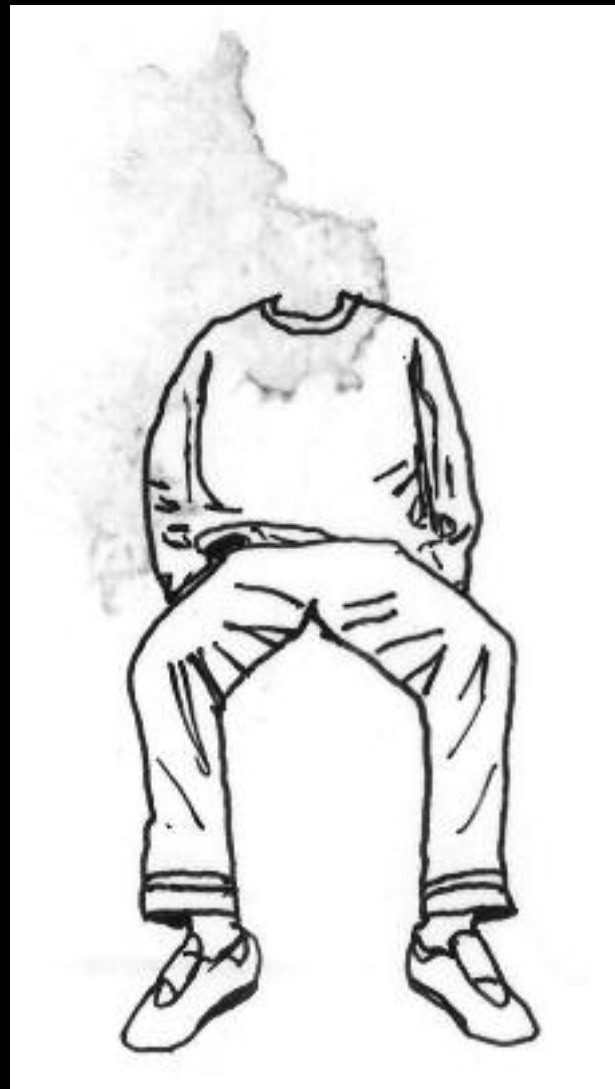


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# Reviews

Film review

## **Everyday (2012)**

Dir. Michael Winterbottom

*Everyday* had a limited theatrical run in late 2012 and was broadcast on Channel 4 in early 2013, but it has taken me almost a year to get around to watching it. I often have a feeling of dread when faced with a prison film, perhaps the consequence of watching too many over the years with too few worth the effort. However, this film really is worth the effort, in fact, since I reluctantly pressed 'play', it has entranced me, running over and over in my head long after the credits had rolled.

The film itself focuses on a family, with four children, over a five year period in which the father (played by John Simm), serves a prison sentence for an unspecified crime. A series of visits take place, to prisons and then home leave, before the sentence ends. The family feel the strain of staying together financially and emotionally. The style of the film is realist with the emotions muted and the narrative constrained. The realism is heightened by the use of real locations, non-professional actors in critical roles, including the four children, and fact that the film was made over a five year period, with shooting taking place in short blocks over that time, so that the characters visibly grow and age.

The director Michael Winterbottom has always been a busy and diverse film-maker. In a similar vein, he has been responsible for socially-conscious, realist films such as *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), *In this world* (2002) and *The road to Guantanamo* (2006). He has brought

new life to the work of Thomas Hardy in his adaptations of *Jude the Obscure* (1996), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (*The Claim*, 2000), and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (*Trishna*, 2011). He has also had success with a series of comic dramas featuring Steve Coogan including *24 hour party people* (2002), *A cock and bull story* (2005), *The Trip* (2010), and *The look of love* (2013). Winterbottom is one of Britain's most prolific, varied and imaginative film-makers.

