

**How and why is surveillance used in cities?**

**To what extent is surveillance a just means of social control?**

To be able to discuss the issue of surveillance, it is necessary to understand what is meant by surveillance. Surveillance literally means 'keeping watch over, guarding or supervising'. In the field of sociology, the word surveillance has a much more technical meaning, writers such as Foucault (1977), have often discussed how surveillance is a way to impose social control and order upon society. In society today, surveillance is widely used, particularly to monitor behaviour.

In the city, the use and different forms of surveillance has increased immensely over the last thirty years. The use surveillance within the city dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of police surveillance. The police began walking 'the beat' in order to reduce crime and in the hope of being more accessible to the public. The practise of 'pounding the beat,' has continued to modern times, in cities such as Manchester, policing the streets is used for a variety of reasons. Primarily, the police is used for detecting crimes, deterring criminals from offending, and also to reduce the publics' fear of crime. Another reason of 'pounding the beat,' is to observe suspicious characters. It has been contended that as well as giving a community a sense of security, some have argued that the police can cause tension within a community, especially in communities where there is a distinct lack of social stability. The term 'suspicious characters' is also too ambiguous, the definition is unclear, do the public know what constitutes a suspicious character; there is no official guideline of what actually represents a suspicious character for the police to follow. The police may

consider one certain group more suspicious than another. Due to this lack of formal guidelines, it is possible for one group, e.g. young black males, to be classed as more suspicious, and be targeted more than middle aged females.

Policing the streets is a form of surveillance that dates back to the early 1800's, another form of a similar type of surveillance that has increased over the last 20 years, would be the introduction of private security firms. Private security firms are common use today within shops, pubs and clubs, car parks and even in residential buildings. A good example of private security firms being used would be the Manchester Arndale Centre, where there are a large number of overt security guards who are there to monitor the public. Critics of employing the private security firms for surveillance have suggested that, firstly, the companies are a public limited company, therefore, their interests lie in earning profit as opposed to the interest of the public. A second criticism would be about the employees, there are no procedures on the qualification that a security guard needs. How does the security firm decide on who is competent to perform surveillance.

These private firms are also used to keep under observation of the closed circuit television (CCTV), but is this infringement on the public's civil liberties this will be discussed shortly. Firstly, consideration of what is the utility of CCTV will need to be analysed. CCTV is probably the most widely used form of surveillance within cities today; an increasing number of streets, buildings, car parks and more recently, people are putting CCTV in their homes. Manchester is a prime example of using CCTV; Manchester has invested in a multi million pound, state of the art surveillance system. CCTV is used throughout the city and is used to monitor behaviour and detecting criminality. This most up-to-date technology that is in place, can match known criminals to the images that the CCTV captures. Again this is quite

controversial, it goes back to the monitoring of certain groups, is it really fair that this group should be monitored more than others, just because they are known criminals, what about the individuals that do not get caught? Research has shown that the use of CCTV within the UK, that because there are no clear objectives of who should be observed, people who look 'peculiar' or deviant are targeted more than others.

In 1992, the city of Newcastle installed CCTV into the city centre after ram raiders and street crime turned the city centre into a 'no-go area.' The police monitored the CCTV system, the public approved of this, so long as the police and no outside agencies that were the observers. The system worked in Newcastle; the city was opened up by a newfound security that was felt through the CCTV. More arrests and conviction were made as a direct result of the CCTV.<sup>1</sup>

More recently, forms of 'hyper-surveillant control' have been developed; Boggard (1996) originally coined the term hyper-surveillant control. As a definition, hyper-surveillant control means,

*"Not just an intensification of surveillance, but the effort to push surveillance to the absolute limit."*

Boggard was referring to modern day society and included all types of surveillance, including the previously discussed and methods of surveillance, which are more recent, including monitoring consumption patterns when using credit or debit cards. When people use credit or debit cards, banks can monitor where, when, time, what they bought, and all this information is logged and stored. Moreover, every time a form is completed, information is given on all aspects of a person's life, once the form has been completed, the individual can never be clear what happens to the information. Furthermore, in this day of increasing consumerism, where more and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Someone to Watch over me (1995)

more people are using the Internet, websites that have been viewed are stored and then tailor made advertising will appear on screen.

The previously mentioned “*absolute limit*” that Boggard discussed, is an imaginary line beyond which control operates. This leads to the second part of the question on social control and to what extent is surveillance a just means of social control.

Parsons (1951) defines social control as,

*“the process by which, through the imposition of sanctions, deviant behaviour is counteracted and social stability maintained.”*

Is surveillance a means to ensure that these sanctions or rules, which Parsons discussed, are adhered to? Some writers have argued that by attempting to achieve social control, by the increased use of surveillance, of particular crimes or social groups, could lead to the deviancy to be amplified rather than deterring. Does this mean that surveillance is not a just means of social control?

Initially consider the moral issue of closed circuit television, some groups have suggested that CCTV impinges on peoples’ civil liberties. It is questionable that it is right to watch people, especially if they do not know they are being watched. There is little regulation over CCTV and people are not sure who is accountable when it extends to civil liberties. Some writers have argued that surveillance is not generally a necessity in achieving social control, but social stability of groups within society, community groups and shared values are all more important than surveillance. For example, if there is tension between police and particular minority within a city, when the police are considering increasing the number of police on ‘the beat,’ concern over this instability within the community should be taken into account.

Surveillance is widely used within all aspects of society and whether people it is right or wrong that someone else has the right to watch over another person, this is not always the issue. There are both advantages and disadvantages of surveillance and these have been discussed, however, to use surveillance as a form of social control will need careful deliberation. If surveillance is made excessively intense, it may be possible that a society where the public are constantly under surveillance could be created, it may be possible that this 'hyper-surveillant control' that Boggard mentioned, and the absolute limit will be achieved.

Surveillance could be classed as a just means of social control, and on the whole, society is willing to except that surveillance is a necessary to ensure that the norms and values are accomplished. The only time that surveillance is not just means of social control, is usually when the form of surveillance intrudes upon people's civil liberties, or intrudes in people's private affairs. Take for example celebrities in the public eye; these people are constantly being watched by the media and paparazzi, is this use of surveillance justifiable? It could be contested that this is intrusive into the lives of the celebrity. When surveillance is concentrated on particular groups within society, this could be considered prejudiced and unfair. Crime may reduce in a specific area of the city, but it is possible that the crime is not simply stopping, it is just being moved to another part of the city.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jeremy Bentham came up with the idea of a Panopticon, this idea was a prison, where surveillance enforced complete social control. This prison had no bars, but observation was the key to control, the wardens would be able to see every part of the prison, but the prisoners would not be able to see the wardens. Foucault suggested that the Panopticon worked because

*“it induced a state of conscious and permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power.”*

As the prisoners are aware that they are being watched, it is said that their behaviour alters because of this. The Panoptic prison was never developed, however, Foucault does argue that the idea did have an influence on other institutions such as hospital, schools and factories. The Panoptic idea was an idea that social control could be enforced through complete surveillance.

To conclude, surveillance is crucial within cities in order for social control to be maintained, but contrary to what some have argued, surveillance is not always the most essential ingredient in sustaining social control. Surveillance is a useful tool in the prevention and prosecution of crime, moreover, surveillance gives people the security that they require for them to feel safe from crime. People are willing to accept that surveillance is inevitable, but are not will not accept surveillance to encourage the extremes of social control where the ‘all seeing eye’ is developed and all aspects of social behaviour is controlled through the use of surveillance.

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