

CONVERSATION ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

A talk with Ian Loader and Richard Sparks

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1. Happy accidents

Dzur: Let's start with a personal question. What do you think brought you to the study of criminology, to which you've devoted your careers.

Loader: I think a mixture of things. I'm a refugee from a law degree. I did law as an undergraduate degree, which you can do here in the UK, with the express and conscious intention of becoming a practising lawyer. Somewhere along the way I lost interest in being a practising lawyer and started to find certain aspects of academic legal inquiry not that interesting. I did a law degree which had lots of social science in it: we sampled bits of anthropology and politics and sociology. Then I did criminology as an undergraduate subject, and I got interested in that. That's one strand of it.

The second strand is I was at the time living in Sheffield during the [1984-84 miners' strike](#) and got very politically interested in a whole series of questions, some of which were to do with policing. I had a political interest in policing, which I suppose has carried on ever since. Some of these things were just happy accidents. I went off to do a Master's, and then a PhD in Edinburgh. During my Master's, I applied for a couple of non-academic jobs, and there's a reasonable chance if I [had](#) got one of them, I would never have been an academic.

Dzur: Fortuitous. How about you, Richard? What set you down this path?

Sparks: I think there have been quite a lot of happy accidents in my story, too. Although I don't consider myself a refugee from anything, [although](#) I started off as a student studying modern languages rather than social sciences, and that was poorly enough taught at the time that I did [very much start looking for more exciting things to do become a kind of refugee. This My flight](#), took place [a couple of years earlier](#), while I was still an undergraduate. By the time that I came to my final year as an undergraduate, one of the courses I was taking as [by now](#) a sociology

student was in *sociology of Deviance*, taught by Colin Sumner, who then later became my PhD supervisor. That just excited me in a new way. I was interested in lots of my courses, but never captivated in quite the way that that one took me. All I knew at that point was I wanted to do some more. And one thing kind of led to another.

For both of us as people entering criminology as a field, we're probably not the *first* members of the *first* cohort of people who took it on more as an academic pursuit than a practice-related activity, but it was certainly not the norm. In my master's program, for example, in Cambridge, at least half of the people there were 20 years older than me, and were experienced practitioners in various criminal justice-related fields. They were moving somewhat in the other direction *from me*, or taking a sabbatical into academia, whereas I was moving from being an undergraduate social science student to going into graduate school; that wasn't necessarily the *typical* trajectory prior to that point.

Loader: There are a couple of other things that are worth saying, at least in my case, partly *having* to do with having sponsors and good teachers in your early days. I was the first person in my family to go to university, so the idea that you could spend a working life in university was in all kinds of ways really alien to me. I had no support structure around me or anyone to look to, to say, well, that's the kind of thing you could do with your life. My dad shook his head in incredulity, he just couldn't wrap his head around the fact that this was actually a job. I had lots of hesitation about entering this as a field of activity that one might be able to get paid for; it felt like a real leap in the dark.

But for me criminology seemed like an exciting thing. It was a kind of space in which you could ask all sorts of big questions about order and justice. Of course, that was partly a product of the whole NDC (National Deviancy Conference of critical criminologists) revolution, which made an intellectual break with a rather more grounded and pragmatic and applied form of criminology, and that *was what* was exciting. I met lots of those people. Tony Jefferson, who was one of the authors of *Policing the Crisis*, was my academic supervisor at Sheffield. I was then supervised by Richard Kinsey, who to some extent, took me under his wing, and was also taught by David Garland. I always thought of criminology as an intellectually exciting thing to do, not something that was limiting and constraining in the ways that it often could look like from the outside.

2. Public criminology with a question mark

Dzur: On the question of academics and practice, you for a long time have talked about a kind of public criminology. That's the title of one of your books. I wonder if you could talk about how that differs from the ways of being a criminologist that you encountered when you went to study this at university, and what you were seeing around you as you entered academia.