Much of the coverage and reaction to *Everyday* focussed on the issue of time. Of course the unusual production schedule drew attention and in many ways shaped subsequent discussion of the film.<sup>1</sup> This concern with time was intentional, as reflected in the production technique. As Winterbottom himself has said:

... we wanted to do a film about time passing across five years, to see how the children would change with the absence of the father and whether, for instance, he could maintain a relationship with them.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than deploying cinematic conventions to show the passing of time or relying upon special effects or make up, Winterbottom was attempting to reveal 'the small, subtle changes as people grow up and grow old whilst being apart'.<sup>3</sup>

As well as time, the film is also deeply concerned with issues of space. This is shown most starkly through the long journeys from home to the prisons, moving from foot, to bus, to train to taxi. The distance between prison and the

home is an important aspect of painfulness of prisons for the families of those incarcerated.<sup>4</sup> The film dwells on these liminal spaces with all of the physical, emotional and financial exhaustion they contain.

The visits themselves are also an important space. The film shows them with all of their diversity from visits rooms, closed visits booths, to day release and home leave. Each has its own emotional texture of hope and despair. A recent BBC comedy set in a prison visits hall was criticised for using the situation to distance the viewer and anaesthetise them to the reality of prison life.<sup>5</sup> Rather than attempting to obscure the painfulness of prison, the depiction of visits in *Everyday*, illuminates how the tentacles of imprisonment reach out, entangling those outside as well as those inside.

The power of Winterbottom's film does not, however, rest only upon its technical innovations or its intellectual ideas; it is an emotionally moving work. The realist approach meant that the narrative and relationships developed organically over the years of production. The family experience strains in their relationships with each other and those around them, but also drawn upon their own resources and the support of others. There is no grand melodrama or wrought emotional climax, instead they face the future, scarred by their experiences but still together. The muted, constrained approach makes it all the more affecting; it is an almost unbearably honest reflection of family life.

Michael Winterbottom's *Everyday* is a cinematic gem, albeit one in a minor key. It is the product of

1. For example see *The Guardian* 15 October 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/oct/15/child-stars-michael-winterbottom-everyday> (accessed 03 February 2014).
2. <http://guru.bafta.org/michael-winterbottom-interview> (accessed 03 February 2014).
3. Ibid.
4. Mills, A. and Codd, H. (2007) *Prisoners' families* in Jewkes, Y. (ed) *Handbook on Prisons* Cullompton: Willan. p. 672-695.
5. Turner, J. (2013) *The politics of carceral spectacle: Televising prison life* in Moran, D., Gill, N. and Conlon, D. (ed) *Carceral spaces: Mobility and agency in imprisonment and migrant detention* Farnham: Ashgate. p.219-237.

a film-maker willing to take risks. However, this is not only an artistic achievement; it also illuminates hidden corners of everyday life. From that perspective, it is a work of profound humanity.

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Book Review

***Critique and dissent: An anthology to mark 40 years of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control***

Edited by Joanna Gilmore, J.M.

Moore and David Scott

Publisher: Quill Books (2013)

ISBN: 978-1-926958-28-6

(paperback)

Price: £20.00 (paperback)

***Rethinking social exclusion: The end of the social?***

By Simon Winslow and Steve Hall

Publisher: Sage (2013)

ISBN: 978-1-84920-107-0

(hardback) 978-1-84920-108-7

(paperback)

Price: £75.00 (hardback) £24.99

(paperback)

***Criminal justice and neoliberalism***

By Emma Bell

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan (2011)

ISBN: 978-0-230-25197-7

(hardback)

Price: £50.00 (hardback)

***Why prison?***

Edited by David Scott

Publisher: Cambridge University

Press (2013)

ISBN: 978-1-107-03074-9

(hardback)

Price: £75.00 (hardback)

Together these four books offer an introduction and overview of

critical criminology. This approach has a number of dimensions but is arguably underpinned by a concern with power and inequality, and how this is not only reflected within but also sustained and entrenched by social institutions such as criminal justice. Many critical criminologists attempt to describe the wider ideology that shapes politics and society. They are also often concerned with the effects, particularly the experiences of socially and economically marginalised groups, historically the poor, but also engaging with issues of gender, race, and other forms of identity and social positioning. It is a movement which seeks to challenge dominant ideas and practices intellectually, but is also linked to social activism.

