

Stuart Waiton

University of Abertay, Scotland. <mailto:s.waiton@abertay.ac.uk>

Abstract

This paper explores the rise of CCTV in society during the last two decades. It concentrates on state sponsored surveillance schemes in an attempt to answer the question of why it is that CCTV surveillance emerged at this particular point in history. At one level, advancing technology can allow a 'surveillance society' to emerge, yet the extent to which CCTV cameras have spread into city centres and residential areas suggests something more profound has changed in 'public' life. The exponential rise in the surveillance of society is often understood to reflect the rise of authoritarianism, perhaps particularly in the UK. Whether from a Weberian, a Foucauldian, or even – and perhaps in particular – a neo-Marxist perspective, this development is often understood as an enforcement of power, resulting from an ideological consensus built around 'rampant' neo-liberalism; public life is, in part, understood to be undermined by private interests, the power of capital, or techniques of governance associated to one degree or another with neo-liberalism. In this paper, the neo-liberal framework for understanding the rise of surveillance is questioned. Building upon arguments by Baudrillard, Lasch, Bauman and Furedi it is argued that, rather than an aggressive and purposeful moral or neo-liberal authoritarianism lying behind the rise of surveillance cameras the opposite is in fact the case. The diminution of 'public' space both reflects and represents the decline of political purpose and meaning within society and especially within the political elite.

Introduction

In 1983 Jean Baudrillard wrote *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, a book that examined what he described as 'the end of the social'. This theme – the end or the 'death' of the social – has been explored subsequently by Rose (1996), and from a more post-modern perspective by Bauman (2000) in his study of what he describes as today's *liquid modernity*. Prior to Baudrillard's text, the question of the essence of 'public' life had been raised by social thinkers from C. Wright Mills (1968), to Richard Sennett (1986) and Jurgen Habermas (1992). In various ways, these authors explored the 'fall of public man' and the rise of a 'mass' of individuals where the 'public' had once been. Prior to this, but perhaps most especially in the 1970s, this development was also connected to an examination of the 'elite' and their *legitimation crisis* (Habermas 1976) or what the American writer Christopher Lasch (1979) described as a *culture of narcissism*. With these works in mind, this paper attempts to explain the contemporary development of the 'surveillance society'.

The question of the public, or the lack of one, at one level draws us towards an examination of 'the people', the 'silent majority' or the 'mass'. However, as the above writers recognised, albeit in differing ways, attempting to reconceptualise the meaning, or lack of meaning, in public life was in effect to shine a light on the question of agency and action within society. It also raised issue with the idea, understanding and significance of class, or perhaps more particularly with the changing and or diminishing dynamic of contesting classes and the impact that class conflict had upon social processes, and indeed within politics

itself. In this respect, the question of the public has a dialectical interconnection with the question of authority, with the cohering beliefs or traditions that make a society – and as such, with the elite itself and the nature of the relationship between the people and the polis (Castariadis 1991).

In relation to the growing surveillance or regulation of society, it is perhaps worth also noting from the outset that one of the curiosities of contemporary modernity is the fact that CCTV (to take the most obvious example) has grown and grown precisely at the time when class conflict has all but disappeared. The traditional tensions and forms of ‘governance of social relations and social conflicts’ (Campbell 2004), are perhaps less significant than they have been for almost two centuries.

This curiosity raises the question of the *dynamic* behind today’s growing surveillance, and this paper is an attempt to explore this precise point. Here, as with Baudrillard’s description of a ‘black hole’ where a public once existed, the suggestion is that there is a *negative dynamic* to the rise and rise of CCTV in the UK – a kind of antimatter (to continue with the cosmic analogies) that forms and deforms public and political life.

Politics

Perhaps the clearest expression of the changing nature of the ‘public’ can be seen in the sphere within which the ‘will of the people’ is (in theory) represented: politics. On both sides of the Atlantic and arguably across the world, not only the participation but also the very meaning of politics has declined. Writing in 1992, three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ‘victory’ of the West – and the ‘free world’, E.J. Dionne Jr. opened his book *Why Americans Hate Politics* by noting that,

“At the very moment when democracy is blossoming in Eastern Europe, it is decaying in the United States. Over the last three decades, the faith of the American people in their democratic institutions has declined, and Americans have begun to doubt their ability to improve the world through politics” (Dionne 1992: 9).

Despite the recent Obama excitement in the U.S. the jury is still out on the significance of this election in terms of a revival in political and public life. Elsewhere little appears to have changed. The ‘blossoming’ of democracy in Eastern Europe has gone quiet, while the recent British election saw neither of the two main political parties able to cohere a majority of the electorates’ support.

Discussing the decline of politics in Britain, Colin Hay in *Why We Hate Politics* notes that, ‘Nowhere, it seems, does politics animate electorates consistently and *en masse* to enthusiastic participation in the democratic process’. More than this he continues,

“Once something of a *bon mot*, conjuring a series of broadly positive connotations – typically associating politics with public scrutiny and accountability – ‘politics’, has increasingly become a dirty word. Indeed to attribute ‘political’ motives to an actor’s conduct is now invariably to question that actor’s honesty, integrity or capacity to deliver an outcome that reflects anything other than his or her material self-interest – often, all three simultaneously”(Hay 2007: 1).

Reasons for the research

With a focus on the question of the ‘public’, and a consequent surveillance of politics, and an interest, indeed concern with the emerging regulatory state, this paper will attempt to locate the rise of CCTV within this (anti) political climate. The paper itself developed out of the authors’ involvement with an anti-CCTV campaign in the area where he lived in Glasgow – East Pollokshields. As such there is no claim to neutrality here when it comes to the question of the growing surveillance of society.

Three factors consequently led to the writing of this paper. Firstly, a frustration during this campaign in trying to understand why the cameras were being introduced onto the streets, not only in this area but on many estates in Glasgow – indeed across Scotland. The commonly given answer, that it was what people wanted or that they were being introduced to stop crime, did not appear satisfactory. After all people want lots of things but only some of them materialise; meanwhile, the impact that CCTV has upon crime levels remains disputed.

Secondly, the academic literature within surveillance studies, whilst raising an array of useful insights about technology, modernity, consumer society and governance, appeared to either lack a sense of agency or to give too great a sense of a domineering Big Brother, to explain why cameras and surveillance had become so significant.

Finally, work being carried out by the author exploring the decline of political authority in Western society, the rise of micro politics and indeed of micro politicians, appeared to embody something not explored fully yet within surveillance studies.

One key issue explored here, is the idea of neo-liberalism, or at least neo-liberalism as a forceful political project, driven and supported by an ideology of robust liberal individualism; the usefulness of this idea as an explanation for the rise of the surveillance society is questioned below. This is not to question the dominance of the market in society, but rather to question the *dynamic* of neo-liberalism in politics, culture and society more generally. In contrast to the idea that neo-liberalism can explain the rise and rise of surveillance, here it is argued that it is the collapse of politics that can better explain this development. Indeed, rather than presuming that today's market oriented society is driven by an underlying neo-liberalism, it is more useful to recognise the declining support and belief in freedom or a classical sense of liberty; a decline reflected both within the elite itself and in the new understanding of public space as essentially a *safe* space for all.

After exploring the issue of neo-liberalism and further examining the significance of the loss of meaning within politics, the example of the CCTV scheme introduced in Glasgow will be explored to illustrate how this process works out in practice. Despite the local and to some extent specific nature of this CCTV scheme the usefulness of the case study is in its attempt to explore the centrality of the diminished nature of politics and political leadership. Here the argument is made that the driving force for this surveillance scheme is centred around the lack of a political relationship that exists between the local member of parliament and the 'public' he is supposed to represent.

The rise of 'neo-liberal' CCTV?