Sparks: The title of our book is *Public Criminology?* with a question mark. *We often point that out to people. #That*'s important to us, if not to anybody else, because we tried to be clear from the outset that we were *investigating* something rather than propagating it. We wanted to know what this was, or might be, as much as we had something that we wanted to sell—*even*

if that's a slightly reductive term for the ways in which people advocate public engagement. On the other hand, we don't want to be evasive. The book is certainly full of a concern for responsibility, whatever that is, or how it is that we, as academics, contribute to accountability, in a variety of ways.

The only reason for entering those qualifications is to say that it wasn't necessarily that we thought we were inventing something different from what already existed. Indeed, there were quite a few cases in point close to both of us, and Ian's already mentioned some of them, who were very much already doing the kinds of things that we took to be important when we started, and still felt were important when we finished that project. I came into very close contact during my time in Cambridge, during and after towards the end of my PhD, with Tony Bottoms, my first employer, as I worked for him as a researcher in the couple of years immediately following my PhD. We write about him in the book as being one kind of exemplary person in our thinking about these things: but there are also others, doing things in different ways. What we were trying to get at was the sense in which people could both strenuously pursue curiosity-driven research and still have a very clear sense of their public responsibilities, and not allow either one to kind-of displace or trump, or overly dominate the other. Those were amongst the things that we were trying to capture. Is that right, Ian?

Loader: Yes, I think so. The thought has just occurred to me, going back to the biographical entry--point to this conversation, that for criminologists working in the UK of our generation--and this must also be true of the US--we'd only ever known a subject that was thoroughly and deeply politicized from the get-go. We didn't know There was no sense of what it might mean to study that subject in a context where the political climate, to use/borrow the metaphor that we adopted in the book use, was much cooler, where crime was much more insulated from political competition and media discourse. That was just part of the sea that we swam in. This field of study had this kind of character and had this kind of prominence in public discourse in a way that I don't any longer think it has, to anywhere near the same extent. If you've been schooled in that for 20 years, and that's what you've been trying to wrap your head around, it's quite hard to come to terms with the idea that your subject matter isn't quite as deeply politicized as it was in say, the 1980s and 1990s.

So Public Criminology? was a book born of that context and written by two people who'd spent their time only ever knowing criminology, the practice of criminology, in a world where crime was a deeply culturally and politically contested topic, and therefore had to think about what it might mean to practice something called criminology, and to engage in the political and policy process as a criminologist, in that highly politicized context. Part of the point that we were trying to make is that for all the value in that setting of trying to insist on certain kinds of facts or evidence as a way of trying to encourage responsibility, that was both necessary but insufficient. There are other ways in which criminologists could be alert to and remind other people of the range of things politically that are at stake when people argue about crime. Some of that has to do with the kind-of meaning and significance of a series of salient political concepts: order, legitimacy, justice, freedom, rights. All those things are in the room. There's always a lot more at stake when people are arguing about crime than simply the question of how you control or

reduce it. That bleeds ~~ss-over~~ into the point that we're trying to make in the book, really, that part of what you might be trying to do in ~~seeking~~ trying to foster a more intelligent public conversation about crime is to bring forth for discussion ~~out~~ the full range of things that are at stake.

Dzur: I take your point, that you weren't proselytizing or offering up a simple approach or a simple method, but rather taking part in a network of academics who are already engaged in this kind of work and spotlighting it. Do you think it is harder now to be a public criminologist, with or without the question mark, than when the book was published?

Sparks: I don't know really. Possibly not, because although certain issues remain or move into focus and become very hot, it's not necessarily the case that the overheating that we address in the book is just an endlessly intensifying process. Indeed, I think it fluctuates, almost unbidden, and in ways that are sometimes difficult to explain. For example, I've noticed latterly in some of my courses in Edinburgh, that the wave of enthusiasm that was around between ten and five years ago amongst students for doing more penal political subjects, for doing courses on, in my case, prisons, has somewhat subsided. There are still plenty of students who find those things interesting but it's not necessarily the crest of the wave. That partly reflects ways in which some of these questions have slipped a little bit out of the absolute forefront of public attention – because the peak of mass incarceration in the United States seems to have passed, for instance, at least for now. Other things take their place for our students' generation, and those have more to do with climate, for example, but they also have to do with topics that arise elsewhere in the criminological and related trades; ~~to do with~~ – questions of sexuality and gender, for example, and of migration.