The ambitions of critical criminology are well captured in the title of the first book: *Critique and dissent*. The book itself draws together contributions from 40 years of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control. The group was initially established in the early 1970s, a period of social upheaval and conflict, and attempted to bring together an international collection of scholars concerned with issues relating to critical criminology. As revealed in this book, the first manifesto made explicit reference to an underlying Marxist philosophy. As well as providing rich intellectual ideas, the group has also embraced conflict, including hosting conferences in Northern Ireland during 1981 hunger strikes, Wales during Miners strike of 1984 and more recently Greece and Cyprus. This book neatly captures the tenor of the groups work to expose the limits of knowledge and the ways that it is exploited by the powerful, and the promotion of research that reveals the experiences of the powerless and offers them solidarity and support. Whilst this book is perhaps best seen as a celebration of the work of the Group, it will offer something of

interest to both scholars and the casual reader who will be able to trace the emergence and development of this school of thought.

It could, however, be argued that the moment for critical criminology is not historical, but is now upon us. The financial crisis and subsequent recession have drawn attention to the failures of capitalism. In relation to prisons, there has been a loosening of the grip of popular punitiveness and the appeal of mass imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> This is partly because it is no longer considered affordable, but also the political payload has been reduced as crime rates have fallen. In addition, there is a growing body of evidence, including that offered by critical criminologists, which has revealed the harmfulness of prisons and questioned their effectiveness. The three further books reviewed here address these contemporary circumstances.

Two powerful critiques of contemporary UK political and social culture are offered by Simon Winslow and Steve Hall in *Rethinking social exclusion: The end of the social?*, and by Emma Bell in *Criminal justice and neoliberalism*. Both take as their starting point the dominant ideology of neoliberalism. As Bell argues, neoliberalism is a complex system that has economic aspects but also social, political, legal, cultural and intellectual dimensions. In essence it encompasses the withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere, instead promoting the deregulation of markets and the contracting out of state services. In addition, this also embraces interventionism in dealing with problematic groups or institutions including the marginalised and those that resist. For Winslow and Hall, the enduring, permanent poverty and punitive control of those at the margins are integral parts of the whole system. However, Bell disagrees, suggesting that neoliberalism and punitiveness

1. Cullen, F., Jonson, C., and Stohr, M. (2014) *The American prison: Imagining a different prison* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

are not inevitably interlinked, but indeed address contradictory impulses about the role of the state. She argues that offering safety from crime, or at least the appearance of action in this regard, is compensation for reduced economic and social security for the majority.

For Bell, neoliberalism is mediated through local cultures and therefore is different in different countries. Nevertheless, she does accept that the UK has been more willing to embrace punitiveness and that neoliberalism helps to create conditions that sustain this, including: reduced social solidarity and the rise of rampant individualism; the deprofessionalisation of criminal justice and creation of managerial elites, and; the triangulation of politics, media and judiciary to create a powerful orthodoxy. Bell offers an in-depth and deft contribution, linking wider social changes with those that took root in the criminal justice system during the New Labour era.

Winslow and Hall's account is more polemic. Its commitment and consistency is admirable and it is persuasively argued, but it does also reveal many of the limitations of critical criminology at its most strident. They describe notions of 'social exclusion' as inadequate for a number of reasons. First, they suggest that those in circumstances are not excluded, indeed their position is an integral aspect of capitalism and neoliberalism. They are the losers than enable others to be winners. In addition, in perhaps their most significant contribution, they describe how the subjectivity of those in poverty can only be understood by reference to the dominant consumer culture: many are unable to consistently and extensively enter into this world and therefore experience that as a source of painfulness, and seek opportunities, however, fleetingly to access this. More widely, they even question whether there is a 'social' from which it is possible to be

excluded. They describe the 'non-places' of manufactured dormitory estates and towns, bland shopping malls, and empty social experiences in an atomised, individualistic world. They describe an ugly and unpleasant society, which makes one wonder, whether if Blur hadn't got there first, then this book might have been called *Modern life is rubbish*. But is such a description entirely justified? There is certainly much to be said for the harms that capitalism perpetuates on those at the margins and the disproportionate power and resources accumulated by a few, however, it is in the relentless problematising and criticism that perspective can be lost. For example, at one stage Winslow and Hall briefly take on the idea of social media, describing this as 'low level immaterial labour that is appropriated by capitalism and used to generate profit' (p.115). Whilst such a perspective has some merit, it is too dogmatic, ignoring the potential for meaningful social connections that can be forged and sustained across space and time through social media, let alone the potential for developing networks of shared interest, or even resistance. However, moderation is not the aim, instead they are pitching at more revolutionary change, arguing:

