



The image shows a horizontal row of twelve hands, each holding a single rose stem. The roses are at various stages of bloom, from small buds to fully open flowers in shades of pink, red, and yellow. They are set against a clear, light blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy

Book Review

Carolyn McKay (2018) *The Pixelated Prisoner: Prison Video Links, Court 'Appearance' and the Justice Matrix*. Abingdon: Routledge

ISBN: 9781138085107

Hannah Klose

Monash University, Australia

Digital and technological advancements are proliferating through criminal justice systems and law enforcement agencies, dramatically influencing prisoners' access to procedural justice (see Almog and Aharonson 2004; Fowler 2013; Lederer 2017; Stone 2015). Carolyn McKay (2018: 5) contended that many jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, Canada and European countries, are increasingly integrating videoconferencing technologies and audio-visual links (AVLs) into prison and courtroom infrastructures. In her comprehensive analysis, McKay articulated that prisoners' perspectives have often been neglected in previous literature and that understanding their subjective experiences with criminal proceedings via AVLs is crucial for reform and change in the current policy framework (see Young 2011).

In *The Pixelated Prisoner: Prison Video Links, Court 'Appearance' and the Justice Matrix (The Pixelated Prisoner)*, McKay (2018: 3) asserted that technological AVL and videoconferencing platforms for court appearances are integral to 'collaborative justice partnerships'; thus, advocating a multi-agency response and face-to-interface criminal procedures (see Richardson 2010). Drawing primarily on her doctoral findings, McKay effectively utilised her interview data with prisoners to reveal the 'micro-level' effects (2018: 31) of AVLs as well as prisoners' own 'experiential accounts' (2018: 9) of visual and audio culture in official courtrooms (see Feigensohn and Spiesel 2009; Schofield 2009).

The Pixelated Prisoner is a timely and prescient text as it has shone a light directly on modern videoconferencing technologies within the criminal justice system, which are redefining legal practices and procedures on an international scale (see Licoppe and Dumoulin 2010). The book comprised seven chapters and commenced with an in-depth explanation of the 'justice matrix', foregrounding the carceral context of AVLs, which are gradually being implemented within the criminal justice system (McKay 2018: 19). In Chapter 2, McKay (2018: 27) introduced a Foucauldian framework that was used to analyse the

significant shift in emerging prison technology, provide insights into power, punishment and surveillance through an 'appreciative' approach, and evaluate the 'human experience' of prisoners by seeking to understand their perspectives (see Halsey and Deegan 2015; Kristensen and Ravn 2015). In this chapter, McKay's (2018: 9) contention was clear and succinct: that prisoners' experiences provide valuable insights into the 'ramifications of technologies' in criminal justice.

In Chapter 3, the author discussed the multi-method approach to her empirical fieldwork. Through individual, semi-structured interviews, McKay (2018: 41) gave prisoners across New South Wales a platform to narrate their own accounts and subjective opinions of AVLs. The proceeding three chapters presented the central argument of the book: that custodial appearance has created a 'heightened zone of demarcation' (McKay 2018: 60) between prisoners and other courtroom participants, including judges, lawyers and prosecutors. In the context of altering traditional criminal justice processes through AVLs, this demarcation was examined in Chapter 4 through one-on-one interviews with prisoners who have had first-hand experiences of virtual and remote court appearances. Hence, in analysing prisoners' custodial appearances, the author was successful in comparing their experiences of attending court spaces in-person versus via AVLs (McKay 2018: 65).

Chapter 5 discussed the corporeal effects of AVLs and the perceived lack of 'realness' of the AVL appearances when prisoners appear virtually on a screen rather than in a physical court setting (McKay 2018: 89). In this section, the author critically analysed the potential disadvantages of integrating AVLs within the criminal justice system. For example, McKay argued that prisoners are often unaware that they have a right to speak in court when appearing on a screen and are, consequently, left voiceless (McKay 2018: 102). Chapter 6 drew on visual criminology, which seeks to examine how 'visual culture' (McKay 2018: 125) affects the individual and society (see Biber 2005; Hayward 2009; Young 2010) and how virtual images are constructed and produced in line with the criminal justice system (see Rafter 2014). The author also critiqued the prejudicial effects of AVLs on prisoners. Often, they are 'doubly trapped', meaning that they are not only framed within the video screen but also judged within the context of their confinement (McKay 2018: 135). This idea was central to the aims and scope of McKay's research as these visual representations reinforce the underlying comment that inspired her book—that is, each prisoner is a 'bunch of pixels on a screen' (McKay 2018: 142). Finally, Chapter 7 concluded with an examination of human rights violations within prisons, with a direct focus on how cumulative demarcations challenge procedural justice and compromise prisoners' legal experiences (McKay 2018: 153).

