as ‘imagined touch’ seems more fitting to describe the processes at work in the relationship between artist and spectator to produce a richer, more tangible experience of prison space. For Rodaway, this is a kind of haptic

experience based on memory and/or expectation. In this way, what he defines as a ‘rich touch imagination’ permits an

intimacy with people and places which may be a great distance from our present location, in time and/or space, or which we have never actually experienced, such as the evocation of tactile experiences in dreams or when reading. (Rodaway 1994, 54)

However, in following these definitions, it may be argued that ‘imagined touch’ rests on a shared experience or expectation. How does the recognition that most gallery viewers will never have experienced prison complicate matters? Offender-artists present the prison world in new and unexpected ways, but ultimately they attempt to exhibit a co-belonging. If then, an artist can develop a certain sense of similarity with the observer prison is reachable, readable, and similar. Visual images stir empathy and emotion, which drags the spectator across the boundary into prison – the journey itself being of notable interest to the academic too.

Attempting to incorporate images of prison into the mainstream is more successful if they are combined with some kind of emotional familiarity. For example, rappers 50 Cent and Eminem highlight how influential prison art can be, with the inclusion of that style on their album covers and in the content of their tattoos. Clothing companies *Affliction* and *Tap Out* have also created prison style screen printed images for use on their items. However, in this case, the consumer must find themselves emotively drawn to either the celebrity or the desire for the latest fashion – and not the prison emblems – in order to find common ground.

Curator Helen Lloyd writes of *They Still Wear Suits Like This, Don't They?* (Figure #.5):

A subtle portrayal of the challenges and emotions that a long-term prisoner may experience on release. The artist has captures a flicker of anxiety combined with a hint of vanity, evoking the desire to integrate into the outside world.

< **Figure #.5:** *They Still Wear Suits Like This, Don't They?* Anon., (HMP Shepton Mallet)

Victor Roberts Highly Commended Award for Portraits **Source:** by artist's permission *about here* >

Generating an empathetic response from those viewing the artwork, in this case an acknowledgement of vulnerability helps those on the inside to reach the audience, hoping that they will find common ground in their affective response. However, in doing so, this chapter deals with an undeniable tension between the humanising and more neoliberal aspects of the charity work of the Koestler Trust. The awards scheme, on the one hand, demonstrates an ethos of respect, compassion, positivity, and individual care; yet, at the same time, the manifestation of such work is dependent upon selling the art produced and awarding/rewarding success. In terms of the latter, this is underpinned by notions that are not necessarily charitable but rather may be recognised as neo-liberal and capitalist. Indeed, the rewarding of “time” put into an art object, exaggerated responses displayed in art, the use of found materials within the prison, and the omission of “risky” emotions dictate that Koestler and prisoners clearly continuously operate within the existing framework of art worlds in neoliberal capitalist contexts. In this way, the empathy generated within these contexts may express both integration into society but also reproduces the ideal prisoner as a carceral subject (both in and out of prison). However, complicating this tension is the ability of artwork to produce relations of ‘touch’ between the inside and outside of prison. In spite of a

process of creativity and exchange, an ethical connection is fostered that disrupts all these functions – bringing prison, charity and art-viewer together in more empathetic relationships.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the 2011 Koestler Awards as a mechanism through which prisoners are encouraged to produce art for potential scrutiny by both competition judges and members of the public visiting an exhibition of selected pieces. As I have illustrated, allowing ‘outsiders’ to interact with this artwork has a number of important purposes. Prisoners engaging with artwork have managed to achieve a variety of successes. By offering artwork for sale, prisoners are able to contribute to a system of production and economic exchange that allows them to supplement their meagre prison earning, reducing their reliance on informal welfare networks. Furthermore, both the accreditation and pleasure that prisoners have derived from producing artwork has allowed prisoners to work on transforming themselves into more creative individuals. The properties associated with this are much valued in their potential to encourage individuals to aim for a prosperous future both within, and outside of prison. In exploring this, what is also revealed is a complex relationship between the artwork as a ‘useful’ production for prisoners, but a method through which they can ‘touch’ or consume the world outside of prison.

It is clear that ‘touch’ is important, but for many it is much more than that – it is vital to our sense of self. Following the work of Tuan (1974), Rodaway explains that to lose touch (or to have it denied) “is to lose a world and, in effect, our sense of identity, even awareness of being” (1994, 44). However, for philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1981), touch need not be physical; it can be, rather, an ethical relation between the self and the other. Re-conceptualising traditional ‘touch’ allows for a different understanding of how individuals and objects experiencing a proximate distance may still be within reach. In the latter half of

the chapter I have attempted to highlight ways in which prisoner artists develop connections to the ‘outside’ through the creation of empathy, content, and the common ground of ‘imagined touch’. In my fieldwork diary, I noted,

All of a sudden, prisoners scribbling on foraged scraps of paper in their cells represent more than a freedom of expression. Here, they are not just free to give their own impression of the penal world, but gain access to the outside one. (fieldwork diary entry, 11 October 2011)

This particular artwork, exhibited by the Koestler Trust allows prisoners to symbolically climb over the prison walls, moving boundless in the world around them.

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ⁱ A version of this chapter also appears in Turner, Jennifer. 2016. *The Prison Boundary: Between Society and Carceral Space*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

ⁱⁱ Available at: <http://prisonerben.blogspot.co.uk/> [Accessed 12 August 2012].

ⁱⁱⁱ For examples see Hugunin (1999).

^{iv} Tattoos have a huge significance in criminal culture, although often constituting a metaphor for difference (see Shoham 2010). The proceedings of the court of the Old Bailey in London reveal that branding of criminals was a common occurrence in the 17th and 18th centuries (see Emsley et al. 2012). Convicts found guilty of manslaughter but not murder were often branded on the thumb (with a "T" for theft, "F" for felon, or "M" for murder), so that they would be unable to receive this benefit more than once. In a similar vein, prisoners at Auschwitz concentration camp were forcefully tattooed with a serial number marking their identity a skin-scarring technique employed deliberately to impose shame upon the individual who bore them (see United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2012).

^v The Koestler Awards and associated exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall Southbank Centre are both annual events. Fieldwork carried out at the 2011 exhibition formed part of a wider programme of research exploring interactions across the prison boundary at this time (see Turner 2016). Much of my analysis of the 2011 artwork could indeed apply to latter exhibitions. These have not been specifically interrogated due to the absence of official Koestler post-Award statistics and reports; and/or artist permissions to reproduce the work.

^{vi} Available at: www.lsa.umich.edu/pcap [Accessed 1 August 2012].

^{vii} Available at: <http://www.koestlertrust.org.uk/pages/uk2011/exhib2011gal1.html> [Accessed 16 September 2015].

^{viii} Curator and artist quotes were displayed alongside selected pieces during the exhibition. It is not clear whether artists were interviewed following the selection of their pieces for the exhibition, as the award application form does not facilitate any comments on the work.

^{ix} Scottish prisons and some specialist hospitals have a No Sales Policy.

^x 'Private cash' can contain any amount and is held by the governor. A prisoner's weekly spend entitlement varies depending on whether they are sentenced/convicted or on remand

and also what regime they are subject to e.g. basic, standard or enhanced. Allowing inmates to have access to more cash per week arguably contributes to systems of supply, demand and exchange that exist as an informal economy within the prison – a clear subversion of the normative positive associations with neoliberal markets.

^{xi} For a more detailed analysis of the exhibition tour in the UK, including details about the period at Pentonville Prison, see also Holden (2005).