

CRIMINOLOGY, DEVIANCE,
AND THE SILVER SCREEN

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CRIMINOLOGY, DEVIANCE,
AND THE SILVER SCREEN
THE FICTIONAL REALITY AND THE
CRIMINOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Jon Frauley

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2010 978-0-230-61516-8
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First published in 2010 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-37886-9 ISBN 978-0-230-11536-1 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230115361

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Frauley, Jon, 1972–

Criminology, deviance, and the silver screen : the fictional reality and the criminological imagination / Jon Frauley.
p. cm.

1. Crime films—United States. 2. Creation (Literary, artistic, etc.) in motion pictures. 3. Reality in art. 4. Criminology—United States. I. Title.

PN1995.9.C66F73 2010
791.43'6556—dc22

2010021215

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Scribe Inc.

First edition: December 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my cherished family—Leigh, Isobel, and Amelia

There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to all those who have helped me along the way, especially Frank Pearce and R. Paul Datta. If nothing else, Frank Pearce has taught me that systematic and rigorous theorizing is a craft that good, critical, and relevant social science and critically minded, politically and socially conscious human beings cannot do without. That this practice is often neglected tells us not about its dispensability but about the state of sociological and criminological scholarship today. I owe a great debt to him for my own intellectual formation. Thanks to Richard J. F. Day, Lauren Snider, Roberta Hamilton, and Terry Willet. Although it has been years since I studied with them, they have left an indelible mark on me. Thanks to Erich Schellhammer and Alan Hunt for guiding me toward and through some important intellectual puzzles. To all those unnamed but indispensable souls who have helped me out in times of need. I also express gratitude to my colleagues in the Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa, for creating a dynamic and intellectually stimulating environment and for taking a chance and giving me a job. Thanks to our excellent and invaluable support staff whom I could not do without. Thanks to Peter Kraska for being a remote but important interlocutor, to Noel Ward for his friendship over many years, and to George Rigakos for his support and friendship. I also thank Terry Tatum, director of research (Historic Preservation Division, Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning, City of Chicago), for her quick and invaluable assistance and making it possible for me to use the photo of the historic Uptown Theatre in Chicago as the cover of this book. I also express my gratitude to Samantha Hasey and Burke Gerstenschlager at Palgrave for their patience and for working with me to bring this book to print (well beyond its initial due date). Lastly, and most importantly, this book is dedicated with thanks to my two beautiful little girls, Isobel and Amelia and my lovely wife, Leigh, for enriching my life. Thank you, Leigh, for your love and dedication.

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PREFACE

This is not a book about film. It is about the usefulness of fictional realities for a craft practice of theorizing. It uses film as a vehicle for analytic reflection on criminological and sociological ideas and as a tool for illustrating these ideas. These ideas, these concepts, can and must be operated to extract criminological significance and meaning from social objects. In this sense, they are tools. The analytic languages of criminology and sociology are sometimes mistaken for hypothetical descriptions of phenomena; this book argues against this view. Our analytic languages provide us with tools for description and analysis: tools that can be refined through use and which enable and constrain our examinations. Fictional realities, whether literature or film, are social objects that can be utilized to help us grapple with and clarify our analytic languages. They are especially useful for illustrating the importance of imaginative and creative thinking for social science. They contain arguments and insights, however rudimentary, about our social world. They are nontraditional sources of information for scholars to puzzle through. They are empirical referents for use in demonstrating analysis and illuminating the strengths and weaknesses of our analytic languages. This text focuses on film because films help us reflect on the analytic languages of social science in creative and imaginative ways.

There seems to be a dearth of imagination and creativity in criminology today. Criminology has always been a semiprofessional field, long fragmented and marked by conflict over what ought to be its proper objects of study, methods, and procedures for knowledge production. There has also been controversy surrounding its status as a social science, among other things. I have often contemplated these issues in my writings and through my teaching. I have struggled to make sense of the place and role of social theory in criminology. It is especially puzzling for some students and perhaps colleagues to make sense of my courses that emphasize theorizing itself, not just the content of theories. In the classroom, I think that students and professors who are accustomed to the study of surveys of information to later

be regurgitated on a test or employed in a thesis are frustrated by my emphasis on theorizing. Sadly, seldom do students wonder from where a particular set of concepts have come. Over many years I have tried to teach theorizing, thinking theoretically and conceptually, no matter which courses I have taught, because I believe that thinking conceptually and imaginatively should not be reserved only for “theory” courses. All social scientists ought to be able to contemplate abstractions and work in a considered way with abstract concepts to forge carefully crafted analytical narratives.

This book is the outcome of my interest in theoretical practice and pedagogy. I have utilized film and fiction in my teaching for many years in an attempt to show students that thinking systematically, rigorously, reflexively, and imaginatively is more important than memorizing content. One must have an imagination and use it to make sense of things, to make connections between things that are seemingly unrelated, and to reveal something new in what one is studying. Importantly, good social science demands a *disciplined* imagination. I think that engaging with fictional realities through a circumspect use with reflection on our analytic languages goes a long way to unlocking that imagination.