The question of why CCTV cameras have come to be so significant a part of the urban landscape in the UK is the central focus of this paper. This question has been made all the more interesting by recent research in Britain which suggests that these cameras are often impractical and limited at doing what they are supposed to do – reduce crime and the fear of it, and to catch criminals.

In 2005, research for the Home Office raised questions about the usefulness of CCTV cameras. The report *Assessing the Impact of CCTV* found that of the 14 CCTV systems examined only in one area could the introduction of cameras be shown to have reduced crime (Gill and Spriggs 2005). Professor Gill explained that, 'For supporters of CCTV these findings are disappointing...For the most part CCTV did not produce reductions in crime and it did not make people feel safer'.¹

¹ See BBC website at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/leicestershire/4294693.stm>

More recently in London, questions about the usefulness of CCTV cameras have been raised by Detective Chief Inspector Mike Neville who runs the Visual Images, Identifications and Detections Office (Viido) at New Scotland Yard. Neville has called the 'Billions of pounds' spent on CCTV cameras, 'an utter fiasco' (*Guardian* 6 May 2008).

Neville and Gill both see a possible solution to these problems through better technology and better communication. However, the lack of effectiveness of the cameras up to this point in time raises wider questions about why CCTV has been so widely supported by 'evidence based' politicians and so widely funded by central government and implemented by local authorities.

The interest in the rise of CCTV cameras, and indeed of surveillance more generally, has grown significantly in the last decade or so, with 'Surveillance Studies' becoming an interdisciplinary subject in itself (Lyon 2007). A variety of theoretical approaches have been adopted to help explain the rise of the 'surveillance society'. Fussey, for example, believes the neo-Marxist emphasis on the significance of the sovereign state is a more convincing perspective than the Foucauldian understanding of 'governmental' power, but is one that needs to take account of local processes (Fussey 2004: 266).

For many within this discussion, there is an understanding that neo-liberalism has a significant influence when it comes to understanding the dynamic behind things like surveillance cameras. From a leftist and neo-Marxist perspective both the regulation of 'undesirables' and the development of the 'entrepreneurial city' are highlighted. For Foucauldians in contrast, neo-liberalism is often understood as being characterised by the governance of risk and fear. However, in general, the use of the term neo-liberal as a 'concept' to explain developments often lacks clarity and at times appears to represent the 'power of capital' in an exaggerated and one sided way.²

Fussey notes that,

"In general the neo-Marxist approaches to CCTV concentrates on two interconnected themes: the use of CCTV to police economically marginal groups in society and CCTV as a manifestation of sovereign state power" (Fussey 2004: 255).

Thus Fussey concludes that much recent work looking at the operation of CCTV in public relates to this theme of policing socio-economic boundaries, with economically powerful groups being seen as having an increased influence in defining and managing public space. Likewise, McCahill notes this understanding of an 'exclusive impulse', particularly in town centres that are portrayed as 'places of consumption' for tourists and consumers (McCahill 2002: 13). The idea represented here is that a 'safe city' makes business sense.

Within the framework of a critique of corporate crime, Coleman, Tombs and Whyte go further still to outline the neo-liberal dynamic of surveillance, arguing that,

"The trajectory of regeneration discourses and practice...is resulting in a stabilisation of opportunity structures for corporate crimes and harms, whilst at the same further exposing the relatively powerless to the punitive gaze of the extended surveillance capacity being developed as part of the entrepreneurial landscape." (Coleman et al. 2005: 2511).

² It is worth noting here that many Foucauldian writers more accurately describe the more limited nature of neo-liberalism and the type of power it represents. However, perhaps because of their political (or even emotional) sympathies with the left, they, like Jonathan Simon (2007) for example, often end up exaggerating the dominance of the 'right' in their final analysis of society. Rather than focusing on the Foucauldian approach, this paper looks more at the one sided approach by writers such as the neo-Marxists.

Here they stress the ‘corporate and business interests in the state-building process’ (Coleman et al. 2005: 2512), something they believe relates to a ‘broader neo-liberalism of urban political economics’ (ibid.: 2514) and the promotion of the unfettered rule of capital (ibid.: 2515). As such, regeneration is understood to be a ‘political strategy’; not simply *laissez faire* but involving ‘politicised local agents’ who both encourage the development of capital and also help to police ‘public space’ in its interest (ibid.: 2515-6). One result of this process, they believe, is that unregulated capital ‘intensifies the reproduction of environmental damage, deaths and injuries at work, and threats to consumers’ health and safety’ (ibid.: 2516). Within public space the result is that ‘neo-liberalised space is massaged, oversurveilled and carefully managed’ (ibid.: 2516), with one result being that ‘undesirable’ types are increasingly regulated and moved from city centres something that amounts to the ‘corporatisation of crime control’ – not least of all with the growth of private security guards and systems.

They note that businesses have been able to increase the awareness of crimes against businesses, consequently ‘viewing businesses as victims [of crime] is enabling business to scale the commanding heights of the local politics of crime control’ (ibid.: 2518). This all represents a ‘structural increase in the power of capital’, something that is ‘mirrored in an increase in its ideological power’ (ibid.: 2519).

Coleman, Tombs and Whyte also argue that the ‘convergence in the city of private-sector business and property interests with public-sector local authorities constitutes a localised neo-liberal statecraft’ (ibid.: 2525) where ‘space’ is left open, protected from the poor, but unprotected from deadly corporate harms. This is a form of governance of crime – but only certain crimes are governed, which intensifies the division between rich and poor within entrepreneurial cities (ibid.: 2526).

For Coleman the rise of CCTV has ‘entrepreneurial roots’ framed by a ‘class based discourse’ of crime and fear’, something which reinforces a long established scrutiny and criminalisation of the activities of the least powerful (Coleman 2004: 199). CCTV is not merely about crime prevention but rather the ‘*normative strategy of spatial ordering*’, a process related to urban entrepreneurialism and the local management of inequality (ibid.: 200). Here, the language of self-responsibility and self-reliance are juxtaposed to the deviant other and camera networks constitute a form of statecraft that, in an era of “roll out neoliberalism”, is constituted “with the aggressive reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalised and dispossessed” (ibid.: 206).³

Questioning the neo-liberal category

The neo-Marxists above argue for the centrality of class and both the structural and ideological domination of capital (and indeed capitalists) to help understand much of the development of surveillance in British society. However, as an explanation of the dynamic behind the rise of the ‘surveillance society’, these arguments raise as many questions as they answer.

It is noticeable that in these writings and others (see for example Mitchell 2003; Norris and Armstrong 1999), the observed focus of authoritarian attention is not the ‘working class’ as such (or even more specifically the proletariat) but rather the poor, beggars, the homeless and also young people who hang around city streets. Whatever the reality of this surveillance situation, this is clearly a different type of ‘social control’ and ‘public order’ enforcement than that which emerged in the 1970s, when the police became ‘militarised’ at a time when crime, law and order were used, in part, as a battle of hegemony and as part of a class struggle against the ‘enemy within’ (Hall et al. 1978).

³ The direct quote in Coleman (2004) is from Peck and Tickell (2002: 389).

In this respect it is also noticeable that the initial use of CCTV cameras in both the UK and Germany, as Williams (2003) and Kammerer (2009) have noted, related to both the practical regulation of traffic and, perhaps more significantly, the political monitoring and tempering of demonstrators, strikes and potential riots. Today in comparison, this wider sense of political order and disorder that was almost always associated with issues of class and class politics, something that helped to encourage forms of surveillance and to politicise the issue of crime, appears to be far less relevant than it was.

