Pre-crime paints a vivid picture, but – like the best scholarship – it left me with unanswered questions and a desire for more detail. For example, ‘justice’ is an important concept for McCulloch and Wilson, appearing in three different chapter titles. Pre-crime appears problematic because it is incommensurable with justice, but ‘justice’ is only loosely defined: a society in which people are ‘trusted rather than treated as presumptive enemies’ (p. 142). Without a clearer framework for justice, however, it is difficult to identify which aspect of pre-crime is problematic. Is it the transformation of populist prejudices and the catastrophic imagination into actionable intelligence? The emergence of questionable technologies and the concomitant mystification of prediction science? The reification of social inequalities? The violation of civil liberties and human rights? All of these contribute to pre-crime, and it would be useful to parse them in more detail to understand how, exactly, they trench upon justice.

Similarly, the authors do a fine job of extending an analysis rooted in terrorism to the criminal justice context (e.g. control orders for organised crime and ‘bikies’), but it would be fascinating to apply a pre-crime framework to other criminal justice/security phenomena. Preventive detention regimes, crimmigration (Stumpf, 2006), the opaque workings of the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court and the spread of sexually violent predator (SVP) legislation would all benefit enormously from pre-crime analysis. So, too, might substance abuse: after all, civilly committing sex offenders with mental disorders who present a risk of future offending is logically indistinguishable from civilly detaining drug addicts who are likely to continue abusing illegal drugs (Krongard, 2002).

Pre-crime is an urgent and important piece of socio-legal scholarship. McCulloch and Wilson’s book breaks new ground in the criminological literature on risk and challenges its readers to confront hard realities about the growing convergence between national security and criminal justice.

References

Dawn K Cecil, *Prison life in popular culture: From the Big House to Orange is the New Black*, Lynne Rienner: Boulder, CO, 2015; 233 pp. ISBN 9781626372795, $58.00 USD (hbk)

Reviewed by: James Oleson, University of Auckland, New Zealand

I recently published an article suggesting that the 18th century shift away from visible, corporal punishments to concealed, carceral punishments eliminated Durkheimian social rituals of punishment (Oleson, 2015). This vacuum, I suggest, has been filled through the consumption of crime and punishment media. In movies and on television,
at least, we can glean normative lessons about good, evil, justice, redemption, and revenge. Accordingly, I was very excited when I noted the publication of Dawn K Cecil’s book, *Prison Life in Popular Culture: From the Big House to Orange Is the New Black*. Although there are literally dozens of books and hundreds of articles on the topic of prison film, Cecil’s book provides a fresh and insightful look into representation of prisons in contemporary television and film.

Although Cecil’s book is entitled *Prison Life in Popular Culture*, her work does not provide a comprehensive examination of the prison in all aspects of popular culture. For example, despite America’s seemingly insatiable appetite for prison culture (Novek, 2009) there is no real discussion of the prison in fine art, literature, theater, architecture, design, fashion, tourism, video games, or toys. There *is* some discussion of prison music (e.g. Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, and prison rap) and prisons in cartoons (e.g. *The Simpsons* and *The Boondocks*), but this is more exploratory than encyclopaedic. What Cecil’s book *does* cover are US-made films and television shows about prisons. But the definition of “prison film” is notoriously elusive (Bennett, 2006), and Cecil’s attempt to focus on the “pure prison film” (e.g. pp. 18, 35–36)—the story about incarceration rather than the story that is incidentally set within a prison—necessarily involves subjective judgment. This has profound implications for the scope of the book and might have been more carefully discussed. The decision to concentrate on pure prison also excludes a broad swath of titles that—arguably—might belong within the prison genre (e.g. execution films, POW and political prisoner films, escape films, or science fiction prison films). Excluding foreign works and titles only peripherally related to prisons, however, tightens Cecil’s focus and allows her to impose valuable order on a sprawling and unruly subject matter.

*Prison Life in Popular Culture* is arranged into 10 well-structured chapters. Chapter one sketches out the history of the prison and its representations, as well as laying out the structure for the book. Chapter two contrasts the depiction of prisons in newspapers with the depiction of prisons in less expected places (such as in *Sesame Street* or in product marketing). Chapter three examines prison drama in films (across the golden age, the rehabilitation era, the confinement era, and the modern era); chapter four looks at prison drama on television (e.g. *Oz* and *Prison Break*). Chapter five examines prison documentaries on film (distinguishing historical, deterrence, and investigative types); chapter six looks at prison documentaries on television (*Lockup* and its progeny). Chapter seven looks at women in prison in film and television (distinguishing romantic melodramas, exploitation films, and modern dramas); chapter eight looks at women in prison in documentaries. The penultimate chapter, chapter nine, examines prison music and prison comedy, and chapter 10 draws all of these themes together into a solid conclusion. The chapter titles occasionally muddy the structure of Cecil’s book. For example, chapter five (“Early Prison Documentaries”) canvasses film documentaries up to 2012, but chapter six (“Modern Prison Documentaries”) extends as far back as 2000. Given these dates, an early/modern distinction does not make sense, although this structure *does* make sense if it is understood as distinguishing film from television documentaries.

The introduction to the prison is not as developed as it might be. Although Table 1.1 helpfully parses the US penitentiary/prison system into a handy timeline, key scholarship in the history of the prison (e.g. Foucault, 1977; Morris & Rothman, 1995; Rothman,
1971) are conspicuously absent from the bibliography. The discussion of the emergent modern prison is correspondingly underdeveloped. This, however, is not an insurmountable defect in a book about representations of the prison in television and film. Potentially more problematic, however, are absent references to relevant works about prison film and television. Although Cecil’s bibliography is impressive, it is not comprehensive. It does not include, for example, prison movie texts such as Captured on Film (Crowther, 1989) or Prison Pictures from Hollywood (Parish, 2001).

Cecil’s book does not examine all forms of prison culture, and excludes even feature films and television programmes that might be germane to the study of prison in popular culture. Nevertheless, in the tradition of the work of Ray Surette (2015), Prison Life in Popular Culture will be exceptionally useful to anyone interested in the relationship between punitive societies and media representations of the prison. Cecil’s chronologies are valuable tools for understanding the evolving nature of the imagined prison, and her film taxonomies have the potential to organise seemingly heterogeneous works of media. Cecil’s chapter on MSNBC’s Lockup franchise and its successors is frankly the best I have read on the topic, and her discussion of Orange Is the New Black is thoughtful, insightful, and timely. Prison Life in Popular Culture synthesizes the best existing scholarship on prison media and extends it into new directions. It is a fine addition to the cultural criminologist’s shelf and will be especially valuable for students and lay readers seeking an introduction to the prison in media.

References


Reviewed by: Jude McCulloch, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

One of Routledge’s ‘major works’ and part of its Critical Concepts in Criminology series, this four-volume set edited by James Sheptycki reprints 63 articles, chapters,