

Level: advanced

## Big Brother is Watching You #2

### The Eyes of the Law: Closed Circuit TV

It has been estimated that if you spend a day walking around London, the chances are that your movements will be recorded by over 300 cameras. These are not cameras of TV companies broadcasting to homes around the country. They are CCTV cameras that either belong to the police or to companies trying to protect their property. In recent years the British police force has been spending most of the money allocated for crime prevention on expanding this massive system of video surveillance – a system in which cameras are increasingly being used in conjunction with face recognition software so that suspicious individuals can be identified and followed automatically. Britain now has a greater concentration of these cameras than any other country in the world.

#### Discussion point 1:

Let's imagine you are a young person from a poor background and this evening you just want to hang out with your friends in the square closest to your house. You look up and see a number of cameras scanning the area. How would you feel? Would the cameras make you feel safer (if someone tries to attack you the cameras surely mean that the police will be here in seconds), or would they create an unpleasant feeling of being watched? Perhaps there is a third option: would you not even pay attention to them because you are so used to the idea of cameras everywhere nowadays?

#### Discussion point 2:

A question about CCTV and crime: Some politicians and senior police officers insist that CCTV systems are effective deterrents that keep crime levels down. Critics argue that criminals just move to areas without cameras and they are adamant that there are better ways of tackling crime. Where do you think the truth lies?

#### Discussion point 3:

Read the following paragraph and discuss whether or not you agree with the idea that it presents.

At the end of the eighteenth century Jeremy Bentham wrote some very influential essays in which he argued for increased levels of surveillance. He liked the idea of schools, for instance, in which pupils would feel that they were always being observed. As he put it: "A pupil cannot be too much under the eye of the master." His theory was that systems of surveillance were some of the best techniques for encouraging people to be law-abiding and conscientious. If people grow up feeling that they are always being watched they internalize that critical eye and they develop the habit of regulating their own behaviour even when they are not being watched and when it is not strictly necessary for the purposes of social control. Thus they are more likely to become exemplary law-abiding citizens.

Was Bentham right? Is this a good way to improve social behaviour?

#### Discussion point 4:

Back in the 1780s Bentham could never have dreamed of a city with a camera on every street corner, but he would surely have been a staunch advocate of this use of CCTV. Opponents of this view have argued that something valuable is endangered by the spread of CCTV and other forms of surveillance throughout the city. Here's one point of view about what is under threat.

One of the attractions of city life for many people is the anonymity that it offers. In contrast to life in a village, you can travel to another part of the city, enjoy yourself in whatever way you like and never have to worry about gossip or the other aspects of village life that can make it seem repressive. Large cities have been called "societies of strangers" and this is where many people feel more at liberty to express themselves.

If people start to feel that records are being kept of their movements and their correspondence the character of city life changes. The journalist William Safire, writing for the New York Times, put it like this: "To be watched at all times, especially when doing nothing seriously wrong, is to be afflicted with a creepy feeling .... It is the pervasive, inescapable feeling of being unfree."

Is this a valid criticism? Could it be argued that this is a price worth paying to improve the level of safety in public places?

# Big Boss

**Question 1:** Let's imagine you go for two job interviews with two different companies. At the first company you find out that you'll be working in a large office with a group of colleagues plus your manager. At the second company you find that you won't have to work in the same office as your boss but there will be a camera and there will be software that collects statistics of how busy you have been on your computer. Which company would you prefer to work for? Why?

**Question 2:** If you were the boss of a company and you were not entirely happy with the productivity of the guys in the office, would you consider installing closed circuit TV cameras? Would that be the best option?

**Question 3:** To what extent do you agree with the following point of view?

The more we feel that we are under surveillance, the less we feel that we are trusted. Although some forms of surveillance may be beneficial for society a line must be drawn somewhere. Social relationships depend on trust and permitting ourselves to undermine it in this way seems like slow social suicide.

## Surveillance on the Roads

Read the following paragraph and then discuss the question that follows.

Congestion on the roads is becoming increasingly severe. It is also unfair that every car driver has to pay the same road tax regardless of the amount of driving they do. A third problem is that in countries where there are tolls, traffic flow is not helped if cars have to stop and pay at a toll booth. To deal with these problems there is a proposal to fit all cars with a GPS device (i.e. a device that communicates with satellites in order to determine its exact position). The location and speed of every car on the road will be recorded by the traffic police. Instead of a fixed tax and instead of stopping at toll gates car owners will be taxed according to which roads they have driven on at which times (the charge for driving through the city centre during the rush hour will be much greater than that for driving along a country lane). There will be no need for policemen or cameras to spot speeding violations. Thanks to the GPS system every speeding violation will be immediately recorded and the speeding ticket sent to the driver's address. Inevitably this system will involve keeping records of every movement of every car in the country – records that could be used as evidence in a criminal investigation.

How would you weigh up the pros and cons of a system like this?

## Other Surveillance Systems

Read each of the following brief descriptions and then discuss what justification there might be for these surveillance techniques.

**Supermarket cards.** Customers who use one of the supermarket's own cards receive a discount and at the same time the card enables the supermarket to keep a record of everything you have bought.

**Cards for public transport systems.** London has the Oyster card, which people can use to travel around London without buying tickets for each journey, but the system also keeps a digital record of all the journeys made by each cardholder.

**Phone records.** Phone companies in Europe are now required to keep records of who has phoned whom and when for two years so that these can be made available to the police when necessary.

**Phone bugs.** It is possible for software to be secretly installed on your mobile phone enabling others to use the phone's microphone as a listening device either during phone conversations or when the phone is not in use. The system will still work if the phone is switched off, although not if the battery is removed.

