Book Review

Doyle, Aaron, Randy Lippert and David Lyon (eds). 2012. *Eyes Everywhere: The Global Growth of Camera Surveillance*. London: Routledge
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While the expansion and deployment of camera surveillance may have been spearheaded in the UK during the 1990s—‘backed up’ by dubious evaluations as to their effectiveness—‘the friendly eye in the sky’ has proliferated globally; from the workplace to the gated community, from the police officer’s helmet to the back of taxi cabs and buses. How are we to interpret the expansion of camera surveillance in the global context? What are the reasons for the roll-out of surveillance in different parts of the globe? Why is this roll-out geographically uneven and why is it resisted to degrees in some places more than others? If, on balance, as the growing consensus amongst critical scholars and some closer to the policy sphere appears to be, camera surveillance ‘does not work’ in deterrent, crime prevention, detection and prosecutorial terms, why are various institutions and agencies continuing to spend millions in public and private money on the technology despite overtones of ‘failure’? This edited volume attempts to address these kinds of questions.

As official social control talk has it, surveillance cameras are a valuable tool in the fight against crime. At the very least, camera roll-out appears to reassure the wider public that something is being done about ‘the problem of crime.’ Indeed, increasing incarceration rates in some ‘advanced’ countries, along with expansions in community corrections, has led some to believe that camera surveillance as a ‘policing’ tool has widened the net and thinned the mesh of social control, adding more deviance to the criminological lexicon and providing impetus to criminal justice ‘solutions’ more generally. One may postulate that CCTV, in some notable contexts, has had material effects in complementing the continued growth of the criminal justice state. As Stan Cohen has argued, such visionary technologies are not so much alternatives as further complementary additions to the ‘great confinement’ which began in the 19th century.

However, as I have argued, and as Norris does in the first chapter of this volume, the appeal (indeed the ‘success’) of CCTV has less to do with its stated aims and objectives and more to do with its symbolic appeal: as an expressive component of particular and unequal social relations and as a social ordering vehicle. Even in these terms its wholesale success is never entirely assured. CCTV—as this volume suggests— is a contested technology across many fronts. Its roll-out is neither uniform nor inevitable. However, as this book makes clear, roll-out continues in global terms. As I and Mike McCahill have recently argued, the advent of the surveillance camera has not merely been to track the deviant and the criminal as some preordained category; it has also aided powerful and longstanding ways of perceiving and organising ‘crime’ in contemporary social orders, fuelling common sense understandings of what ‘crime’ is, who commits it and where. So while its failure in crime prevention is relatively uncontested, its success—like that of the prison— presently remains assured in spatial terms in, for example, marking out

and symbolically locating a criminal class for the law-abiding to fear, be entertained by, or cast punitive fantasies upon. As Foucault argued about the birth and expansion of the modern prison, its ‘reliability’ and success marked the hegemony of a particular social order in which the domination of a bourgeois social order was drawn. So, like the prison, CCTV is embedded in, and reflective of asymmetrical social relations, and it is these relations structured through class, ‘race,’ gender, age and sexuality that form the starting point for analysis. The introduction to the book alludes to ‘an era of neo-liberalism’ in which ‘the widespread use of privately acquired personal images by public police and security agencies means that the situation is very complex indeed’ (p.17). If CCTV is indicative of neo-liberal rule, in what ways might this be manifest in relation to complexities in the roll-out of CCTV?

The first part of this book attempts to situate camera surveillance growth within economic, political and cultural developments. As a mode of class power, neo-liberalism is not some monolithic block with an inevitable trajectory (Coleman, 2004). Tensions and contradictions exist across its ideological and institutional terrain: its local manifestation displays peculiar characteristics rendering the deployment and uses of CCTV open to some level of contestation both within and outside of local statecraft. Gavin Smith notes some of these tensions in the expansion of CCTV in the UK under neoliberal rule. The rise of managerialist, costing and efficiency discourses on the one hand, and punitiveness on the other, make for an intriguing set of tensions within the neo-liberal political field. In the UK, as Smith notes, the former may be undermining CCTV’s expansion and replacing it with a politics of contraction in the context of austerity drives, stories of blunder and ineffectiveness relating to CCTV and the criminal field it seeks to monitor.