The regulation of the poor does appear to be a reality today, however for writers like Nils Christie this is not simply a pragmatic act by self-interested shopkeepers. Rather, the homeless and unemployed hanging around the streets are understood, as in the 1930s, to be 'provocative in their non-usefulness' (Christie 1993: 66). Here the poor are not just an eyesore, but also a representation of the inadequacies of capitalism – inadequacies that raise the spectre of a working class alternative. This understanding of surveillance as being related to class may have had some salience in the early 1990s, but over this decade the attempt to invoke the threat of an enemy within died away as the threat from the working class as a collective and political force in society dissipated; consequently the poor and homeless can no longer act as a symbolic threat as they once did. Which again raises the question of why the dynamic towards increased surveillance took off at precisely this point in time? Indeed, if class, social control and political order are central to the rise of surveillance, one would have imagined that with the decline of a collective and political opposition to capitalism the use of CCTV would have become less necessary not more so.

The understanding that beggars and 'undesirables' are being moved away from town centres does however ring true, to some extent (Waiton 2001). But again, whether this is a reflection of neo-liberalism and 'corporate crime control' is questionable. To some extent homelessness and begging, with the development of *Big Issue* selling has become both more regulated and also institutionalised. At the level of politics the shift in the understanding of begging as a social problem took a significant turn in the mid 1990s where the moral and political argument of the Conservatives about begging as an issue of welfare cheats was transformed by New Labour into begging as an issue only when it was understood to be 'aggressive'. Here begging itself was both legitimised and criminalised not within a neo-liberal framework, one focused for example on the 'work-shy' problem of begging, but through a more therapeutic representation of the public as 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' and in need of protection from intimidation. These arguments, presented at the time by Labour's Jack Straw and Tony Blair, rather than relating to any liberal idea of the free individual actually undermined it and replaced it with an understanding of a diminished subject that needed to be kept safe.

The importance of this development for understanding the rise and rise of CCTV cameras on our streets relates to the question not of crime or indeed disorder, but the 'fear of crime' and an engagement with a sense of anxiety and insecurity – something that both had a reality amongst an increasingly disaggregated public in the 1990s and also related to a new form of advocacy politics: a politics predicated upon the idea of protecting not liberal individuals but a newly constructed idea of the 'vulnerable public' (Waiton 2008: 63-67).

Looking at the idea of the 'private' regulation of public space, as Anna Minton has rightly argued, there has been a corrosion of a public ethos within much of the urban regeneration of recent years – something that has resulted in the 'death' of the city as a living public sphere. Where privatisation of public space and facilities has developed, and where social house building has been replaced by gated communities and privately owned malls, authoritarianism has increased (Minton 2009).

However, today it is also of note that often the most significant increases in the regulation of public space and life have emerged not with reference to the private interests of entrepreneurs; rather, they tend to circulate around a promotion of the defence of the public. Not only CCTV cameras, but also smoking and drinking bans for example are being promoted very much as a defence of public life and space, the

difference being that what ‘good public space’ actually means nowadays has been transformed, and that through the framework of safety and vulnerability increased regulation has emerged. In this respect, the opposition to ‘private’ interests and to ‘individualism’ as opposed to a common or ‘public’ good often misses the point that in fact it is in the name of the public good and the defence of public space that regulations of individual and public life are being introduced. Once constructed and engaged with as a ‘vulnerable public’, freedoms become problematic and protection and regulation become the norm. Within the framework of intolerant-tolerance, rather than young people, the homeless and minorities being understood and treated as an evil that must be removed, they are in fact often factored into the design of ‘cosmopolitan’ city life – an illustration of diversity – but only so long as they themselves are safe and that their activities do not impinge upon the ‘fear and safety’ of the those around them (Williams 2004).

Through the framework of diminished subjectivity the ‘norm’als and the ‘other’ are unified as all being in need of protection – both from themselves and their own risky behaviour and from the risky behaviour of others. Within this context, CCTV cameras help to give us our liberty back by ‘freeing us from fear’ (Waiton 2008: 26).

The ‘free’ market?

The sense that neo-liberal capital is today more free than it has perhaps ever been, let loose on cities, unregulated and destructive, is also worth questioning. At times the complaint of ‘red tape’ appears to act as an excuse, by businesses and capitalists, for their own failings, however the discussion about the over-regulation of health and safety related issues does have a certain reality. As John Plender argues, ‘Never before have [top executives] been so pinned down by governance constraints’.⁴ Just as we have witnessed the emergence of more criminal laws in the last decade than ever before, new laws and regulations have also emerged in relation to industry, business and consumption (Clark 2006; Howard 1994; Howard 2001).

As Michael Power has argued in *The Risk Management of Everything*, rather than a liberal state emerging in the 21st century, it is more accurate to characterise recent developments as part of a new regulatory state (Power 2004). Regulatory bodies such as Ofcom, Ofwat, Ofgem and Offer have emerged and developed their influence, and businesses are being encouraged by the government to act not just as businesses but as ‘corporate citizens’. Indeed, the recognition of the problem of regulation has led to the Better Regulation Executive being established in an attempt to regulate the regulators.

A preoccupation with health and safety has also been developing for a number of years, but today this appears to have moved on to a different level, one that has greater consequences for the way the market operates. Within a risk averse framework, even developments aimed at deregulation often end up with new and more invasive regulations emerging. This trend towards increased regulation can be observed for example in the ‘deregulation’ of licensing laws which became caught up with concerns about irresponsible landlords who open all hours (who need to be regulated), with fears of irresponsible drinking and drinks promotion (that need regulating), with government campaign against ‘binge drinking’ and discussions about potential street disorder. Neo-liberalism?

Much of the description in surveillance writings about the rise of the ‘consumer society’ rings true, however this does not mean that capitalism and business has become popular, or that a neo-liberal ideology predominates. As Professor Shoshana Zuboff, co-author of *The Support Economy* has noted, 80 per cent of British adults do not trust the directors of large companies to tell the truth (Zuboff and Maxmin 2004). This is something that again, it is believed, has further encouraged the trend towards business self regulation.

⁴ See John Plender, ‘Tilt in the balance of boardroom power’, *Financial Times* 21 January 2004.

There may be no alternative to the market, but that does not mean that there is a great enthusiasm for it or that the values of neo-liberalism holds sway amongst the public or indeed the political elite itself. The decline of an organised opposition to capitalism and the market has allowed opportunities for increased flexibility for businesses; however, rather than confident forceful capitalism emerging and clamping down on ‘undesirables’, both the development of business and of surveillance appear to be significantly influenced by risk aversion.

Inequality, as Coleman noted above, is indeed being ‘managed’ today, but this occurs more within a framework of ‘community safety’ than of the entrepreneurial city (Hughes 2007). There may well be, and perhaps has always been, personal gain for private companies in regulating public space, but it is more accurate to see capitalists as being drawn into – and indeed encouraging – the world of ‘safety’ than to understand safety as an ‘entrepreneurially’ enforced condition.⁵

Politics, authoritarianism and authority

While recognising that there are still strong prejudices in society that influence how CCTV is used, it is questionable whether the idea of a dynamic neo-liberal outlook is central to this development. Rather than a robust liberal elite we appear to have a more risk averse culture developing, in part because of the collapse of class (at least at a subjective and political level) – a collapse that in itself creates a negative dynamic, a greater sense of anxiety across society and a tendency to regulate everything that moves. Change, and – historically the force for change – people, have become an unknown entity, an object observed from a distance by an elite that can no longer *engage* with them. At the very time that politics lost its meaning and connection with the public, indeed with class, CCTV cameras spread across cities, towns and eventually the estates where people live.⁶

In the UK, as Ditton (2000) notes, there was, ‘substantial public and private investment in open-street closed circuit television surveillance in the 1990s’. Emerging most clearly from around 1993, state funding of CCTV cameras was boosted by £100 million government investment between 1994 and 1997. Following this, between 1996 and 1998 the Home Office allocated 75% of its crime prevention budget to CCTV cameras (NACRO 2002), and the implementation of cameras in residential areas has also been encouraged by the government – with half of the grants for CCTV being allocated for these areas at the turn of the century (Fussey 2004: 255). In Scotland (and indeed across Britain), towns, cities, and increasingly estates have developed surveillance schemes – and CCTV has been ‘institutionalised’ (Ditton 2000: 692; Waiton 2008: 56).