*... if we are serious about preventing the manifold harms of exclusion in their entirety, it is clear we need a fundamental reorganisation of the global political economy from its financial core. . . (p.170)*

Critical criminology has itself been sometimes criticised for failing to present a persuasive alternative. Winslow and Hall should be applauded for articulating an alternative, grounded in reduced levels of economic inequality, optimistically asserting that:

*Despite the failures of previous ill-conceived attempts to do so,*

*it is always possible to be something else, to transcend the ideology of liberal capitalism and replace institutionalised selfishness with genuine community, to replace enmity with solidarity, and exclusivity with inclusivity (p.175)*

However, they also do not flinch from revealing the challenges of persuading people to embrace this:

*What by and large we cannot countenance is the painful reality that we might have to get by with less, that whatever power fills the void left by the exit of capitalism would decree an end to our profligate lifestyles. Despite the likely protestations of the ethical consumers of the middle class, a world without foreign holidays, iPads and other accoutrements of a socially included lifestyle fills the mainstream Western population with dread (p. 172-3)*

In many ways this book is impressive. It has a singularity of vision and a seductive passion. However, for all that it also leaves an unsatisfactory sense of its own futility. It is so ambitious and revolutionary that it feels unachievable. A bit like the street corner, sandwich board wearing prophet declaring that the 'end is nigh': they might not get what they want but the world would be a poorer place without them.

Finally, David Scott's edited collection *Why prison?* will have the most relevance to prison practitioners and will also have the broadest appeal. It offers an impressive array of leading scholars dissecting the emergence of global hyper-incarceration and strategies for change. As was mentioned earlier, now is a time when the grip of imprisonment has been loosened and this book talks directly to this issue and indeed plays an active role in the struggle.

The first part of the book traces the rise of mass imprisonment, spreading penalty into new forms of detention such as migration, and the dominant neoliberal ideology that underpins this development. The role of the public is also examined, including the role of spectatorship in defining how we think about and engage with prisons. Most importantly, this book develops a credible argument for the abolitionist cause, that is the view that the institution of imprisonment should be abolished and instead alternative institutions and processes be developed that can manage transgressions. Such an argument is not located simply in a change of the criminal justice system but also encompasses a wider change in social structures and ideology. In their chapter, Vickie Cooper and Joe Sim challenge the notion of asking 'Why prison?' and instead suggest we should ask 'why *not* utopianism,

abolitionism and socialism?' (p.210). Whilst this reveals an explicit political agenda, it also raises a wider issue about whether removing prison from the question opens the imagination and offers more creative opportunities for thinking about crime and society. In other words the prison acts as a dead hand, stifling ideas. A particularly important chapter by Keally McBride describes the recent process of decarceration in California, driven by legal judgements and the economic crisis, which saw a 16.5 per cent reduction in the prison population in a year (2011-12). This case study shows that radical change is possible. The final two chapters of the book take forward the abolitionist cause. Julia C. Oparah provides an account of how to make the case and to campaign effectively for radical change. In closing, David Scott sketches a utopian, but nevertheless grounded and practical, vision of abolitionist alternatives. This

is a very welcome contribution which deserves close attention and would merit expansion in the future. As with Emma Bell's book, Scott offers a nuanced and grounded analysis throughout this excellent edited collection. What he additionally contributes is an engagement with the activism of radical reform.

Critical criminology offers a challenge to conventions; it leads one to question not only professional practice and criminal justice but also the wider social world in which it is situated. That can be an uncomfortable experience but also one that is enlightening and emotionally powerful. These four books illustrate that this is a diverse field but one that is full of imagination and remains relevant to the way we live now and in the future.

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