



## Evaluating CCTV :

# Lessons from a Surveillance Culture

Paper Prepared for the Final Conference of the European Forum for Urban Safety: Citizens, Cities and Video-Surveillance Programme and for the EFUS CCTV Charter launched in Rotterdam, May 2010

<http://www.fesu.org/>

Peter Squires  
Professor of Criminology and Public Policy  
University of Brighton, UK.  
[p.a.squires@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.squires@brighton.ac.uk)

### Introduction

The deployment of CCTV surveillance in the UK provides an invaluable learning opportunity for

the UK has been a world leader in CCTV investment. In many ways, we have led the world from its early introduction in the 1970s to the present day (Home Office/ACPO, 2007). During the latter half of the 1990s almost four-fifths of the entire Home Office crime prevention budget was spent on CCTV (Armitage, 2002; Goold, 2004: 40). Furthermore, between 1999 and 2003 alone, a total of £170 million CCTV funding was made available to local authorities following a competitive bidding process. This led to over 680 CCTV schemes being installed in town centres and other public spaces (Home Office/ACPO, 2007: 7).

Perhaps understandably, with the rapid rolling out of a relatively untried technology, many mistakes were made; lessons were often learned only slowly, and sometimes the hard way, about what CCTV could and could not achieve. Goold went so far as to note that, although the Government was prepared to fund the development of new CCTV systems in many British cities, CCTV grew very fast in the UK context, rather faster than was justified by any evidence of its impact or effectiveness for, as we shall see, CCTV appeared to have only a negligible effect on crime rates in the areas it had been deployed. Yet, despite this, a wholly unrealistic expectation prevailed, sustained in part by an unholy alliance of enthusiastic police entrepreneurs, security

industry marketing agents and fearful citizens, that CCTV could solve many of our public area crime and disorder problems. As a Home Office evaluation from 2005 concluded:

[CCTV] was oversold by successive governments as the answer to crime problems. Few seeking a share of the available funding saw it as rarely obvious why CCTV was the best response to crime in particular circumstances

As other countries increase their levels of CCTV investment, the UK experience can provide useful lessons, significantly improving the process of policy transfer, avoiding mistakes, developing better practice, clarifying issues, and even saving money. Learning from the UK experience, adding the evidence, can make a reality of the promise of development. More than this, in an area of policy-making that goes to the heart of questions of state power and security and citizen privacy and individual rights, the issues surrounding the management, governance and oversight of CCTV systems in the UK can be a useful basis upon which other societies can plan their own. As EFUS moves towards the development of a Europe-wide code of practice and ethics for CCTV, the British experience can provide a salutary lesson. In a wider sense the British experience of CCTV also bears out an uncomfortable truth of the politics of law and order: that policies and strategies are often adopted because they are politically expedient, popular, cheap, consistent with existing priorities or favoured by dominant interests, amongst other reasons. As Savage has noted, much of the law and order politics of the 1990s were fundamentally driven by politics and ideology rather than research (Savage, 1998: 172). It is as plausible to argue (Squires and Measor, 1996a) that the various and the form that these took, matched funding-bids based upon public/private partnerships - were as much about kick-starting these (strategies) as they were about funding CCTV itself. It is arguable that the CCTV industry in the UK was a spectacular beneficiary of a unique combination of circumstances and its own slick publicity. We might proceed rather differently a second time around.

So, at a time when the perceived threats posed by crime, violence, disorder and terrorism are generating new demands for security and when the security industries themselves are sensing lucrative new markets (Loader, 2008),<sup>1</sup> it is incumbent upon the research and evaluation community to do two things:

[1] to ensure that the measures of crime prevention adopted actually deliver the crime reduction benefits promised,

claiming to treat even violent crime solely with the criminal justice apparatus is condemning itself  
WR SURJUDPPHG LQHILFLHQF\ « DJJUDYDWLQJWAcquaintance\ LW LV V  
275-6).

Accordingly, the adoption of CCTV in the UK, while resembling a search for the cure-all,

μ'HVSLWH WKH FRQFHUQV , the Surveillance Society of CCTV cameras, logging devices and databases recording our e-mail and phone activity, our criminal and car records, and anything else we care to think of, is paying off big time when it comes to catching criminals and

That brief comment, the points it makes explicit and those LW GRHVQ¶W FRQQHFWV ZLWK V the issues which run to the heart of many questions about the role of CCTV in effective public safety management. In the first place Hayman presents the contribution of surveillance WHFKQRORJLHV μGHVSLWH WKH FRQFHUQV RI FLYLO OLEHUWLHV JU contradiction between policing and freedom. It is not necessarily so, although this debate takes us back to the first establishment of uniformed policing in London. As Robert Peel (founder of the Metropolitan Police in 1829) UHPDUNDery does not consist in having your house robbed by organised gangs of thieves, and in leaving the principal streets of London in the nightly possession of drunken women and vagabonds (Sir Robert Peel, 1829). Properly established,

that police managers might adopt CCTV to allow them to save resources by reducing police patrol levels in certain areas (Deane and Sharpe, 2009). At other times the lobbying and marketing of CCTV by security industry representatives has been called into question (Loader, 2007). Loader's research has led to a generalised expectation about what security cameras could achieve. Facing two such sets of potentially vested interests the case for an independent evaluation of CCTV schemes might seem incontrovertible. However, the limits of the early CCTV evaluations were often restricted to simple questions of crime reduction impact. The potentially much wider role that CCTV technologies might play across a wide range of policing activities was rather overlooked: a case of restricted vision, perhaps. When future CCTV systems are considered or when systems are to be modernised and developed these issues need appropriate consideration – systems may need to be fit for a variety of purposes as the Home Office and ACPO have acknowledged (HO/ACPO, 2007: p.13). There are further complaints, here emanating from the ACPO CCTV survey team itself, that the current systems are not fit for purpose (ACPO, 2007: p.14). Reference is made to the Home Office and ACPO CCTV strategy document (HO/ACPO, 2007: p.13).

