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In their call for contributions to this relaunch issue of *Visual Culture in Britain* the new editors are signalling a fresh enthusiasm for studying this interdisciplinary field, by considering its most urgent challenges and exciting possibilities. The key assumption remains that there is plenty more to say about the changing role and status of vision, visuality and practices across the nation. Indeed, the call explicitly invites us to question how the notion of 'high and low' visual culture might be tested and probed while interrogating, problematizing and rethinking the very concept of 'Britishness' itself. In taking this lead my contribution seeks to develop my work on the iconography of punishment, which has analysed some of the dominant ways that penal rituals have been represented since the 1300s. My approach is one seeking to elaborate an aesthetic sociology that combines a historical sensitivity to images with the analytical concerns of social science.

The overall ambition is to indicate how punishment has an art history and by studying it as such the suggestion is that the gap between the disciplines might be bridged. It is driven by the premise that the history of punishment and the history of art are linked in ways that have yet to be fully recognized. For instance, studying the visual culture of punishment is a way of recovering a body of thought about how the poor 'saw' in the eighteenth-century Britain, not least since one of the many slang terms for the gallows was the 'the sheriff's picture frame' (Gamer, 2015). A small group of art historians have examined the relationships between martyrdom, passion iconography and the spectacle of punishment (see Edgerton, 1985; Merback, 1999; Mills, 2005). Others have studied a kind of image-making that is no longer extant, but which was prevalent in Europe from the thirteenth century up to the eighteenth century, where pictures and effigies of absent malefactors were tried, tormented and executed in absentia through a doctrine of *executio in effigie* (see Freedberg, 1989, Carney, 2015 and Terry-Fritsch, 2015). These are only a handful of examples, but they do offer a glimpse of what is a historically rich but relatively marginalized topic in the field of visual culture studies, which itself continues to occupy a fraught position between art history, cultural studies and post-structuralism (amongst the various 'posts').

In my research on the iconography of punishment the eighteenth-century artist William Hogarth plays a pivotal role. I have recently

argued that we need to place Hogarth in the evolving art world politics of early eighteenth-century London, taking a close look at the range of Hogarth's artistic vision to fully grasp the impact of it and the challenges it presented to the dominant aesthetic order (Carrabine, 2021). If seen from within the parameters of English art, which was largely characterized by its mediocrity, then Hogarth's contribution becomes even more striking. As the Marxist art historian Frederick Antal (1962:xvii) put it 'no other artist built up an art of such originality and such high quality upon so slender a native tradition'. Before 1700 England was regarded as a cultural backwater, most of its leading artists were hired from abroad, and the market for painting was limited, restricted to the nobility and aristocracy who had a particular taste for portraiture, while an old Puritan animosity towards images (as symptoms of 'Papist' idolatry) was only beginning to dissolve. Yet by 1800 London was one of the leading centres of European art, rivalling the kind of importance that cities like Florence, Venice, and Amsterdam had achieved in earlier centuries.

In this evolving situation, the artist was faced with two different kinds of employment: one sought the patronage of the older, patrician nobility, while the other catered to the 'new rich' and their tendency to buy rather than commission. The problem confronting ambitious artists was how to balance these competing interests, and it is also important to recognize that the divide between arts and crafts was somewhat fluid. These were not yet two worlds, rather the distinctive art world that developed in and around St Martin's Lane was one that preserved certain features of the artisanal, communal, workshop-based model, which was the hallmark of urban European art centres for centuries before. Yet at the same time, the artists and artisans working in this neighbourhood deliberately cultivated the new commercial market, pursuing an economic orientation towards mercantilism, rather than institutional or private patronage. In doing so, they developed a corporate style, strongly influenced by the Continental rococo, or 'the modern taste', as it was known at the time and predicated upon an advanced and innovative concept of design (Sloboda, 2019:246–247). Much of Hogarth's own graphic work and his famous 'conversation pieces' were influenced by French rococo engravers and painters, though it was to a Low Country tradition that the London market especially looked. Dutch art was the first to celebrate domestic space, as well as to 'satirize its disruption' (Schama, 1987:391), in the century before. This tradition informed the visual art of William Hogarth to the extent that the question of his 'Dutchness' is crucial to understanding his position in the art world of eighteenth-century London.