**Search engines** on the internet keep records of key words you have typed into their search boxes and of the pages you have visited. One of the search engines has even developed software that will enable it to use a built-in microphone on your PC to listen to what is going on in your house or office.

**ECHELON:** International phone calls and emails may well pass through what is known as the ECHELON system – an international intelligence network which scans electronic forms of communication looking for key words and phrases.

**Tags for convicts.** If you are unlucky enough to be sentenced to a few years in a British prison you may find that the authorities offer to release you before your time is up. The chances are that there will be a condition: they will only release you early if you agree to wear a tag on your ankle for a year or so – a tag fitted with a tiny GPS device that lets the local police know where you are 24 hours a day.

## Do You Like Chips?

### Discussion

For some time now companies have been using tiny microchips in labels attached to their goods to keep a central database of exactly where those goods are (leaving the factory, in the warehouse or on their way to the customer). Have you heard of any proposals to use similar chips on people? Before reading the next short piece, discuss any ideas that you have heard about.

### Reading

In some countries people seem to accept that everyone ought to have an ID card and carry it with them. In Britain, until recently, the feeling was that it would be an unacceptable attack on civil liberties if people had to carry an ID card. However, things are changing and support for a system like this is growing. Now there are plans for an ID card that will be machine readable. This will be needed to open a bank account, enter a government building, claim a government benefit or board a plane. Because these cards can be scanned by a device connected to a computer network, every time they are used details can be sent automatically to a central database where records will be kept of every time you enter and leave the country and every time you make a request or enquiry at a government office.

Supporters of cards like these say they are essential if we are to counter identity fraud (an example of this is when people claim state benefits using a false identity). However, the most persuasive argument for many people concerns the threat from terrorism. The government argues that new ID cards would make it much harder for terrorists to move around the country with a false identity. In the UK, at least, it seems that they have won the argument. One survey found that seven in every 10 people think compulsory identity cards for all adults would be "a price worth paying" to reduce the threat of terrorism.

The trouble with ID cards is that they can be lost or stolen so some people argue that it would be better to give everyone a microchip implant. The chips in question are known as RFIDs because they use a radio frequency identification system. They can store data – your name, date of birth, ID number and a digital photograph, for instance - and then transmit it when brought in close proximity to a scanner. Because they are small enough to pass through the needle of a syringe they can be implanted easily in the human body.

Implanted chips have already been used on patients in hospitals in the US to ensure that patients arriving at the operating theatre are correctly identified and the right records for the patient are kept up to date. The Baja Beach Club in Rotterdam (Holland) also persuaded its customers to have chip implants so that the club could control admission and enable clubbers to pay without having to carry cash. Some employees have also agreed to have chips implanted so that employers can keep better records of when people arrive and leave the place of work.

### Discussion

1. Do you think everybody in a country should be obliged to carry some form of identification?
2. Do you think the police should have the power to stop people they consider to be suspicious and demand to see their ID (of course there would be unpleasant consequences if they didn't have an ID card on them or if it was invalid or contained inaccuracies)?
3. Some people would argue that if they had to carry some form of identification it would make them feel as if they had to get permission from the government to leave their homes. Is this a reasonable point of view?
4. If there are good reasons for some kind of ID card scheme, wouldn't it be even better to use implanted chips instead of cards?

5. Looking back at all the methods of surveillance, to what extent do you agree with the following point of view? Is this a reason to be concerned?

Although most of the technology is currently being used in a benign way, we are creating the perfect tools for a future dictatorship. Many former dictators such as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin and Benito Mussolini would have been delighted if all this technology of surveillance had been in place when they came to power. If democracy slides again into dictatorship, the future dictator will find a wonderful system of surveillance and control waiting for him.

## Vocabulary revision

Match the words on the left with their definitions on the right.

a) label	1) a tax (e.g. the one paid on roads)
b) bug	2) a reduction in the price of something
c) undermine	3) an adjective describing something that makes people feel less free to express themselves
d) implant (noun)	4) something which has been put inside the body
e) discount	5) something showing a name that is attached to a product
f) fraud	6) the crime of deceiving people in order to gain money
g) toll	7) supporter (of a proposal)
h) scan (an area)	8) traffic jams or blockage e.g. in the nose
i) violation	9) strong (supporter)
j) repressive	10) a noun referring to an act that breaks the law
k) warehouse	11) to make something weaker
l) pervasive	12) a listening device used for the purposes of spying
m) staunch	13) widespread; common over a wide area
n) syringe	14) look around; monitor what is happening
o) advocate (noun)	15) a place for storing goods
p) congestion	16) a device for giving someone an injection

## Language practice

Complete the second sentence using the word in bold – without changing its form – so that the second sentence has the same meaning as the first.

- They gave each of us two pairs of trousers. **allocated**  
We ..... two pairs of trousers each.
- They say that CCTV is effective in persuading people not to commit crimes. **deterrent**  
They say that CCTV ..... that keeps crime levels down.
- It is highly likely that your movements are being recorded. **chances**  
The ..... your movements are being recorded.
- I am a firm believer in the use of CCTV. **advocate**  
I ..... the use of CCTV.
- We are concerned that our employees are not sufficiently productive. **productivity**  
We are concerned ..... employees.
- We are weakening the sense of trust that is essential to society. **undermined**  
The sense of trust that is essential to society.....
- It doesn't matter how much we use our cars, we all pay the same road tax. **regardless**  
We all pay the same road tax ..... driving we do.
- The Galileo satellite will make it possible for Europe to have its own GPS system. **enable**  
The Galileo satellite .....its own GPS system.
- They have put a chip in the arm of each customer. **implanted**  
The arm of each customer ..... a chip.
- The chip only transmits the data when it is very close to a scanner. **proximity**  
The chip only transmits the data when ..... a scanner.