The Pixelated Prisoner has made a highly valuable contribution to the literature on AVL technologies in prisons (see Richardson 2010) and has added to the limited body of existing international research into prisoner's experiential accounts of emerging technologies within the criminal justice system (McKay 2018: 9). McKay's (2018: 11) text has highlighted that AVLs are integral to an increasingly networked justice matrix as they have the capacity to eliminate prisoner transport costs, speed up legal proceedings, reduce court backlogs and improve overall productivity. Furthermore, the book will be of interest to criminal justice practitioners, stakeholders, academics and students and appeal to a wider readership, promoting critical areas for future research and considerations of AVLs within the criminal justice system.

Correspondence: Ms Hannah Klose, PhD Candidate and Teaching Associate, Monash University, Wellington Rd, Clayton VIC 3800 Australia. hannah.klose@monash.edu

References

- Almog S and Aharonson E (2004) Law as film: Representing justice in the age of moving images. *Canadian Journal of Law and Technology* 3(1): 1-18. <https://digitalcommons.schulichlaw.dal.ca/cjlt/vol3/iss1/1/>
- Biber K (2005) Photographs and labels: Against a criminology of innocence. *Law Text Culture* 10: 19-40. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol10/iss1/4/>
- Feigenson N and Spiesel C (2009) *Law on display: The digital transformation of legal persuasion and judgment*. New York: NYU Press.
- Fowler Y (2013) Non-English-speaking defendants in the magistrates court: A comparative study of face-to-face and prison video link interpreter-mediated hearings in England. PhD Thesis, Aston University, Birmingham. <https://research aston.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/non-english-speaking-defendants-in-the-magistrates-court>
- Halsey M and Deegan S (2015) 'Picking up the pieces': Female significant others in the lives of young (ex)incarcerated males. *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 15(2): 131-151. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1748895814526725>
- Hayward K (2009) Visual criminology: Cultural criminology-style. *Criminal Justice Matters* 78(1): 12-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09627250903385172>
- Kristensen GK and Ravn MN (2015) The voices heard and the voices silenced: Recruitment processes in qualitative interview studies. *Qualitative Research* 15(6): 722-737. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1468794114567496>
- Lederer FI (2017) Technology-augmented and virtual courts and courtrooms. In McGuire MR and Holt TJ (eds) *The Routledge handbook of technology, crime and justice*: 518-531. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Licoppe C and Dumoulin L (2010) The "curious case" of an unspoken opening speech act: A video-ethnography of the use of video communication in courtroom activities. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 43(3): 211-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08351811003741319>
- McKay C (2018) *The pixelated prisoner: Prison video links, court 'appearance' and the justice matrix*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rafter N (2014) Introduction to special issue on visual culture and the iconography of crime and punishment. *Theoretical Criminology* 18(2): 127-133. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1362480613510547>
- Richardson I (2010) Faces, interfaces, screens: Relational ontologies of framing, attention and distraction. *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* 18: 1-15. <http://www.transformationsjournal.org/2010-issue-no-18-the-face-and-technology/>
- Schofield D (2009) Animating evidence: Computer game technology in the courtroom. *Journal of Information, Law and Technology* 1: 1-21. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/jilt/2009_1/schofield
- Stone J (2015) Is it now time to abolish the dock in all criminal proceedings in England and Wales? *Archbold Review* 3: 7-9. <https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/Doc%201.pdf>
- Young A (2010) *The scene of violence: Cinema, crime, affect*. Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish.
- Young J (2011) *A virtual day in court: Design thinking & virtual courts*. RSA. <https://www.thersa.org/reports/a-virtual-day-in-court>

Please cite this book review as:

Klose H (2022) Review of *The pixelated prisoner: Prison video links, court 'appearance' and the justice matrix* by Carolyn McKay. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 11(1): 239-241. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.2135>

Except where otherwise noted, content in this journal is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](#). As an open access journal, articles are free to use with proper attribution.
ISSN: 2202-8005