While these things remain contested and remain important, it doesn't necessarily follow that they are always and everywhere important in the same ways. One thing we've become more aware of now than we had been when we were working on the book is that more global and comparative dimension of some of those questions, the ways in which they're heated and the ways in which they are contested is really very variable, and that's central interesting, too.

Loader: The book was very much rooted in our experience, which is principally focused on the kind of politics of crime and punishment in one jurisdiction in the global North, with some comparative reference to other places. And it was written to some degree before some of the more thoroughgoing debates now taking place in the field around Southernising or decolonising criminology, of extending the range of reference for how you think about these topics and the kinds of resources and voices that are now kind of part of the conversation.

If we were writing this book again now, it might in all kinds of important ways look very different. While there was an argument for a certain figure, whom we called the democratic underlabourer, it was an exercise in *not* trying to proselytize on behalf of public criminology. But it was also for the most part an attempt to just clarify the kind of practices that were around in the field, and the kind of dilemmas that people encountered, and the ways in which they sought to resolve them. My hope is that some of that might actually still be of some assistance in other

parts of the world, for people whose experience and socialization and politics weren't formed in the setting that ours was.

3. Police and the public

Dzur: The problem of the public--what the public is and how you connect to the public--is a live issue for every country. As long as there are questions of state legitimacy and high levels of public distrust, you have concerns about connecting to the public. Turning to the more local, let's talk about policing in the years since *Public Criminology?* was published. Have you seen any changes in the ways police connect with the public? Are any departments getting into any of the big public conversations about the intersecting ideas and issues, Ian, that you were talking about? I don't know if I've seen any of that, so I'm curious about your experiences.

Loader: I'm not sure that I've seen it. I was trying to think through what it might mean to answer that question with a 'yes'. In the UK, one of the things that we might point to is the commitment over the last two or three decades to forms of public engagement--not only, but among senior levels of the organization. It's become built into the question of what policing is, rather than being an add-on to proper policing, and that's been institutionalized in all kinds of ways. You might say it is all rather limited and unsatisfactory, but it's nonetheless been institutionalized. Procedural justice theory has become extremely influential in policing quarters not just in the UK, but across large parts of the world. Therefore, a whole series of political questions around trust and legitimacy and accountability have become much more mainstream in the policing world, and no longer just seem pushed on the police organization by academics or by outsiders.

You can register all that as change, but alongside that you need to reckon with the fact that in this country in recent years there's been a whole series of very damning reports on the police, which have found a stubborn persistence of institutionalized forms of racism, sexism, [and](#) discrimination of various kinds. There's been a whole series of ongoing and very high-profile scandals, and marked defensiveness among police institutions to properly reckon with what might be required to grasp some of that. Though it's a cliché, one is very tempted to say that lots of things have changed, and nothing has changed. Some of that might just have a rootedness in the ways in which policing as an institution is located in highly unequal capitalist societies, that there are constraints on the ways in which you can do this thing differently.

The other thing that has changed, and this is not unrelated to what we were just talking about in respect of public criminology, is the sharpening of the debate around policing, certainly, since the killing of George Floyd. I teach a graduate class in policing every year, and the class now [tends to](#) divide between people who turn up wanting to know about how police institutions work and wanting to improve them and make them more effective, or accountable, or better governed, or more engaged with their communities, and students who turn up with a wholesale critique of police as an institution, and who think it's just deeply embedded in the reproduction of forms of racist and class violence, and is unreformable. They're deeply committed to that idea. Lots of those students are North American, though not exclusively North American. There's been a sharpening of the discussion, and I often experience this in classes having groups

of students who talk past each other, because they're interested in the same institution in very different ways.

It has put a whole series of questions on the agenda of criminological, but to some extent also, police discussion: such as why the police have become a frontline agency for managing mental health. There's something both bizarre and deeply troubling about any society that treats the police force as its frontline agency for managing mental health. And serious police officers worry about that as well.

Dzur: In some ways you could see that as a healthy development. Your graduate seminars are having dialogues that wouldn't have occurred ten years ago. It's a polarized dialogue, as you say, between institutionalists, let's call them, and abolitionists, but at least it's a dialogue.