The millions of cameras that now monitor the shops, streets and houses across the UK have been largely justified as part of a fight against crime and also, significantly, the fear of crime. However, while this explanation has a practical reality there is a broader issue and question regarding not only the changing nature of public space, but the changing nature of the public itself and of the political elite who up until the early 1990s had done relatively little to encourage the growth of public surveillance cameras. It is the change in this relationship, a change to politics and especially the transformation of the political elite that is focused on below to explain the rise in CCTV cameras and surveillance – a change that became increasingly significant from the early 1990s.

⁵ See ‘The State, the economy and the politics of Fear’ by Phil Mullan at <http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/0000000CAF05.htm>

⁶ To witness a very different time, a time when politicians and a public (in the C Wright Mills sense of the term) still had a certain existence and interconnected relationship, see the Adam Curtis webpage and video that explores the issue of Heckling in the 1960s. http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/2010/02/do_people_heckle.html

The silent majority

Jean Baudrillard's description of the 'silent majorities' in the early 1980s is of particular interest here in part because of his portrayal of the transformed nature of the public in social and political life; and more especially because of the way in which he views the impact of this transformation upon the elites within society. An aspect of what Baudrillard is describing here is the nature of society with the fall of politics and the disappearance of the 'social'.

The political emerged, he argues with the Renaissance, initially forming as part of a Machiavellian 'game', but following the French Revolution it was transformed into a form of representation. Here, rather than working on 'signs alone', politics became intertwined with the social, with 'the people, the will of the people', and crucially because of this it now worked 'on meaning'. From here on in, a balance emerged in the 'proper sphere of the political' where the social, the historical and the economic were reflected within politics (Baudrillard 1983: 17). In more modern times however, with the decline of class and political meaning, Baudrillard argues that,

"the system continues under the same manifold signs but...these no longer represent anything...there is no longer any political investiture because there is no longer even any social referent of the classical kind (a people, a class, a proletariat, objective conditions) to lend force to effective political signs".

Rather, he continues, '*The only referent which still functions is that of the silent majority*' (ibid.: 19, original italics).

In a more abstract and postmodern vein, Baudrillard's description echoes, if in a more complete form, C. Wright Mills' understanding of the difference between the 'public' and the 'mass', the former being a collective, active political body of citizens compared to the more individuated and passive mass – a mass who, rather than developing an understanding and engagement with social *issues*, become engaged by more private *troubles* (Mills 1968: 355). However, Baudrillard goes further, seeing the impact that the emergence of the 'silent majorities' has on society and especially on the elite – the 'positive brutality' (1983: 13) that their indifference creates. The mass now, he argues, acts as a 'gigantic black hole' engulfing the energy of those who attempt to give them meaning or reason (ibid.: 9).

For Baudrillard, the social, the political and the 'public' had imploded and the old categories for understand society were now mere zombies, with no existence outside of the minds of those who continue to attempt to direct and engage with a fictional 'energy' of the people. The 'mass' as a black hole denied definition, in a sense it did not actually exist, or at least it did not have a sociological reality, 'the mass is what remains when the social has been completely removed' (ibid.: 6).

Without a 'public' presence, the masses' existence is 'no longer social, but statistical', and their only mode of appearance becomes 'the survey'. They don't express themselves, 'they are surveyed' – but '*their representation is no longer possible*' (ibid.: 20 (original italics)). For the political class who attempt to direct social process or involve the energy of 'the people' there is a problem: without meaning, objectivity, 'social' reality or a public, the political class itself becomes a 'phantom' which, 'no longer knows what kind of "power" it wields over it'. Rather than rule being assisted by the passivity of the masses, Baudrillard notes, the significance of meaning in the representative phase of political life drives the political elite to forever attempt to listen to the masses, to get them to speak, to be represented, as without this representation or any sense of what or where 'the people' are, there is a confusion amongst those who rule (ibid.: 23-24).

Of interest here is the potential anxiety created within the elite itself with the fall of political 'man' and their representation of 'him'. Also of interest is the necessary dialectical interconnection suggested

between the ‘public’ and the political elite. If the masses, as Baudrillard describes it, is a mass that lacks quality or definition, then what about the elite itself. Baudrillard is ultimately not talking just about the ‘speechless mass’, but equally and arguably more significantly, about the ‘hollow spokesman without a past’ who stands as its representative. What we see is an ‘admirable conjuncture’ between an empty elite, ‘who have nothing to say, and the masses, who do not speak’ (ibid.: 6). There is an impossibility of ‘making meaning circulate’ he argues, but more than this there is in fact an ‘abyss of meaning’ itself (ibid.: 9). This necessarily raises the question of power in society itself as, ‘without this minimal participation in meaning, power is nothing but an empty simulacrum’ (1983: 27).

The crisis of meaning

A key benefit of Baudrillard’s work for this paper is the recognition of the emptiness of the elite itself, of what Laidi describes as a ‘crisis of meaning’ (Laidi 1998). As Philip Hammond argues in *War, Media and Postmodernity*, Baudrillard’s work is insightful in its recognition that the crisis of meaning ‘is a crisis of political disengagement’ – a crisis of an elite with few obvious points of connection with the electorate (Hammond 2007).

As we have noted, CCTV developed most significantly from around 1993 – a time of political change with the end of the ‘class war’ both within the UK and internationally. This was also the time when a struggling British Conservative government launched its crime fighting initiatives against the ‘yob culture’ – a spin off from conservative pronouncements about the ‘underclass’. Using Baudrillard’s categories (or anti-categories), perhaps these developments can be seen as a new changing form of politics – a phantom class war (literally in the case of new age travelers who were demonised in the mid 1990s) – where a new age ‘enemy within’ was sought to help give meaning and purpose to a conservative elite that lacked coherence after Margaret Thatcher and the political conflicts of the 1980s. These developments were significant not simply because of the political use of crime – which was not new – but because here crime fighting became a replacement for politics. The government of the time, ‘became increasingly organised around crime and safety, not as a means to a wider political end, but as the end in itself’ (Waiton 2008: 53).⁷

Out of this growing period of politics without social meaning or purpose emerged ‘New’ Labour, an ersatz political party freed from its ‘class’ constituency, a party of the ‘Third Way’, a phantom name for an organisation that could define what it was not – left nor right – but not what it stood for or represented. Furedi goes further, arguing that the Third Way was not about political definition at all, but was rather a definition against politics itself: a self consciously anti-political project adhering to the dogma of ‘there is no alternative’ (Furedi 2005: 68).

Hay similarly describes a change in the politics of the right in the 1990s; indeed a change and decline of politics itself. As Hay observes, public choice theory – a theory associated with neoliberalism – which emerged out of the fifties and became important for the rise of the new right and their attack on state planning and indeed government itself in the seventies, was fundamentally a ‘science of political failure’. Following the logic of rational choice theory, politicians and state institutions were understood to be instrumental, self-serving, and as following their own cost benefit interests (Hay 2007: 96). What we need, the new right argued, was less state, less government and – ultimately – less politics.

Hay notes that in the 1980s the confrontation between the left and this new right created in both the United States and Britain a temporary form of ‘political identification and participation’. However, ‘since the

⁷ The Conservative cry that ‘prison works’, in this respect, should be seen not as the rise of the right, but its collapse. With no solutions for society, or indeed any genuine belief in the (classical) individual (who could benefit from prison and a period of self reflection) this sudden discovery of the usefulness of prison represented nothing more than a demand that evil men be locked up while the government simply threw away the key.