Finally, the case for civilian oversight, public accountability and independent monitoring is as important in relation to CCTV as in other areas of contemporary policing. Not only is this important in terms of the public understanding of the purpose of CCTV but it also helps establish its acceptability and, while enhancing public trust and confidence, can improve the effectiveness of policing systems (Honest and Charman, 1992; Gill and Spriggs, 2005). This is an area often overlooked, even in the recent UK Home Office CCTV strategy document. While the document considers the necessity for inter-agency collaboration, the importance of local stakeholders and partners and the need for effective governance and oversight of CCTV planning, it is rather silent about the systems of local accountability to which such surveillance systems might be subject. Reference is made to

As Gill and Spriggs noted, however, a simple VWRU\ RI DSSDUHQW is just as IDLOXUH  
PLVOHDGLQJ DV WKH over-ambitious claim G XVWU\ V



These ethical questions stretch backwards to the definition of the crime and security problems



## REFERENCES

Armitage, R. 2002 To CCTV or not to CCTV? London, NACRO.

Brown, B. 1995 CCTV in Town Centres: Three Case Studies, Crime Prevention and Detection Series, no.73. London: HMSO.

Deane, A. and Sharpe, D. 2009 Big Brother is watching: A comprehensive analysis of the number of CCTV cameras controlled by local authorities in Britain in 2009. London, [www.bigbrotherwatch.org.uk](http://www.bigbrotherwatch.org.uk)

Clarke, R.V. 1995 Situational crime prevention. In M. Tonry and D.P. Farrington (eds.), Building a Safer Society: Strategic Approaches to Crime Prevention: Vol. 19. Crime and Justice: A Review of Research (pp. 91-150). Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Clarke, R. V. and M. Felson (Eds.) (1993). Routine Activity and Rational Choice. Advances in Criminological Theory, Vol 5. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Crawford, A. 1998 Crime Prevention and Community Safety: Politics, Policies and Practices. London, Longman.

, & 2 , QIRUPDWLRQ & RPPLVVL CCTV Code of Practice Revised Edition. ICO Office, Wilmslow: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)

Loader, I. 2008 Evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution: Surveillance, Citizens and the State. May 14<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Norris, C., Moran, J., and Armstrong, G., 1998 Surveillance, Closed Circuit Television and Social Control, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Norris, C., and Armstrong, G., 1999 The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV. Oxford, Berg Publishers.

Riches, J. 2006 CCTV: Does it work? EFUS: Zaragoza Conference. [http://zaragoza2006.fesu.org/IMG/pdf/CCTV\\_PresentationJames\\_RICHES.pdf](http://zaragoza2006.fesu.org/IMG/pdf/CCTV_PresentationJames_RICHES.pdf)

Shearing, C. 2000 Exclusion From Public Space. in Ethical and Social Perspectives on Situational Crime Prevention. (eds) A. von Hirsch, D. Garland and A. Wakefield. Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2000.

Short, E. and Ditton, J. 1998 British Journal of Criminology, 38/3: 404-428.

6 NLQ QV ' μ & ULP H 5 HG X F Wacquant, L. 2009 Punishing the Poor: The Neo-Liberal Government of Social Insecurity, Duke University Press. (IIHF WLYHQHV V RI & & 7 9 ↑ LQ & 1RUULV - Surveillance, Closed \* \$UPVWUR Circuit Television and Social Control, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Squires, P. 2006 Introduction: Asking Questions of Community Safety, in Squires, (ed.) Community Safety: Critical Perspectives on Policy and Practice. Bristol, The Policy Press.

Squires, P. and Measor, L. (1996a). CCTV Surveillance and Crime Prevention in Brighton: Half-Yearly Analysis. Brighton: Health and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton.

Squires, P. and Measor, L. (1996b). CCTV Surveillance and Crime Prevention in Brighton: Follow-up Analysis. Brighton: Health and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton.

Surveillance Studies Network, 2007 Evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution: Surveillance, Citizens and the State. 28<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

Von Hirsch, A. 2000 The Ethics of Public Television Surveillance, in Ethical and Social Perspectives on Situational Crime Prevention. (Eds) A. von Hirsch, D. Garland and A. Wakefield. Oxford, Hart Publishing.

Wacquant, L. 2009 Punishing the Poor: The Neo-Liberal Government of Social Insecurity, Duke University Press.

Welsh, B. and Farrington, D. 2002 Crime Prevention Effects of Closed Circuit Television: A Systematic Review, Home Office Research Study, No.252, London: HMSO.