



## CCTV and the privacy

By Douglas Grant

In the previous issue of Focus, I shared with you the conversation I had about the never-ending debate concerning privacy and electronic eye. The first topic discussed was about the civil libertarians. Other topics in the conversation were; What could we compare historically to surveillance, the security camera and how public space is altered by the use of surveillance cameras.

Unfortunately, as a society we are individuals that need to know that we are being watched in order to behave the way our society demands. This can easily be demonstrated by the continued monitoring of children in the play-ground, if the schools could afford a monitoring system with the amazing eye sight the nuns in my school had, all teachers would be able to relax and enjoy lunch.

Our community has creative scribblers and litterbugs, but more dangerous types are emerging in what has been seen in the past as safe areas. These people leave in their wake a trail of damage, and leave permanent scares. I suppose what interests me is, considering our society has always adopted the practice of monitoring people, can invasion of privacy in a public space such as malls and street space even be classed as an infringement?

I can still remember the invaders of privacy my parents had, I never managed to play hooky without mum confronting me at the door with "Mrs. Jones saw you up town, was school can-

celled?" My wife even manages to catch me from time to time with, "why were you in Sydney today I thought you were off to Melbourne," and this is before a hello. She tells me it's radar, I know better, she's got spies. In my life, as I'm sure with many of you, there would have been a few more absent days from school if it had not been for Mrs. Jones and her team. As a society we often do what we believe we can get away with. I consider the general way in which we use CCTV, as in monitoring people's behavior, is in a way

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replacing the eyes of people in the past like Mrs. Jones.

As our society has grown, the Mrs. Jones of twenty years ago are unable to keep up the extended watch dog hours. CCTV has been able to fulfil that vacancy. Public space has been altered by CCTV in a few ways, the designers now have one more element to take into consideration, and there is much more interest placed on landscape architecture and placement. I have from time to time spoken to people about the effect CCTV has had on them, obviously no one is too excited about having their office space monitored or other more personal space. Although the reality of monitoring public space has never seemed too much of a concern for anyone, in most cases the general public are under the belief that the space is made safer with the use of cameras.

Where as, the one anxiety that has been raised, concerns the operators. In the past the media has highlighted some unfortunate incidents depicting the operators recorded images.

I believe these incidents focus on the lack of respect the operators have for the people they are monitoring. What this also reinforces is the concept that people being watched are reminded of the behaviour that is expected of them. So in all likelihood placing a camera behind the operator would remind them of their anticipated behaviour. In my capacity as a professional and a teacher in the CCTV industry, it interests me that companies offering the service to supply control operators, don't seem to recognise the need to train their controllers professionally. It is damaging and of very little use having

a controller train new staff, even if they have taken a course, as all they may be doing is reinforcing bad habits and training new ones. Of all the courses I had offered the one with the least inquiries is the one for the CCTV operators. In the event I do have an inquiry it will not be from the companies, but from the individual operator recognising the need for training.

There will always be people that consider CCTV in public spaces as some type of invasion of privacy. I suppose, what we could consider is that those people view junk mail, telephone solicitation, TV advertising and billboards in the same way. Mind you, I dislike most of those as well. Tolerance and education is the key to changing peoples' negative perceptions. ■

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