1990s things have changed'. In the 1980s there was a 'highly politicised' environment, but in the next decade the 'neoliberal' dynamic was replaced by 'a process of institutionalization, normalization and depoliticization' (2007: 98). Here the political dynamic (if a negative one) on the right was coupled with the decline of the left, a process Furedi describes, with reference to the idea that 'there is no alternative', as the collapse of the political imagination (Furedi 2005: 15).

This collapse can be understood as part of Baudrillard's understanding of the silent majorities and of Mills' discussion about the decline of the *public*. In Britain in the 1990s these trends came to a head and a transformation of politics and the political relationship between the political elite and the public developed – carried forward most successfully by the new Labour Party.

With reference to this changing relationship, Heartfield argues that,

“The Third Way connected with the electorate, not on the basis of their collective purpose, but instead playing upon their individuation and the anxieties that arose from it. The voters were no longer represented in the polity as the collective subject of the democratic process. Instead they were recognised by the state as the isolated and persecuted victims of events beyond their control” (Heartfield 2002: 199).

Dialectically, this representation of the public as fundamentally vulnerable, as powerless victims, can be understood to reflect the outlook of the diminished political elite: an elite cut adrift from any constituency and lacking a coherent ideology or framework for organising and developing society. As Bauman has argued, today the elite themselves are no longer the 'pilot' of society. Where past rules were set down by the 'captains' of society and 'displayed in bold letters in every passageway' – rules that could be followed or challenged – today, in comparison, 'the passengers of the 'Light Capitalism' aircraft...discover to their horror that the pilot's cabin is empty' (2000: 59).

In this respect, perhaps the relentless regulation and surveillance of society reflects not a neo-liberal elite with a powerful sense of purpose but the opposite: an anxious elite devoid of meaning and authority with which to direct society's institutions and engage with the 'energy of the people' (Finlayson 2003).

CCTV in Pollokshields East

Above, the idea that neo-liberalism is a powerful and directing force in society or that it is the basis of the rise in CCTV surveillance has been questioned. Subsequently the argument has been made that the most significant influence on social policy developments in recent years has been the changing and diminishing nature of the political elite. Below, the development of a local CCTV scheme is used as a case study to explore the issue of the growth of surveillance within this context and with particular reference to the nature of the relationship between today's political elite and the 'silent majority'. Despite the limitations of this study, it is useful in at least suggesting that some of the more abstract ideas discussed above have some real existence.

While recognising that the dynamic behind private and publicly funded CCTV schemes, indeed between city and residential estate surveillance, is not one dimensional or entirely generated by the same interests, the specific benefit of the Pollokshields example studied here is in its focus upon the particular relationship between a local politician and his constituents. As such, the theorists discussed above and their understanding of the significance of the changing nature of public and political life is reexamined.

A number of previous case studies examining CCTV schemes have been written within surveillance studies thus far (Brown 1995; Coleman and Sim 2000; Norris and McCahill 2006). For many of them, a key focus is the actual impact of the cameras, their 'power' and use. Here, the focus will remain narrow,

centred not on the impact of the cameras, but rather on their emergence and the dynamic for their introduction; a dynamic that, it will be argued, was related most centrally to the nature of the relationship between the local Member of Parliament and the local people he represented.

Pollokshields East in 2004 had a population of 6,045, just over half of which was ‘non-white’, of largely Pakistani origin. Most people in this area live in a tenement flat, with just over half of the properties owner occupied and the remainder split between public and private rented accommodation – this is slightly above the average in Glasgow for owner occupation.⁸

In 2006 six CCTV cameras were installed in Pollokshields East in the Southside of Glasgow. Today these cameras are linked to Streetwatch, the Glasgow hub for CCTV cameras where the images of over 400 cameras are now watched and recorded. Pollokshields East is not an area of deprivation, it has no streets filled by boarded up houses, relatively low unemployment and as we will see, a relatively low crime rate. That CCTV cameras were installed in this part of Glasgow was of particular interest to the author of this paper due to his previous research on youth curfews and antisocial behaviour and also because he was living in the area when the cameras were first introduced.

As a resident of the Pollokshields estate in Glasgow at the time of the surveillance initiative, the author of this paper has drawn from first hand experience, conversations with local residents and shop keepers, and through attendance at public and community council meetings. On top of this, an analysis of the *Southsider* – the local newspaper – was carried out and local officials involved in the surveillance scheme were interviewed.

The drive towards and the usefulness of CCTV cameras

In the summer of 2003 a public meeting about crime and antisocial behaviour was held in a local primary school in Pollokshields. Around 500 people attended the meeting, many of whom had to stand down the sides and at the back of the hall. This meeting was chaired by the local Labour MP Mohammad Sarwar and present with him at the front of the hall were various local officials including staff from housing and the police. A year later in 2004 a second meeting was advertised in the area by Mr Sarwar but this time there was a specific focus to the meeting – the planned introduction of CCTV cameras. Held in another primary school, this time only 70 people were present and the discussion focused on which streets should have the surveillance equipment. In 2006 the first of the six cameras was installed.

The development of CCTV cameras in this residential area of Glasgow came as something of a shock to the author of this paper and consequently led to both a campaign against the cameras and also further research to understand what had been the driving force for their implementation.

A police initiative?

One seemingly obvious agency likely to be keen on the development of CCTV cameras and potentially responsible for the push for them in Pollokshields is the police. This seemed to be probable at the time given the forceful crime prevention approach that had been adopted in the West of Scotland during the 1990s. In this decade for example, the Strathclyde Police Force had promoted the use of zero tolerance policing methods, introduced one of Britain’s first curfew initiatives and helped introduce surveillance cameras in a number of town centres and in Glasgow city centre itself. Chief Constable John Orr had also gained a reputation for being ‘tough on crime’ and was a regular local news fixture discussing various crime problems, especially that of ‘yobs’ who needed to be ‘stopped and searched’. Consequently, the surveillance scheme in Pollokshields could be understood as a continuation of this approach. However, as

⁸ For more details of the social make up of this area go to <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E17F14F7-3FA8-4CA4-8550-B4A08183BACB/0/Pollokshieldsdemographics22aug06.pdf>

it turned out, members of the police force were clearly not in favour, or at the very least, not enthusiastic about the idea of CCTV cameras in this case, nor indeed did they believe that crime was a growing problem in the area.

Indeed, in contrast to what had been expected by the author of this paper regarding the police attitudes to crime problems and particularly to the introduction of CCTV cameras, the police officers in the area were surprisingly balanced in their assessment of problems that existed and generally critical of those who exaggerated the problems in the area, and equally critical of the idea of CCTV cameras.

At the first public meeting, in response to a point made from the floor that before any action was taken it would be useful to know if crime was increasing or decreasing in the area, the senior police officer present nodded his head enthusiastically, pointing out that crime had not in fact increased – and agreed with the questioner that before any call for more policing was made it might be worth knowing what the objective problems actually were. At community council meetings at the time it was also noted by the community police officers that crime had in fact fallen in Pollokshields East, and that this area had the lowest crime rate of the three areas covered by this police division. In discussions at these community council meetings the police also stated that they believed that the installation of CCTV cameras was unnecessary and that it was a waste of money.

Neither these local officers, nor the senior officer at the initial meeting appeared to believe that either crime was a growing problem in Pollokshields East, nor that CCTV was the most useful way to deal with what problems existed. Indeed the senior police officer clearly felt that there was something of an over reaction taking place in the area regarding crime and antisocial behaviour.⁹

Public pressure?

Looking elsewhere to explain the push for the CCTV cameras in this area, judging by the 500 people at the first public meeting, it is clear that safety issues associated with crime and antisocial behaviour were of concern to local people. To what extent this public anxiety was the reason for this meeting being called in the first place is unclear. Mr Sarwar suggested that it was the reason, explaining that he was simply responding to local concerns in calling the ‘crime meeting’.¹⁰

Despite these public concerns, at the meeting itself there was however no call for CCTV cameras to be introduced. Afterwards in discussion with those attending the meeting, there was clearly no collective consensus either about the nature of the problems or about possible solutions to these problems.

