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Book Review

Lee Murray and McGovern Alyce (2014) *Policing and Media: Public Relations, Simulations and Communications*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

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Transformations in policing are often driven by technology. Murray Lee and Alyce McGovern's new book examines the broad gamut of policing, media and public relations. It is, however, particularly novel and useful in its focus on new media and the ways it impacts policing. The book draws together the authors' decade of empirical work on police and the media in Australia and puts this in a broader international context, including relevant examples from the USA and the UK.

Influenced by Baudrillard's theory of simulation, one of the key arguments advanced in the book is that 'we have seen the emergence of ... simulated policing ... and it is from this hypereality, the new realm where policing is becoming pure representation, that such a capacity has emerged' (4). The authors conclude their introduction by underlining this statement: '[w]e suggest in this book that images of policing have become *policing*. The two are increasingly indistinguishable. Policing in the twenty-first century is nothing if not hyperreal' (6; emphasis in original).

The book's analysis uses four key conceptual frames: O'Malley's simulated policing; Garland's cultures of control; Mathiesen's viewer society; and de Certeau's tactics of resistance. The first section of the book articulates these frames and provides the context in which they operate, tracing the development of modern professionalised police media departments alongside the key logics that the authors maintain drive police engagement with the media: image work, risk and responsabilisation, and trust and legitimacy. Section two looks at three examples of simulated policing: police media releases; the emergence of social media and the ways that police organisations are using social media in ways that are 'increasingly rendering policing organizations news organizations in and of themselves' (5); and police engagement with reality television and the implications of this. The third and final section explores 'resistance to the dissemination of preferred police messages and how such resistances can take hold in the face of the ability of police organizations to structure crime news and information' (6). This section covers the use of social and traditional media by various groups that aim to expose and confront police abuse of power and brutality.

The book's examination of the impacts on policing of social media and the ubiquity of cameras and smart phones is timely. The recent protests over the shooting of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown in the town of Ferguson, Missouri, highlight the relevance of these

twenty-first century developments for policing. Wanting to be part of the solution, three teenage siblings created an ‘incredible police accountability app with tons of awesome features’ (Vibes 2014). Launched in September 2014, ‘Five-O’ allows users to share details of their police encounters and claims to make it possible for victims of brutality to instantly gather local support.

The book considers inverse surveillance and the ways that surveillance technologies have the potential to ‘invert the traditional panoptic model’ to confront organisations such as the police (177). Recent events highlight the salience of this theme. Alongside the protests and outrage in Ferguson and throughout the USA over the recent fatal shooting, there has been a spate of viral police violence videos. These have woven through social media and onto mainstream news broadcasts and front pages (for e-news readers/viewers these are embedded footage) (O’Malley 2014).

I part ways with the authors in their claim that images of policing and policing are one and the same. Restating their position on simulated policing they argue:

... [t]he image not only represents policing, but increasingly the images of policing and actual operational policing are inseparable—they are, for all intents and purposes, the same thing. Rather, policing is occurring through often disembodied image work, and this image work is also occurring through policing’. (72)

However, policing for minority communities is not disembodied. Each of the videos mentioned above show acts of police brutality, mostly inflicted on people of colour (O’Malley 2014). I had to turn away while watching them because I knew that the thuds and cracks I heard, and the boots, fists and weapons wielded, were breaking bones, bruising bodies, rendering people unconscious, endangering lives, and deeply traumatising individuals, families and whole communities. I also know that each video represents countless similar unrecorded events married to histories of subjugation, colonialism and slavery.

My criticism of the idea of simulated policing as set out by Lee and McGovern follows Stanley Cohen’s criticism of Baudrillard’s 1991 assertion – made ‘just as thousands were lying dead and maimed in Iraq and the country’s infrastructure deliberately destroyed’ – that *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Cohen argued that such ‘precious nonsense’ added to the denial of state crime, suffering and atrocities (Cohen 1993: 112). Police manage and manipulate the media. They use mainstream and social media as part of their investigative work. The authors make this clear throughout the book. However, I disagree that this means that images of policing and operational policing are now or are becoming the same. Nevertheless, the idea of simulation, policing and the media raises some interesting issues. I have no trouble with the idea, for example, that police and the media simulate crime. While I am skeptical of the idea of simulation as used by the authors, I read their assertions as a provocation to push the boundaries and stimulate debate. Their book is not ‘precious nonsense’ and I doubt they would argue that Michael Brown was not shot.

This is an important book primarily aimed at criminologists but also of interest to those concerned with the politics of policing, police accountability, and the relationship between police, the media and the public. It is true, as the authors point out, that for most people the primary source of information about policing is the media. Technology is changing rapidly and to understand policing, including ‘image work’, we must understand the nature of that change and its impact. The book makes a significant contribution to documenting and analysing the contemporary landscape of police and the media and should find a place on many undergraduate reading guides and criminologists’ bookshelves.

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