Indeed, the roll-out of any CCTV programme is rarely free of tension. This was true of the Liverpool system whereby some primary definers wanted no truck with a public surveillance system on the grounds of resource implications and forecast (in)efficiency, despite their support in normative terms for the drive to ‘a safer city’ along with agreement over what constituted a hindrance to ‘public tranquillity.’ Those ‘primary definers’ who initially opted out of CCTV, and those ‘secondary definers’ who now urge a re-think on its expansion, are essentially technocrats less concerned with social justice and more concerned with legitimacy (in the case of policing) and profit and loss. This poses an interesting question in the event of a CCTV-less urban landscape. As Smith intimates, this technology may wither away in the homeland of its initial valorisation *and* all as a result of a neoliberal inspired discourse of austerity and inefficiency. But this is not the same as marking an advance in rendering a more democratic and fair public space—as any understanding of democratisation is largely off the radar in the current neoliberal brutal redirection of the allocation of public funds and remains silenced in much mainstream media coverage. Smith’s chapter does indirectly provoke an interesting example of where synoptic representation *does not*—as in Mathiesen’s writing—inevitably endorse panoptic expansion. But it is worth pointing out here that, despite the ‘critical turn’ in representing CCTV in Britain, those cameras that will remain (along with the prisons, public and private police, databases, and other forms of ‘access control’) are likely to keep their gaze fixed firmly on the most vulnerable and powerless. Perhaps the real challenge is yet to come in the form of a politics and philosophy that challenges neo-liberalism itself.

As austerity measures tend to cut-back and reconfigure, as opposed to abolish and replenish with new philosophies, we can still envisage a surveillance landscape that displays elements of historical continuity, not least in terms of who, and what, is targeted, but also in terms of what Finn’s chapter calls ‘seeing surveillantly.’ His argument rests on the idea that the surveillance camera has introduced a new type of being—a broader culture of surveillance—inaugurated through a surveillance imaginary (evident in advertising, TV and film) which encourages a broader normalisation of the surveillance of self and others. Some of the questions posed here are how is this expansive culture of surveillance reconfiguring concepts of self, other, deviant and normal? How are power relations misrecognised and misrepresented in an era of mass looking?

Global roll-out of CCTV is uneven and Part II of the book explores particular contexts for this. For Murakami Wood, the differences and similarities in surveillance developments in Rio and Tokyo attest to the ways of organising surveillance found in each case; the links between CCTV and other surveillance practices in the locale; who the subjects of surveillance are; processes of camera regulation and the broader modes of order operating in each city. As neo-liberalisation comes to different places in different ways, so too does the surveillance camera, the uses of which will be moderated by the above criteria. However, although difference and nuances are stressed in much of the surveillance literature it is equally valid to complement this in looking for convergence and similarity across borders. Whilst the targets of cameras may be the marginalised in both contexts these are constituted in different ways. There may also be signs in both contexts of a politically and economically trans-national dominant class increasingly concerned with their own security whilst sanctioning greater controls for the poorer inhabitants surrounding them (p.93).

In her review of the situation in Canada, Emily Smith notes the piecemeal development of CCTV, stating that ‘each site has a unique set of circumstances that has led to camera surveillance proposals, implementation or withdrawal’ (p.125). However, powerful national and private interests ‘often lead’ developments here despite evidence to ‘ineffectiveness,’ making transparency of the initialisation process difficult to observe (p.131).

Part III continues to note some of the drivers underpinning the growth of CCTV networks and the characteristics in establishing CCTV in different cultural contexts. Calvin Bozbeyoglu explores CCTV in Istanbul, introducing a framework of political economy and in particular how neo-liberalisation is impacting on urban space and its governance in that city (and Turkey more generally). How neo-liberalism has wedded with Turkey’s longer history of strong state control, along with further erosions of human rights, is also noted along with disproportionate targeting of poor and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the increasing salience of urban mega events (Capital of Culture in Europe, Olympics in London and elsewhere) appears to engender not only rapid intensifications of state surveillance and police control (see also Vonn and Boyle’s chapter), but militarisation of the urban form as well. This feeds the notion that ‘competitive’ cities with ‘flagship’ projects increasingly normalise surveillance as part of urban infrastructure and intensify the targeting of marginal groups.

Doyle and Walby’s contribution includes a discussion of the obstructions to transparency and open debate that the establishment of CCTV often brings forth and are evident in many other chapters in the book. These include the manner in which high profile (though atypical) and emotive crimes are fore-grounded as reasons for surveillance, leaving little room for rational debate; the inscrutability of the private sector involved in developing camera schemes; and the interconnected, opaque manner in which surveillance systems interconnect over time.