However, a year later a public meeting was called by Mohammad Sarwar to discuss where CCTV cameras should be placed in the area. A small group of five or six people within this meeting that was made up of around seventy local adults demanded to know when, where and with whom had the decision been made to introduce cameras in Pollokshields. These questions were ignored by the local MP who explained that the issue of whether or not to introduce cameras was not up for discussion. Most of the seventy attending supported the idea of cameras being introduced, but none had been involved in the decision to introduce them.

⁹ At the very least the chief of police drew attention to the fact that it would be worth considering the ‘facts’ before reacting to things. Having said that, it was also noticeable that this senior officer did not initially make this argument himself – but was drawn into it by a member of the public who asked about the myth and reality of crime in the area. That the police in the area believed that crime was not a growing problem does not necessarily mean that this was the case. After all, all crimes are not reported, and from the large size of the initial meeting, there were clearly concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour. Concerns about crime may reflect real problems in an area, they may however also be influenced by wider social, political and economic factors (Waiton 2001).

¹⁰ At one level public concern and fear about crime did exist in the area, but public concern alone rarely results in political meetings being called by members of parliament if the issue itself is not one they themselves have some interest in pursuing.

From the experience of the public meetings held in Pollokshields, in discussions at community councils and with local people and with shop keepers, the extent of the crime problems in Pollokshields remained a matter of contention. However, it was noticeable at the first ‘mass’ meeting that was held, that antisocial behaviour – much of which was non-criminal in nature – and also the ‘fear of crime’, were both being engaged with and related to as issues equal to, if not even more significant, than crime itself. It was also the case at this meeting that any question of the ‘objective’ nature of crime problems in the area was treated as of secondary importance to the concerns or indeed fears being expressed. There clearly were issues to be addressed; however, as will be discussed below, it was the most extreme, and arguably the most fearful representations of the problem, that appeared to carry most weight. In a sense, rather than there being a collective or public will developed and expressed at the meeting, let alone a ‘public’ call for surveillance cameras, it is arguably the case that those individuals with the worst experiences in the area, or those who were most anxious and insecure, came to be representative of the community as a whole.

Having produced a leaflet questioning the usefulness of CCTV cameras for the community of East Pollokshields the author of this paper spent a number of weekends talking to local residents, shopkeepers and young people about the cameras. There was support for the cameras – although far from unanimous support, and rarely were they supported with any great level of enthusiasm. The support given to the cameras was often done so more with a shrug of the shoulders than with any venom, with comments like, ‘if it stops some of these kids messing about then it’s a good thing’. These comments themselves are of note, firstly in that ‘kids messing about’ rather than more serious crime issues was the main focus of concern for many adults, and secondly, the fact that high tech surveillance equipment in a local residential area had come to be seen as an acceptable mechanism to stop kids ‘messing about’.¹¹ Having said that, in conversation with local shopkeepers it was noticeable that there was an unanimous recognition that it would be far more useful, practically and for the interests of the community, if local adults, rather than the police or CCTV cameras, acted as the regulator of young people in the area. This of course, was understood to be a difficult and perhaps even an irresolvable issue.

The idea for CCTV cameras did not come out of the big public meeting that was held. This is not to say that people opposed them, far from it, but the idea for them and the drive to implement them was not generated by any public gathering of local people. The support for CCTV cameras after they had been implemented was pragmatic but also a little defensive; as one Newsagent observed, ‘The idea of the cameras is a good one...but you know, when they actually put that thing up on my street you kind of think it’s a bit much really’.

Professional pressure?

Elsewhere, for example in the community council, issues to do with crime and especially antisocial behaviour had also been raised and fed back to the local MP. However, as one community council member explained, this was only one issue amongst many that had been raised by the group. The community council was undecided about the cameras issue and as a group had neither promoted nor called for the implementation of these cameras. Indeed the chairperson of the group was strongly opposed to the surveillance scheme.

Other agencies were involved with the development of the cameras in Pollokshields. The local Housing Association for example had been responsible for raising the funds to pay for the cameras. However, a housing officer interviewed explained that the grant form for the cameras was filled out with no

¹¹ The issue of antisocial youth raises a number of questions beyond that of mere crime control: the nature of communities, the more insular nature of families, and the changing relationships between adults and children more generally and especially the intergenerational insecurity and diminishing sense of adult control or responsibility for other people’s children. As with the myopically crime focused government response to the issue of youth behaviour, here too these wider social and public issues were never brought to the surface to be addressed.

enthusiasm; the head of the agency actually opposed the cameras' introduction. But monies had been offered to them for surveillance cameras. This was unusual as it was general practice for the agency to have to compete for money, and it was usually the Housing Association that would determine what they wanted the funding for. The £150,000 funding itself had come from Communities Scotland, a Scottish government agency, as part of their 'Closing the Opportunity Gap' funding, and was given as part of the Housing Association's Community Safety operation. Unusually, Communities Scotland had gone to the housing association and instead of allowing the association to use the money for what they prioritised – 'community engagement' or 'environmental development' – they suggested that this money be used specifically for community safety and more specifically for the introduction of CCTV cameras. As far as the housing officer was concerned, it was clear that Communities Scotland had been 'encouraged' and 'pressurised' to give this money to the association by the local MP Mohammad Sarwar, who wanted to 'gain support from his local constituents'. Future funding for the running of the cameras was a contentious issue as local businesses were encouraged to help pay for this but were less than enthusiastic about doing so. Indeed, in conversation with the local shopkeepers in the area, despite there being general support for the cameras, this was again fairly muted, with nobody having a passionate argument for them. On this evidence, the CCTV scheme did not appear to be being driven by either the local businesses or by local officials, and for those working in the local housing association the belief was that the cameras were being introduced for political reasons.¹²

Political pressure?

Mohammad Sarwar was keen to claim responsibility for the CCTV scheme in Pollokshields. Indeed, looking at the local *Southsider* newspaper between 2002 and 2008 for articles and photographs related to Mohammed Sarwar, it was noticeable that of only five photographs of the MP over this six and a half year period one was of another CCTV scheme that had been launched in Govan. The questioning headline above the picture read 'Big Brother Watching you!', however there appeared to be no concern of any 'big brother' issue for Mohammed Sarwar, nor indeed for the other three political representatives, including the MSP Gordon Jackson, who proudly stood alongside Mr Sarwar for this PR opportunity (*Southsider* April 2003).

There is no reason to question the fact that some local people will have raised concerns with Mr Sarwar about crime related issues in Pollokshields. It is unclear however, if there was any organised or active pressure being placed on the MP about crime or more particular for CCTV cameras to be introduced in the area. The police had not pushed for this, nor had the Community Council, nor indeed had the idea come from the Housing Association. No public meeting had been called where the decision to introduce cameras was made by local adults. £150,000 had been made available for the CCTV scheme, but the demand for this money had not come from local officials; instead it had been offered to them and offered to them specifically for the development of a surveillance scheme.

There was arguably general support for the cameras by local people, but this was largely passive support. The idea of the cameras had not been pushed or campaigned for by local people, nor had there been significant public or vocal demands for the money for this scheme to be made available. Within a year the number of people attending the public meetings about this issue had dropped significantly, and as time went by most people appeared to have forgotten all about the cameras.

Despite this, in 2006, with no fanfare, the CCTV cameras were erected.

¹² The reaction by the businessmen and women may have been moderated by their knowledge of my opposition to the cameras, although in the public meetings this was also little in evidence.