Hogarth was born in 1697 near Smithfield market, where London's cattle were sold, the son of an ambitious schoolmaster of modest means who became bankrupt after a failed business venture. As a result, the

family were confined to the Fleet, the city's debtors' prison. The Hogarth's struggles were little different from countless others down on their luck, and the young William had to 'shift for himself' as he put it, as an apprentice in a silver workshop for 7 years. It was here he learnt the engraving skills that enabled him to open his own business as an engraver of prints and of metal in his mother's house in 1720. In that same year, he enrolled in London's first academy of painting and drawing in rooms off St Martin's Lane, when it closed in 1724 he studied in Sir James Thornhill's similar academy in Covent Garden. He married Thornhill's daughter, Jane, in 1729, at which point his career took flight (Gatrell, 2013:264). Hogarth quickly exploited his family connections and by the early 1730s, he was thriving as a painter of portrait groups, as well as achieving some success with his satirical paintings.

Yet what cannot be ignored is that from the age of 20 to 35 Hogarth repeatedly drew prisons, more than any other contemporary artist, and while we have no way of knowing if his childhood experiences in the Fleet haunted or hardened him, he is captivated by images of confinement. As his biographer Jenny Uglow (1997:150) puts it he 'reworked the image, as if trying to divest himself of its feel, like a dog shaking off rain' but at the same time, 'he clung to it like a criminal returning to the place of crime, as if working to control it and fix it in brushstrokes and ink'. It is also important to recognize that prisons of various descriptions are becoming a feature of urban life and in the case of London, which Daniel Defoe (1724–26/1986:321–2) thought contained more prisons 'than any City in Europe' in the 1720s during his tour of Britain, there is detailed an extensive carceral network that is worth examining in more detail. After listing some twenty-seven 'public gaols', he identifies a host of 'private houses of confinement' that are 'little purgatories, between prison and liberty'. The most numerous of which were 119 'Spunging Houses' for debtors, followed by 15 'private mad houses' and an assortment of 'houses' reserved for political prisoners, who were frequently dispersed among the different institutions to nullify the threat of insurrection and opposition (Harding et al, 1985:85). It is difficult now to comprehend the extent to which imprisonment figured in the life of the city. An indication of their significance can be gleaned from the way the 'body politic demanded that prisons be rebuilt before the churches' after the Great Fire of London in 1666, and they were the 'only new City buildings to be awarded parliamentary subsidy' (White, 2009:71).

Among the most important were Newgate, rebuilt in 1667 and had long been the most famous municipal prison based in the site of an ancient Roman gatehouse, which had held criminal felons since the twelfth century. Likewise, the moated medieval Fleet prison was rebuilt after the fire and remained one of the three main gaols for debtors in London alongside the Marshalsea and the King's Bench. The 'New-Bridewell' listed by Defoe had replaced the earlier palace (known as

Saint Bride's well) destroyed by the fire, which had been set up for correcting the idle and bawdy through hard labour. By this time, Bridewell had become the generic term for the House of Correction, punishing a range of miscreants (mostly apprentices, servants, prostitutes and vagabonds) with the exception of felons, who were detained in public gaols. Although there were separate institutions for distinctive kinds of offender (debtors, felons and misdemeanants) the divisions were not fixed and firm. There were also many mixed prisons where the different categories mingled together, but the decisive factor of prison life for all prisoners remained its cost. Fees varied, but they were payable on admission and release, and at every point in between – such that life inside remained largely unchanged since the medieval period. Every kind of provision and privilege could be brought for a price, irons could be lightened or evaded for a fee, food and alcohol were available, resulting in a lucrative trade in goods and services for the gaoler who could profit from whatever commercial opportunities they could facilitate.

Consequently, it has been concluded that the 'fundamental cruelty of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century imprisonment was therefore the cruelty of extortion' (Evans, 1982:23). The revelation of abuses occasionally prompted the authorities to intervene and one of the more significant attempts to reform conditions came at the end of the 1720s. The immediate trigger leading James Oglethorpe to question the state of the gaols in Parliament was the death of his friend Robert Castel in the Fleet in November 1728. Castel had been a promising architect but had been committed to the Fleet for debt and unable to pay the gaoler's fee for better quarters was taken to a 'sponging house' (so called because they squeezed the prisoner's money out of him) where 'the Small-Pox then raged' (cited in White, 2009:76). Castel contracted the disease and died within a month. The Gaol's Committee Oglethorpe established quickly set about highlighting widespread abuses in their report on conditions in Marshalsea and the Fleet, achieving enduring celebrity in the process but little in the way of concrete change.