Loader: It's a dialogue. It's worth pointing out that our students come to us as graduate students and have been through university education. But ~~it doesn't always seem the case that it's something that's these concerns aren't just~~ a product of their schooling. It's often a product of a certain kind of life experience, a certain kind of organizing in their own communities, and to some degree that runs counter to some of the things that we've just been saying about the ~~kind of~~ heat being taken out of some ~~kinds~~ of crime problems. The relationship to policing is a topic that seems to have become hotter, and the ~~kinds-of~~ issues at stake seem to have become more sharply delineated than was the case a decade ago.

Dzur: I completely agree, and I see this in the US, too. But I'm wondering if the sort of sharp division that we're noticing between abolitionists and institutionalists is a function of the recalcitrance of police departments at actually having genuine conversations about what they're doing, and instead just rolling out a procedural justice program which has no teeth, or just having a kind of deliberative forum which has no teeth. Is that one possibility?

Loader: Yes. Now, I'm guessing, but I think at some level you find police officers who are willing to engage in these conversations and who know to some extent that they're policing problems to which there is no policing solution. I've thought for a long time that a society that's serious about public safety would think and talk much less about the police than ours does, and yours does, and think more about a whole range of other ~~kinds-of~~ social institutions that might want to step up in all kinds of ways. But that presents institutional difficulties. What that means for a senior police officer is, if you get into this discussion, is that starts to look like less resources, lower budgets, responsibilities being devolved elsewhere. Even for the most open-minded officer willing to have this conversation, that can become professionally quite a difficult place to go.

Dzur: Richard, do you want to get in on this?

Sparks: This is very much Ian's more specialist area than mine, and I agree with everything that ~~he has~~ said. Going back to the earlier phase of this conversation, what we're talking about when we talk about criminologists doing criminology and politics together, what's clear about

those conversations when you're in the room trying to understand what's going on, or to make any kind of contribution, is that we didn't introduce the politics into those discussions on this occasion. It's just all already there, and it's there as well in conversations that take place amongst practitioners. There are battles going on for the soul of these institutions, to which we can make some kinds of contributions, or not, that we try to identify. That goes for both the institutionalists and the abolitionists in a way because the abolitionists are not deluded as to whether or not the institutions are going away anytime soon. They know that whatever revolution might be in train, it's a long one, and that's just extremely interesting. I think that more alert practitioners do know a lot about that. The questions of what it is that they seek from academic interlocutors, or whatever, is quite varied and quite sophisticated and it's an interesting part of the story, and that's also partly what our book was about.

4. A changing criminological landscape

Dzur: I want to shift to talk about your new book, which is a return to the town of Macclesfield, which you had visited in the 1990s. Were you surprised at anything that you encountered?

Loader: There are a couple of things worth saying. One is not unrelated to the conversation we've just been having around the reduction in the political heat about crime. I was much more curious this time around as to what we might empirically find when you ask people what troubles them living in this place, this place being a town of 50,000 people of relative safety and moderate prosperity just south of Manchester. I didn't think I was in a good position to have an educated guess at the kinds of things that people would tell us, whereas back in the mid-1990s, I was not especially surprised by what many people told us worried them, even if it was interesting what they said. Worries about certain kinds of property crime – burglary, car theft, car damage, a whole series of worries about disorder in public space – these were very prominent in the mid-1990s. They've not featured this time round anywhere near as significantly as they did then, and they don't seem to do the same kinds of symbolic work in constituting for people what it might mean and feel like to live in this place at this point in time.

To use borrow a term we've been playing around with analysing our data, the crime seems to have become more episodic in people's sense of place there rather than central or constitutive to it. Some people still get victimized, and crime does happen. But people respond to it by thinking, 'this happens here because it happens sometimes everywhere'. That's the local version of the more national story we've just been describing, in which crime is no longer doing quite the kind of symbolic boundary maintenance work that it was doing in the mid-1990s. Crudely put, some of that work now is done politically and culturally by questions of migration which have become much more highly charged. It's no accident that populist politics revolves more around those questions than it does around crime, even though the migration question is not inseparable from crime, though I don't think it ever really reduces to it. So t That's been one feature.