The use of CCTV cameras

Finally, with reference to the implementation of the cameras, a question can be raised about not only the necessity of the cameras, but also their usefulness. For example, following the introduction of the surveillance equipment the annual Ede celebration took place, at which a number of incidents occurred which were reported to the police. However, when the CCTV footage was examined it was discovered that due to the poor lighting in the area nobody could be identified by the cameras; seeing as many incidents of ‘antisocial behaviour’ take place at night, this also raised serious doubts about the usefulness of the cameras for the area. On another occasion when there had been a major incident outside a pub it was discovered that the nearest camera which had been installed had not actually been switched on. Also, the monitoring carried out to assess the impact of the cameras found that the number of incidents caught by the cameras was low, with one report noting that, ‘the number of incidents recorded on the cameras has been relatively low in comparison with other neighbourhoods’.¹³

These examples suggest that there was a lack of seriousness taken with regard to the actual operation of the cameras. Perhaps, as I will go on to argue, this was because the practical use and necessity of the cameras was secondary to the process of their implementation. Arguably, the development of the CCTV cameras can, at least in part, be understood less in terms of their crime fighting practicalities than as a form of ‘reassurance policing’ (Burney 2005: 25), or perhaps even as a form of ‘fear campaigning’.¹⁴

The political dynamic behind the cameras

It was clearly the case that there existed some anxiety about crime and also antisocial behaviour. But equally, and arguably more significantly, it was something that was engaged with and promoted as an issue by the local MP Mohammad Sarwar. At the time the CCTV issue emerged in Pollokshields crime and antisocial behaviour were also key priorities at a national political level. In 2002, for example, when the first meeting was called by Mohammad Sarwar, ‘antisocial behaviour’ was at the top of the British government’s political agenda, following Tony Blair’s Queen’s Speech where he targeted graffiti, vandalism and fly-tipping as key issues for parliament to address.

The first public meeting was organised by Mr Sarwar – promoted with the help of a leaflet delivered to every house in the area. It was the first public meeting promoted in this way and for many attending the meeting it was the first contact they had had with their local MP. This first meeting was attended by a large number of local adults, however, at this meeting and the subsequent smaller meeting there was clearly a distant relationship between Mr Sarwar and almost all of his constituents, both in terms of the lack of vocal support he received and more acutely in terms of the lack of party activists present.

The initial meeting was particularly interesting. Its ‘mass’ nature, with all the seats and standing space being taken up by the 500 plus people attending, and the vocal occasionally heated nature of the meeting, gave it a feeling of being almost out of control at times. Despite having called the event, the local MP was clearly not at ease in this environment, and to the best of his ability he attempted to act as an ‘equally concerned citizen’ – as one of us; someone who was simply there to act as a conduit for our complaints. Consequently Mohammad Sarwar played the role of a neutral chairperson, there to facilitate the event and also there to ‘listen’ to what people had to say. A variety of crime and antisocial behaviour issues were raised, some of which were targeted at Mohammad Sarwar himself. These concerns were then passed on

¹³ This quote comes from *Communities Scotland Wider Role Grant Project Monitoring Report* a grant monitoring form of the Southside Housing Association.

¹⁴ The engagement with crime and perhaps more especially the fear of crime had become a national strategy for the Labour Party from the mid 1990s. Labour’s campaign organiser Philip Gould for example argued in 1994 that, ‘Progressive parties have learned to...connect directly with the insecurities of working families’, and that this is necessary because, ‘in an increasingly fast-changing world, insecurity is likely to grow, and with it the basis for fear campaigning’ (Heartfield 2002: 195).

by the MP to the variety of officials sitting with him at the front of the hall as he acted as a form of customer complaints manager. Unsurprisingly, there was little that could be said about individual cases of burglary or antisocial behaviour, and as this continued there increasingly appeared to be little purpose or direction to the meeting other than to allow people to 'have their say'.

At times the complaints being made were extreme, my own street for example, was described by one person as being 'under siege', a representation that neither I nor the neighbours I stood with recognised. However, this, and other 'extreme' representations of the area were not challenged or questioned by Mr Sarwar or the officials at the meeting, despite there being clear doubts about understanding Pollokshields as a crime ridden area. Rather, people's anxieties and fears were simply accepted and 'listened to', engaged with technically, and therapeutically, but never politically. As such, what C. Wright Mills would have perhaps described as personal troubles were never formed into 'public issues'; private feelings, experiences and anxieties being left as just that. The public meeting and the chairing of it was consequently experienced as something of a group support session, where experiences were simply aired and shared.

Apolitical advocacy

The neutral facilitation of the meeting was perhaps a consequence of a more defensive and distant relationship the MP had with his constituents. This was not simply a defensive approach however, but a profoundly apolitical one. Compared with past Labour Party public events and rallies, here there was no speech made by the MP, no arguments of any kind either about crime, youth, or wider social questions. There were no 'positions' being proposed, no opinions or beliefs made by the MP, nor consequently by the audience. No causes or solutions were offered and contested, and no attempt was made to win the audience and cohere them to a particular viewpoint. Compared to events of this kind in the past, there was no political solution or leadership offered at this meeting. Rather, private troubles were treated both technically, passed over to one of the officials present to be dealt with as a service delivery question (Fussey 2004: 261), or therapeutically - simply listened to sympathetically (Furedi 2004).

Here people were encouraged to air their experiences at an individual level. Most of the issues raised related to antisocial behaviour of young people. However, the nature of the meeting and the lack of any attempt to genuinely relate to these problems as 'public' issues meant that firstly, a contestation of ideas and beliefs was avoided, and secondly, there was no attempt to promote the idea, or even a recognition, that the 500 adults present could perhaps take an active role themselves in resolving some of these issues.

For example, the issue of adults' relations with other people's children is arguably a more confused one today (Furedi and Brown 1997, Waiton 2001). What norms of behaviour are expected of adults in their dealings with young people? Should we be tolerant of youth on the streets; if so, how tolerant? Should we intervene when young people are 'messaging about'; if so, will others back us up if we do so? These issues can best, and arguably only, be resolved by communities themselves, but then this would mean developing a more collective approach to public and community life. Left as private troubles, the only common denominator at the large meeting was fear and anxiety experienced at the level of the atomised individual. Consequently a certain sense of anxiety remained free floating and unresolved at this meeting: a palpable desire being expressed that someone do something to resolve these concerns, but equally perhaps - in part because of the encouraged passivity of the 500 adults present - a lack of genuine belief that anything could actually be done.

Diminishing the subject

Engagement with the issue, and also the fear, of crime and antisocial behaviour, can be understood at one level, to be a classical populist approach to politics. In Pollokshields the issue was popular but not exactly populist. Even at the level of angry individuals (perhaps of neo-liberal subjects), there was no attempt to encourage action or to promote a Neighbourhood Watch type approach to the issues raised. Consequently

there was no talk of the need for people to stand up, to be 'decent citizens' or to take 'personal responsibility' for some of the problems. Indeed, as has been argued, the understanding today that people are being 'responsibilised' and held individually accountable for crime and safety issues (Garland 1996: 453) misses the more significant development which is that people have been categorised and to some extent constructed as more fragile subjects and are consequently expected to play a far less active and public role than previously (Waiton 2008: 27).¹⁵ Even within the promotion of community action around safety issues, this action is never about self-activity, but about working with (or relying upon) third party mediation and intervention.¹⁶

As a contrast, in the 1987 Conservative Party Manifesto the 'neo-liberal' Margaret Thatcher had argued that crime was not just a police issue but rather the public needed to take some responsibility for dealing with crime. In other words the message was, don't just whine about it, 'get on your bike' and do something yourselves – and to some extent this appears to have happened, for example with the rise in the number of people involved in Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

In the 1980s the argument for and expectation of individuals to be robust subjects, to stand up and be counted and do something, was not only acceptable, but arguably gained the Conservative Party considerable support amongst the electorate. Today, and clearly expressed in the Pollokshields example, this is no longer the case. Indeed through the more diminished therapeutic prism of risk and vulnerability, the relationship between the local politician and the public was very different and involved no subjective or active expectations of local people.