The Committee reported that prisoners were dying on almost daily basis, yet contrary to the law of the kingdom, no coroner's inquest had been convened for a Marshalsea death in years. The story was widely reported in the press, and Hogarth depicted the Committee in action in several versions for different patrons. An early sketch vividly captures the dramatic confrontation between the gaoler and an abused prisoner, while a later painting (see Figure 1) has been described as a more 'insipid' (Beckett, 1948:225) rendering of the scene, which is more like an 'official group portrait, bland and corporate' (Uglow, 1997:147). Hogarth was commissioned by one of the Committee's members to paint the examination of the notorious gaoler Thomas Bambridge at the Fleet and this will have brought him into contact with parliamentary

Figure 1. The gaols committee of the house of commons, by William Hogarth, ca 1729. Source: National Portrait Gallery. UsethisImage–NationalPortrait Gallery (npg.org.uk) Free academic licence.

circles, and advance his career, but it also displays his concern with imprisonment and injustice. The scene still contrasts a half-starved prisoner, in rags, bent before the reputable members, while various instruments of torture surround him. Standing in the left hand corner is the shifty Bambridge being questioned, but our attention is clearly directed to the helpless captive at the centre of the picture, and in doing so the picture has a striking moral tale to tell. It anticipates two of his most famous sequences *The Harlot's Progress* (1730/32) and *The Rake's Progess* (1734/35), which chart the demise of naïve protagonists caught up in corrupt social institutions. In the former series of engravings, the contradictions surrounding prostitution and sex trafficking are explored through the plight of a vulnerable country girl tricked into the occupation and her journey through the brothels of Covent Garden, before ending up in a Bridewell forced to beat hemp and eventually dying of veneral disease. The brutalizing forces of city life are also portrayed in the Rake's riches to rags story, wasting away his inherited wealth on high and low living as he then descends through London's spaces of confinement – from imprisonment in a debtor's prison, to the madness of Bedlam.

The juxtaposition between respectable and criminal is a persistent theme in Hogarth's work, often speaking to the power of ruthless economic and sexual forces destroying human beings and exploiting social relations. These political points are most often made through satire and many literary

and visual sources highlighted the failings of the legal system and mocked the rituals of punishment. The work that most revels in the many contradictions governing representations of crime, justice and punishment during this era is John Gay's (1728) hugely successful musical drama *The Beggar's Opera*. Set in the criminal underworld rather than royal palaces, it gleefully parodies the generic conventions of the then fashionable Italian opera, the ploy of associating Newgate society with larger political corruption exposed contradictions at the heart of the social order. Hogarth painted the play many times, and the prison scene depicted borrows from a Baroque tradition of theatrical stage design that was to have a major influence on the Gothic imagination emerging much later in the century.

The darker side of London life is dramatized in Hogarth's most celebrated work, and the compositions themselves are often conceived as if presented on a stage. Literary connections were also crucial in forging this attitude to narrative, which lent a distinct modernity to British painting, through offering a 'new kind of psychological intensity much under the influence of the novel – for example, Richardson's *Pamela* (1740)' (Vaughan, 1999:10). These connections ran both ways. Richardson clearly borrowed 'from Hogarth's progresses the particular Hogarthian graphic version of a play, with big scenes, symbolic gestures and objects' (Paulson, 1996:39) freezing not only a moment in time, but a series of spaces. Both men show what it is like to dream of being a fine lady, and the destruction of those dreams by figures of respectability and authority. The slide from innocence to damnation demonstrated, by analogy, the similar fate 'of the British people in the hands of such "Great Men"' (Uglow, 1997:195), testing and probing the notion of 'high' and 'low' culture. Hogarth also occupied a dominant position within the dominating class, he could never bring himself to fully trust the 'great men', but he simultaneously courted their patronage while exposing their hypocrisy.

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