

Surveillance, Closed Circuit Television and Social Control

by Clive Norris, Jade Moran and Gary Armstrong

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Reviewed by Claire Lawrence

This book is an edited collection of articles that discuss the role of CCTV in society from a wide variety of perspectives. Its aim is to give an account of the rise of CCTV in the UK and to consider the issues arising. In the main, these aims are achieved, although the structuring of the book does not make for a logical and obvious approach to them.

The introduction discusses issues of power and CCTV, offering a Foucaultian perspective on surveillance and the state—a theme picked up again in Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, meaning that there is substantial repetition. Chapter 2, by Bannister, Fyfe and Kearns, discusses the potential of CCTV to sanitise urban democratic spaces and to exclude individuals for their inability or refusal to comply with middle-class sensibilities, driven by the desire to maintain a consumer-friendly environment. Sadly, Chapter 3, by Michael McCahill, again covers almost all of the same points, though there is more edge to his analysis of the issues.

In Chapter 4, Alan Reeve goes on to give some enlightening material on town centre management schemes, suggesting that due to the power of retailers over these schemes, financial growth is the ultimate aim of CCTV cameras, as opposed to improving the social amenity of the town centre. Again, Chapter 5 by Stephen Graham covers much material covered earlier. As a result, due to the frequent repetition of information and analysis, the first five chapters are rather disappointing as a collection, although individually well written and informative. Chapter 5 does touch on the intriguing issue of racism and CCTV—a point that is unfortunately not picked up on later in the book. Chapter 6 marks a turning point in the collection: Armstrong and Giulianotti offer an informative examination of the role of CCTV and other surveillance methods to deal with football hooliganism. This is an excellent chapter that brings to life much of the material presented earlier in the book.

The book then turns to the issue of evaluating CCTV—giving a change of emphasis, topic and style. Nick Tilley begins with a discussion of why evaluations of CCTV so often produce contradictory results. This chapter is useful and informative, as is a later contribution (Chapter 12) by Jason Ditton covering a similar debate; Ditton highlights the methodological problems common in evaluation studies of CCTV systems. Ditton and Short's earlier chapter (Chapter 8), focusing on an evaluation in Airdrie, offers some answers to the question of whether CCTV works—but in the light of Nick Tilley's arguments, the chapter does not address some of the issues set up in the preceding chapter. The following two chapters by Skinner and by Gill and Turbin offer excellent accounts of evaluation studies; indeed, more space should have been allowed for Skinner's fascinating study to be fully developed. In Chapter 1, Sheila Brown addresses women's reactions to CCTV, and although the main points have to be looked for, once found they offer an insight into gender politics on the street.

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Mike Maguire covers the issue of regulation in Chapter 13. Although the new Data Protection Act means that some of this material has been superseded, it is nonetheless a useful source. In Chapter 14, Simon Davies offers an amusing and contextualising account of anti-CCTV action. Chapter 15 discusses the future technological and social capabilities of CCTV, where Norris, Moran and Armstrong identify dilemmas that will face us in the future. In the final chapter Jade Moran offers a chronology of CCTV introduction in the UK, which is an excellent source for the researcher.

In sum, the early part of this edited collection suffers from major repetition, with some chapters being redundant, and others needing substantial pruning. However most chapters are good stand-alone articles, and I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in CCTV and in state and commercial control and power.

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