Alongside that, we've noticed much more of a concern with what might broadly be called a series of environmental harms, and a kind of consciousness towards the quality and state of

people's immediate environment. Much of that takes the form of ~~what criminologists for many decades have called~~ low-level disorders, or what criminologists and others have long called incivilities of various kinds. Some of those incivilities can be surprising ones; it can be people's irritation about parked cars and traffic congestion, or being angered by ~~and~~ the ~~kind of~~ externalities of housing developments, and the like.

Dzur: Does a general coarseness in public interactions fall under incivility? The other day I was driving to the airport, and I saw a bumper sticker on a car that said, 'fuck off'.

Sparks: Right, I think that is uncivil! On the other hand, we haven't encountered anyone talking about exactly that.

Dzur: You use different slang over there.

Sparks: Well, we're familiar with the term. Yes, coarseness, certainly, but I think it's still the case that people do treat events of the kind that we're talking about as signals or indicators in some ways of stresses in ~~the~~ social relations, and the way the world is tending. What you're calling general coarseness or rudeness would certainly be part of that. But the things that people read as **irresponsible**, particularly environmentally irresponsible, are also there. We don't want to overgeneralize, but certainly a lot of people are very sensitized to questions about litter, small-scale local environmental harms, but their concerns include things that are more than purely about misdoings of individuals. Pollution of local water courses, for example, matters a lot to people in all kinds of ways, and that has ~~because they have~~ to do with a broad concern for their shared habitat. The criminological landscape has often been depicted as one that would otherwise be peaceful, but is punctuated by incidents of nastiness or disorder, or whatever, whereas I think what we're trying to get at here is people's implicit sense of a kind of viable shared space in which they wish to live. That doesn't only take the form of local spectacles, of antisocial behaviour or criminality, perpetrated by relatively powerless young people. It's much wider than that.

Loader: Yes, I think that's true. Those kinds of concerns are perfectly capable of coming with their own attendant forms of moralizing and blame and scapegoating, a realization that there must be people around here who don't care about this environment in the way that I do and are actively despoiling it in some ways. But I think the more prominent discourse was ~~about~~ a certain concern, and sometimes expressed anger, about what is perceived to be kind of institutional state failure to just perform the basic acts of infrastructural governance, of looking after a place. Even in this relatively prosperous place people are noticing a kind of evident decline in the ~~kind of~~ quality and liveability of their immediate environment. That's what they've spoken ~~meant~~ to us about when we ask them, 'What bothers you living in this town at this particular moment in history?'

Dzur: Are people drawing political connections to state austerity when they talk about this?

Sparks: Yes, sometimes.

Loader: On occasion, yes, very explicitly. It's an interesting question what's going on there and how you might best interpret it. We could, because the material was there, just write another 'broken Britain' book. There are lots of 'broken Britain' books on the shelves at the moment. I'm personally reluctant to do that, partly because I think there are other kinds of things that are more interesting that are going on here, which have to do with the changing ways in which people are oriented towards their environment, both local and global. And some of that could be a post-pandemic thing. We all became much more local creatures for a while. Some of that might be a local iteration of environmental consciousness, a sense that we haven't done very well at stewarding this planet, and if we carry on like that, the planet is going to be an increasingly inhospitable place to live. And some of that consciousness is very global. But I also wonder whether you find some of that in the ~~kind-of~~ politics of a particular place, the small-p politics of a particular place. And that's what we've encountered.

Sparks: Another problem with the 'broken Britain' genre is it turns out not to be very politically interesting, and certainly not very hopeful, because the tendency is to depict people who are struggling with various issues of disaffection or exclusion as being somehow, therefore, all inherently ripe for capture by the far right, all disposed towards lots of negative reasons for voting for Brexit and being stuck in a position of being resentful, but not very insightful about their own predicaments. And that's not our observation of how people talk about the situations really. People both have considerably more to bring to the table about their understandings of the conditions of their everyday lives, but also are often doing things about it that are much more interesting than all of that makes it sound.

We've become much more interested on this occasion in questions of the self-organization of communities around local politics of protest and of care for their local habitats as well, in practical ways.