Surveillance as a mechanism of silencing is often over-looked, that is, if we hold on to a view of it as ‘all seeing, all knowing.’ Of course, this would be to believe in a technological fallacy—surveillance only partially constructs the social world it seeks to render ‘intelligible’ in the mind-sets of those interests behind it. In this sense, prevailing knowledge about, and definitions of, ‘crime’ and ‘harm’ are reinforced through usage of CCTV footage in Crime Stopper type scenarios. One of the first things that struck me when coming to research this area was its contribution to Foucault’s ‘garrulous discourse’ on what constitutes crime and by implication what kinds of events and social situations cameras rarely record despite these events (usually not included under the category of ‘crime’) engendering relatively high levels of harm. Reinforcing debates about crimes of the powerless, at the expense of the powerful, appears as an important impact of using CCTV footage in police-friendly media (Lippert and Wilkinson this volume). From its materialisation in space and usage in media, there is no reason to think surveillance roll-out is underscored with reasoned argument. In many arenas and when examined critically, roll-out sheds light on the process of tutelage involved in what James Scott called ‘seeing like a state.’

Indeed, what could be construed as seeing like a state appears to run parallel to seeing surveillantly, as the latter is underpinned by the sense of the powerful being able to amass economic, political and cultural capital and institutional leverage through the media and public relations avenues to make the case for, indeed demand, surveillance expansion. In part IV, Laura Huey shows how police and other surveillance advocates are akin to primary definers whose accredited authority remains assured in many surveillance debates in contrast to those who appear less credible (with less capital to draw upon) who argue against surveillance expansion, such as privacy advocates. Unequal social positioning and access to resources in surveillance ‘debates’ means that the interventions of the former can appear as ‘common sense’ (p.246), cohering with the sensibilities of the public at large, whilst the latter appear as enemies of ‘the public good.’ The discussion here poses a question of how anti-surveillance groups (and critical academics) can challenge the ‘common sense’ of surveillance momentum? Pointing out privacy diminishment, or the atypical nature of many signal crimes that underpin calls for CCTV may not be enough in this authoritarian climate. Demonstrating that surveillance ‘solutions’ are not always even close to offering solutions, and indeed can exacerbate what are social, economic and political problems (violence against women, many petty crimes), may be another avenue in what Wright Mills called cultivating apparently ‘personal issues in a publicly relevant way.’

When scrutiny of the powerful exists, even as ‘wrongdoing’ subjects, it is unlikely that such scrutiny will lead to greater surveillance, restriction or censure. Arteaga Botello’s chapter makes clear synoptic scrutiny of the powerful (certainly a phenomena of mainstream media) does not necessarily translate into panoptic control. The powerful can ‘impede what feeds back between synoptic cameras and panoptic cameras’ (p.259) and this he infers from a fascinating discussion of high profile case in Mexico City of what appeared to be child kidnapping from a wealthy family.

Part V of the book looks at the regulation of CCTV with recourse to legal structures (for example, Johnson’s chapter) and the use of signage informing the public of the presence of camera surveillance as a means ‘of promoting greater transparency and public accountability’ (Clement and Ferenbok, p.330). Although various authors note the difficulties, dangers and limitations of these kinds of avenues to regulating surveillance networks, it could be argued that some kind of regulation is better than none at all. But worryingly, such measures, such as applying oversight or reconfiguring the meaning of privacy, take shape outside of considerations of political economies driving and ideologically framing surveillance, as well as the fractured, social divisive and iniquitous social landscapes within which surveillance is established and developed.

While it may be evident for some that surveillance contributes to spuriousness of criminal justice solutions to social problems, CCTV (as some chapters here insinuate) can be seen as indicative of ‘state failure’ in that so many of society’s problems lie beyond surveillant control and, indeed, such problems can be aggravated by these interventions. Are we any closer to understanding the contribution of surveillance to ameliorating or reinforcing the major divisions of time (whether, for example, manifest through gender or class relations)? This question invokes a different analytical angle than what is addressed in this stimulating book which—like many other books on this subject—has silences in relation to historical continuities and discontinuities in relation to surveillance power and targeting. Such silences revolve around the difficult questions of differential state formation in relation to surveillance; the relationship between surveillance and space/place; and—in the contemporary setting—a deeper engagement with social reproduction and the meanings, practices and manifestations of neo-liberalism. Theoretically, we are attuned to panoptic frameworks and, to some extent, synoptic processes, and the growth of assemblages in the quest for understanding the surveillance landscape. However, in many an analysis these concepts often function as empty containers, or self perpetuating mechanisms, divorced from political and economic conflict, class division and other social cleavages of wider structural significance. It is these wider structures that remain central to any analysis of surveillance practice.