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Borders Breached, Conventional Claims Questioned

Welcome to Volume 2 of *Crime Media Culture: An International Journal*. At a time when many of our geographical and cultural borders are ever more closely guarded, it seems apt to reflect on the intellectual and artistic borders breached and intersected across the pages of *CMC*. As the scholarship appearing in *CMC* suggests, these borders – most notably, but not exclusively, between criminology, media studies, and cultural studies – are often porous, and at times fully permeable. Indeed, this journal could scarcely exist otherwise. The diverse contributions to Volume 1 of *CMC*, we feel, clearly illustrate the high quality of academic research, intellectual debate, political commentary and artistic engagement that can result from a truly cross-disciplinary interrogation of crime, media and culture. We are pleased to report, then, that the eclectic, cross-cutting intellectual revolution we spoke of in our first editorial appears to be well under way. Despite this, though, we would suggest that meaningful and sustained analysis between and across disciplines remains an important and pressing challenge.

Even the most cursory glance at publishing catalogues and university prospectuses reveals that media- and culturally-oriented criminology is a rapidly expanding area. Yet how many criminologists possess the methodological and conceptual tools to adequately deconstruct a crime film? How many have the journalistic or literary training to untangle the complexities of popular crime writing? At the same time, while scholars working within the realms of media and cultural studies routinely speak to issues of crime, deviance and control, how many can claim the socio-political and historical understanding of crime and penalty so central to the work of many criminologists? Answers to these questions suggest that whilst there is clearly a burgeoning body of work exploring the interrelations between crime, media, and culture, we have only begun the conversation; there is still much to be gained from a critical and reflexive dialogue between people working at this crucial nexus. Continuing to stimulate and nourish such a dialogue remains one of *CMC*'s key aims.

Recently, one of us attended the launch of a book which collects contributions under the heading *Participating in the Knowledge Society: Researchers Beyond the University Walls* (Finnegan, ed. Palgrave, 2005). Whilst the contents of this collection only distantly echoes the specific concerns of *CMC*, the sentiment behind it certainly reflects that which underpins *CMC*. In debates around 'knowledge', 'research' and 'understanding' the spotlight too often focuses exclusively on universities and on those working within them. Yet for those seeking a fuller and more nuanced understanding of our social and cultural world – among whom we count ourselves and, we trust, our readership – engagement with those producing germane work *outside* the academy is also essential. As we hope is obvious, we are of course fully committed to promoting scholarly excellence; but we are keen to explore and amplify voices outside the traditional bounds of the academy as well.

It was with considerable pleasure, then, that in Volume 1 of CMC we were able to include drawings by a long-term prisoner in an American penitentiary, to reproduce artwork created by graffiti writers, folk memorialists, and skateboard designers, and otherwise to give voice and vision to those often ignored. We hope you will agree that, whilst such works by cultural 'outsiders' seldom feature in the pages of academic journals, their contributions in fact sit comfortably alongside those of professors, doctoral researchers and other academic scholars, enhancing as they do the overall analytic and aesthetic focus.

Volume 2 promises to be no less exciting. In this first issue, we have brought together a vibrant mix of contributions encompassing research notes, photographic essays, a one-act play, and an interview with celebrated graphic novelist and illustrator Peter Kuper, along with substantive full-length articles and book reviews. Collectively, these contributions celebrate in their very diversity the pleasure to be gained from taking on official versions of the 'truth', academic or otherwise.

In recent years, much has been made of the media's role in circulating definitions and counter-definitions of the 'truth' about crime. In particular, the issue of state-sanctioned punitiveness and its relationship to mediated public opinion has been the subject of much debate in academic circles, and it has perhaps now become something of a truism that the media drive populist sentiments concerning crime and punishment. From this view, we are witnessing a surge of punitiveness whereby 'populist punitiveness' (Bottoms, 1995), or punitiveness driven from 'below' by an angry and anxious public, collides with 'authoritarian populism' (Hall et al, 1978) – a 'top down' process in which ambitious and manipulative politicians jump on a popular bandwagon, interpellating public fears and prejudices in order to maximise their electoral appeal.

More generally, the media are in this way seen to be at least partly responsible for the 'punitive turn' in many western democracies. Mediated images, it is claimed, present us with a tableau of crime and deviance that drips with immoderation and excess, and that demands equally spectacular responses. The evidence for Western industrial societies becoming more punitive in turn rests, in large part, on the prevalence of mass imprisonment – the move from incarcerating individual offenders to the systematic imprisonment of whole segments of the population (Garland, 2001), notably young black males from poor urban areas.

Certainly there are deep punitive currents running through many contemporary societies; yet a reductionist interpretation of media narratives as no more than the relentless promotion of a punitive culture surely oversimplifies what is a more complex set of mediated relations. While advocates of a 'new punitiveness' model (Pratt et al, 2005) have noted the media's capacity to fuel public desires for ostentatious displays of punishment, others have argued that media-informed populism can equally be mobilised to limit state oppression and defend human rights (Mathiesen, 2004; Ryan, 2005). One need only think here of the mass global demonstrations against corporatism, or – to take a very different example – the death of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, the victim of the

Metropolitan police's 'shoot-to-kill' policy. In fact, de Menezes' killing on a London underground train became a bigger story in the British newspapers last year than did the London Metropolitan Police's own investigation into the planting of bombs on the capital's transport system. As Mick Ryan (2005) argues, in such cases it might be more apt to describe the policy-making process not as populist but as democratised, if imperfectly.

Nevertheless, amidst the brouhaha that constitutes penal discourse in academic and media circles, we must not forget the countless examples of cruelty, irrationality and vengeance – at both ends of the crime/punishment spectrum - that remain hidden, unobserved and publicly undebated. In his essays on the creation of public acquiescence (entitled *Silently Silenced*, 2004), Thomas Mathiesen suggests that while populist public opinion *can* be mobilised to break down the distinctions between 'us' and 'them' (whoever the 'them' of the moment might be), in many other cases the possibility of public opinion is thwarted, not in a noisy or even noticeable way, but carefully and quietly. Consequently, critical debate about the legitimacy of certain sanctions simply fails to surface (Jenkins, 1999).

In this context it is our hope that *Crime, Media, Culture* can continue to offer a forum for documenting these complex cultural processes, and for developing deeper understandings of them. With what we hope will be an ongoing melange of good writing and evocative images, interdisciplinary scholarship and outsider art, we intend also for *CMC* to engage with these processes, and to contribute critical, progressive voices to them. The editorial with which we inaugurated Volume I closed with a discussion of terror and torture, and an image from Abu Ghraib prison; sadly, similar constellations of tragedy and malfeasance remain a year later. If ever we could afford the convenient myth of scholarly disengagement as regards crime, culture, and the media, we certainly can't afford it now.

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As we embark on this second volume of *Crime Media Culture: An International Journal* we'd like also to express our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the first volume and helped to make it such a success: to the scholars around the world who submitted articles, research notes, photographs, artwork, and poetry; to the global network of referees who gave us the benefit of their wisdom and expertise in providing reviews; to our editorial board for contributing in ways too numerous to list; to everyone at Sage for their professionalism and continued support; and to all those individuals and institutions who have subscribed to *CMC*.

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