Loader: There's one other thing worth saying that connects this study back to the ~~kind-of~~ conversations we were just having about public criminology. The first study was conducted a decade before we wrote *Public Criminology?* and this one's been conducted pretty much a decade afterwards. There is a telling difference in our own orientation to the place and to what we think we're doing. Though we were very deeply immersed in the town when we did the first study, it was in the way that anthropologists immerse themselves. We were curious about what it meant for people to live there, and we did our best to try and find out. But the form of engagement was a rather distant kind of anthropological curiosity. And it wasn't an engagement in the ~~kind-of~~ politics of the town itself. We did the work, we wrote the book, and our form of actual engagement in the place didn't go far beyond that and writing a short report.

This time around, it's felt to us that the whole project has had a much more deliberative ethos-- if you want to be grand about it. We've been very concerned from the start to have a different kind of relationship to the town and the people who live there and our informants. We have been much more committed, especially now, when we've got things to say, to, as Michael Burawoy put it, to trying to foster dialogue with people who are already in dialogue, about the

problems of the place in which they live. I don't know how much of that has been actually self-conscious on our part, at least at the beginning, but that's how the project has taken shape. It feels very different as a study in those terms this time around, than it did 25 years ago.

Dzur: Picking back up on your resistance to applying the 'broken Britain' narrative to what you're seeing on the ground in Macclesfield, I'm wondering if you are witnessing a shift in thinking about what needs to be done and who needs to do it. If the problems are no longer about catching and locking up the bad guys, but are more environmental, and indeed more multidisciplinary, perhaps people are recognizing that they can't just shout at the police department or the local council, but that something else needs to happen, and they need to be part of it. Is that one way of thinking about this?

Sparks: Yes, I think that might be a slightly rosier interpretation than the one that we want to necessarily commit to. But it's not far off. It may also be sometimes that when these kinds of discourses shift about, sometimes they also become more sophisticated. And people become less content with some quite easy answers, or alleged answers to the problems. Sometimes they do think about locking up bad guys, but they don't necessarily think the [key](#) bad guys are the local kids anymore. They've got different ideas about who the bad guys are and where they live. These are really interesting dimensions of it. They do have some of those consequences that you mentioned; they do result in people thinking about ways of taking action that are not just the old stories about vigilantism—in the negative interpretation of what that means. But there's also probably some kind of acknowledgement, when talking about the police and what it is that the police do, that the nature of those roles has diversified and become complicated, and in some ways less visible. For people involved in preventing harm through policing and related activities, an awful lot of the attention of those agencies has moved into less visible places because they've been tasked with things, such as abuse of kids, or gender-based violence in the domestic sphere, or things that come ~~to~~ into one's everyday life across the internet, that aren't actually out on the street but are nonetheless important kinds of order-maintaining tasks.

5. Thoughts on restorative justice

Dzur: This is a somewhat unfair question, since you haven't written a lot about restorative justice, but I'm curious about why that is so. I'd like to put you on the spot about what you think about the restorative justice programs that you've encountered or read about.

Loader: I'm not going to fully answer this question, but I can tell you what your question made me think. I've been thinking about why, for all my sympathy with the restorative justice project, that I've never written about it. And to some extent it goes back to where we started. I think the answer is that I never really think of myself as a criminal justice scholar. I don't really study criminal justice processes. I've dabbled in punishment, but only really dabbled, and my interest in policing is a product of the fact that they're very much engaged in questions of how you order everyday community life, and that's what really interests me. There's a way of thinking about restorative justice that is about those questions as well, but I think that's my best attempt to answer the question of why I've never really written about it.

Dzur: Richard, are you going to deflect this question like Ian did?

