Anne Kaun and Fredrik Stiernstedt's *Prison Media: Incarceration and the Infrastructures of Work and Technology* accomplishes something that few texts in the recent history of the discipline manage. It is a succinct and useful study that provides a breadth of analysis with sufficient depth to support the authors’ central thesis: that prisons, both historically and currently, function as test beds for technologies that later make their entry into commercial and popular use (albeit with slight modifications), such as facial recognition surveillance systems, wearable biometric technology (like Fitbit and the Apple Watch), and GPS-based location tracking systems that have been adapted from ankle monitors. Kaun and Stiernstedt's analysis and prose is thoughtful, engaging, dynamic, and detailed, which makes their text a quick and delightful read. The authors' passion for this field of study and care for this project are self-evident and on display in every chapter. Their attention to detail is meticulous and their dedication to this project over years of research and manuscript refinement has produced a text which MIT Press should be exceedingly proud of.

Though the key points of analysis and case studies within the text maintain a focus on the Swedish criminal justice system, they are of international relevance and broadly applicable. Kaun and Stiernstedt go to great lengths to demonstrate how the technologies and structures of modern incarceration throughout the Western world and Global North display similarities with one another due to their common ancestry with the earliest modern prisons, such as Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, detailed at length in their second chapter. What the authors manage to demonstrate effectively over their four empirical chapters, introduction, and conclusion is how the Swedish system functions as a sort of microcosm for global trends and futures of work and technology within prisons. They do this most effectively in their third chapter, where they detail and analyze the essential work that prison laborers (inmates) perform in the maintenance and construction of crucial components of media infrastruc-
ture. That infrastructure, and the work inmates perform in maintaining it, is a crucial component of this text, as is the more passive “work” that inmates conduct by being watched and having their environments serve as test beds for commercial technology applications.

*Prison Media* is a worthy contribution to the field and serves as a valuable junction between the worlds of prison studies and media studies. At the intersection of these two disciplines, this text serves as a compelling study of the too often overlooked contributions of prisons and prisoners to the global and local landscapes of media and media infrastructure. The great irony of those topics’ omission from the study of prisons/media is, of course, the role of the modern penitentiary as a mediating entity itself, a structure designed to control/restrict communication in all its forms from the outside world for those within its confines, which Kaun and Stiernstedt consciously address throughout their text. *Prison Media* arrives as a critical read for scholars in these fields globally as it draws our attention to these blind spots and gaps in our critical analysis.

Kaun and Stiernstedt’s analytical chapters (2 through 5) each hold a different focus of empirical study, covering the historical scope of penal regimes in the modern era (from the early nineteenth century to the present), the work of prison media, the role architecture plays in prison media, and the array of past and future prison media technologies. Their introduction and conclusion provide a valuable, though dense, history of this field of study and justification for the text’s necessity as a contribution to the field, as well as this junction into prison studies through the analyses of work, architecture, and technology, which have been at the center of mediating incarceration, and thus the social world, since the dawn of the modern prison. Kaun and Stiernstedt fill a crucial void in the field by focusing on prisons as sites of media work and technology development and by interrogating how that work has been integral to the construction and maintenance of media infrastructure. The bridge that the authors have constructed with *Prison Media* between infrastructure studies, media studies, and prison studies should be lauded as an example of the kind of scholarship needed to continue the important work of illuminating the entanglements of the carceral state and the extent of its reach into our daily lives.

Throughout reading this book I found myself continuously struck by how useful this text would be as an instructor. *Prison Media* is of tremendous utility both to undergraduates, as an accessible, practical example of how to conduct empirical research and to do so succinctly and to compellingly present one’s argument, and to instructors, as a foundational text for teaching about the embeddedness of incarceration and the invisible role prison media plays in our daily lives. In graduate courses, it could serve as a model text for interrogating the theories and methods of media studies as well as this junction into prison studies through the analyses of work, architecture, and technology, which have been at the center of mediating incarceration, and thus the social world, since the dawn of the modern prison. Kaun and Stiernstedt fill a crucial void in the field by focusing on prisons as sites of media work and technology development and by interrogating how that work has been integral to the construction and maintenance of media infrastructure. The bridge that the authors have constructed with *Prison Media* between infrastructure studies, media studies, and prison studies should be lauded as an example of the kind of scholarship needed to continue the important work of illuminating the entanglements of the carceral state and the extent of its reach into our daily lives.

one rarely in the public eye according to the authors, ought to be a focal point of our social and political worlds and made more visible.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
https://networks.h-net.org/h-sci-med-tech


**URL:** https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=59531

![Creative Commons License](https://i.creativecommons.org/l/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/88x31.png) This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.