Sparks: Well, there are lots of things I've never written about, and if I've never written about them, it tends to be because I don't feel I know enough to write about them helpfully. That doesn't mean I'm not interested, or I don't read about them. Because the restorative justice field itself has grown and changed and evolved and diversified as much as it has, I'm constantly encountering it. Some of the most interesting things to me in that area have to do with what John Braithwaite, Ivo Aertsen, and others have been writing in the last few years about scaling up restorative justice to think in wider kinds of peace-making and conflict-resolving ways. That interests me greatly. When I read restorative justice literature and talk to restorative justice scholars, I always feel that we have a huge amount in common, including on the subjects that we've been talking about and in our research, because our research is about conversation, and is conducted through that medium. Even if we are not mainly concerned with restorative encounters in the context of criminal justice, we're interested in conversations about crime and justice. That's part of the same arena, isn't it?

Loader: That's also my non-deflecting answer. I have spent most of my career, when I've been working on policing, very interested in the question of how you can generate more participative forms of police governance, that create many more spaces for citizens to be productively involved in conversations. Not just about what do the police do, but what does public safety mean, and how can you deliver it, and who might do that? One of the whole points about the deliberative democratic underlabourer argument in *Public Criminology?* was to try to find ways of fostering more deliberative approaches to handling the whole crime question, whatever that might mean institutionally. Restorative justice is clearly part of that bigger picture.

If I have a worry, it is that I sometimes get the impression that restorative justice has sucked up all the utopian energy in our field. When people try and imagine what a better politics of crime and justice looks like, restorative justice frequently pops up as being the answer. That's not a fault of people who work on restorative justice, because it may be one large part of the answer, but it goes back to the [pointskind-of-questions](#) Richard just made about scaling up--actually trying to find the ways of imagining institutional arrangements for dealing with questions of harm and justice, which are much more deliberative and participative, and to that extent have a kind of family resemblance to restorative justice; principles, and practices. That seems to me to remain a challenge, and in a world of [kind-of](#) authoritarian populism, more of a challenge than ever, really.

Sparks: I think that just means they're part of the same family of inventions, really. When Braithwaite and others write about those things, they're no longer writing about restorative justice [only](#) in a kind of prescriptive sense of saying this is the right way to conduct a conference, and it looks like this, and these are the procedures, though that's important if that's what you're doing. It's also all about rights to participation and consideration and resolutions. Just following up one of the things Ian was saying earlier about how we've been doing this study and what might follow on from it, we don't really know what's going to happen after we've

written this book. But we're not ruling out not ever leaving Macclesfield. If we have more to say about it, it will be in that form, about ways in which we might contribute to stimulating those kinds of encounters between people and working out what their significance is.

Dzur: Is there any restorative justice happening in Macclesfield?

Sparks: On a low level, meaning in very local settings. There isn't a lot of restorative justice in the criminal justice context, but there's quite a lot on the neighbourhood problem-solving level.

Dzur: I don't mean to dwell on this, but I'm curious if, when you encounter restorative justice talk, there are certain conceptual terms that you hear, and you think, 'hmm, yeah, not for me'.

Loader: I need to think harder about this, but I'll just mention one by no means novel thought. I'm currently supervising a student working on transformative justice in the States, so maybe some of my thinking about this is shaped by that engagement. It's the word 'restoration', which implies putting back together something that existed previously, which may, in all kinds of ways, either at the interpersonal or institutional level, if you scale it up, actually be deeply problematic. What's required is something that looks more like transformation than restoration. I won't be the first person to have articulated that thought. [But in](#) response to - 'are there [any kind of](#) concepts or [boo](#)-words knocking around in this field that one has an adverse instinctive reaction to?' maybe the word 'restoration' is one of them, in my case.

Dzur: Yes, and that ties in with what you said about sucking up the utopian energy. Richard, any thoughts on that?

Sparks: I don't think that my relationship with this is [quite like](#) that. I don't feel that I have a resistance to restorative justice. I just think I'm working in an allied area. But that's a good place to be. As for the sucking up of utopian energy, I don't know whether that's what happens to utopian energy. I'm not sure. I think it's interesting that's one of its homes at the moment. It's important that it shouldn't be the only one.

I love reading the kinds of things that some of the most ambitious people writing in restorative justice write about. This returns to a book that [Janwe](#) edited some years ago with Susanne Karstedt and Heather Strang about emotions, crime, and justice. This is one of the places where people started to talk seriously about how those things circulate, the ways in which they get put to use for good or ill. And I think that's been an immense contribution.