Interestingly, through the 'noughties' there has in fact been a collapse in the membership of Neighbourhood Watch schemes in recent years – a fall from 27% of households being covered by these schemes in 2000 to 16% in 2008. One possible reason for this is a declining sense of activism or self activity, even regarding issues to do with crime.¹⁷ In the Pollokshields example, and arguably more generally through the prism of 'community safety', today self activity, or any kind of intervention or action by individuals, is interpreted as being more problematic, as risky, unsafe, and best left to the authorities. As such, not only is there a lack of encouragement of a collective 'public' approach to the problem of antisocial behaviour, there is similarly a lack of an encouragement of an active ((neo) liberal) individualism.

Additionally, regarding any potential form of neo-liberal urban governance, of targeting, or 'other'ing of certain groups, in Pollokshields, despite there being clear concerns about groups of young people, especially young Asian 'lads' hanging about the streets, there was little or no attempt to focus upon the 'villains' in the area, or to cohere a sense of anger against certain groups. Indeed, and perhaps especially regarding the police, there was a hyper 'awareness' about not mentioning or engaging with any discussion about 'Asian youth'.¹⁸

Rather than focusing upon a specific 'villains' in the area and cohering around a common enemy, the focus of the engagement by the authorities centred upon the 'victims': around their (universalised)

¹⁵ While Garland's Foucauldian discussion of responsibilisation does to some extent exaggerate the extent to which responsibility is genuinely being encouraged or expected, it is worth noting that the Foucauldian representation of neo-liberalism does itself recognise the more limited nature of neo-liberal governing compared with the more morally dynamic classical liberalism of the nineteenth century (Lemke 2001).

¹⁶ For example, to some extent, and especially emanating from 'left' and liberal commentators, what would have been understood relatively unproblematically as people being active in their community in dealing with neighbours or young people, is increasingly categorised as 'vigilantism'.

¹⁷ See <http://neighbourhoodwatch.net/index.php?func=PageStory&Type=News&StoryId=307>

¹⁸ This was noticeably something that Asian people themselves could mention, but was clearly a no go area for any of the officials, at least in public.

feelings, around issues of fear and insecurity, and with reference to the benefit that surveillance of the estate could bring to ‘community safety’. Indeed, at the large meeting a youth worker (acting as advocate for the young) defended youngsters in the area by arguing that they were also ‘victims’ of antisocial behaviour.¹⁹

Disconnected public - disconnected elite

Part of the reason for the anxiety of the local MP when facing his constituents at the large meeting was that he had a more distant relationship with the public than politicians had in the past.²⁰ Indeed, at the two public meetings concerning the cameras it was noticeable that Mohammed Sarwar was left isolated when people questioned him or directed their concerns towards him. Nobody at the larger initial meeting stood up to defend Mr Sarwar’s record or argued in favour of the MP. At the second meeting, which discussed where to implement the CCTV cameras, despite the vast majority of the 70 people present supporting their introduction, none of them came to the defence of the MP when he was attacked from the floor by a small group opposing their implementation. In the end it was left to the party activist who had accompanied the MP to the meeting to stand up in his defence and publicly defended what was discussed as ‘his’ CCTV scheme.

This lack of political support and activism is not novel to this area or to this politician. Rather, as Hay has observed, political participation in the UK is at an all time low. From 3.4 million members of the two major political parties in Britain in 1964, by the year 2000 this had collapsed to a mere 500,000 – a collapse that was most distinctly seen in the period from the early 1990s on (Hay 2007: 36). As Hay notes, the small number of activists today within these parties means that at the basic level of constituency activity ‘[t]his level of activism is simply insufficient to maintain constituency campaigning in national elections in all but a limited number of target seats’ (Hay 2007: 22). This collapse in party political activity is numerically significant and reflects the decline of politics as something that was once, either individually or by association, part and parcel of public everyday life and relationships.

In Pollokshields, despite the often ‘rowdy’ and accusatory atmosphere at the first large meeting, the MP was left to his own devices to defend himself – his isolation from *his* constituents was palpable and almost embarrassing at times. The lack of party activists, and the lack of any wider association or connection with those present made the meeting particularly difficult for Mr Sarwar. Just as the audience were arguably not part of a ‘public’ (and certainly not involved in party politics), for the local MP this was if anything even more the case, and more acutely experienced.

This diminution of public-political life impacts on people. It means that they are more disconnected from one another, from social institutions, indeed from society. The world, to some extent, is consequently experienced as being more out of control and we have a greater sense of powerlessness. In this context anxiety and fear are increasingly omnipresent, and there is an ever greater desire for safety and surveillance (Cummings 1997). But similarly, and arguably more importantly, even for those who are theoretically ‘in authority’, this authority has become meaningless, rootless, and lacking in any purpose or dynamic: This anxious elite themselves lack the words to not only engage or cohere the public, but to develop their own thoughts.

As has been argued in this paper, it is noticeable that in the early 1990s, as the Political elite and a Political ‘public’ diminished, the roots of surveillance sprouted and CCTV cameras grew and spread

¹⁹ See Schinkel’s (2008) discussion about ‘senseless violence’ where he argues that we no longer remember the villains of crimes, but have increasingly come to engage with and feel a connection with (and therefore only remember) the victims of crimes today – victims who often become cause celebre, resulting in public campaigns and a further reinforcement of ‘victim issues’ within the public consciousness.

²⁰ See the Adam Curtis webpage and video that explores the issue of Heckling in the 1960s mentioned above.

throughout society. To some extent the growth of surveillance schemes nationally and in cases like Pollokshields can be understood as an expression of the new sub-relationship between the political elite and the ‘masses’. At one level these cameras are largely political (with a small ‘p’) rather than practical, and have emerged at the precise time when both participation and meaning in politics in the UK has all but disappeared.

Ersatz engagement

In East Pollokshields the actual crime rate, the effectiveness of the cameras, their value for money and so on, mattered little: the actual use of the cameras appeared to be a secondary consideration.²¹

The meetings were initially organised by the MP and the funding received for the cameras in Pollokshields was a result of pressure by him on the funders, and through them, on the Housing Association. In the process Mohammad Sarwar was able to raise his profile, and also engage with certain fears within the community. Objectivity and the resolution of problems was arguably a secondary consideration to a process that was less concerned with politics than with what Baudrillard calls ‘publicity’, and less engaged by the political and social life of the community than with the new therapeutic categories of ‘well-being’ and the ‘happiness’ of individuals (Furedi 2004): The creation of a sense of inner-peace through a therapeutic relationship with individuals replacing a political contestation over the meaning and formation of public life.

At this and subsequent meetings it was noticeable that experiences, however exaggerated or one-sidedly represented, were never challenged, even when this was putting the MP and council officials on the defensive and also when there was a clear indication that there was some doubt or disagreement about the validity of the stories themselves. The only unquestionable ‘truth’, it appeared, was the ‘victim’s voice’ – the feelings expressed through the stories told. But then the truth formed through public debate and argument was not the point – these were not ‘public’ meetings as they would previously have been understood.

Democracy, Cornelius Castoriadis notes, is founded ‘upon *doxa*, opinion, the confrontation of opinions, the formation of a common opinion’, where, ‘[t]he refutation of another’s opinion is more than permitted and legitimate there; it is the very breath of public life’ (Castoriadis 1991: 7). At Pollokshields however, despite the size and vocal nature of the meeting, the framework of the discussion and the role played by the advocate politician helped to undermine rather than encourage democracy. The meeting itself was not about finding understanding through confrontation and debate; rather, by engaging with the audience as individuals who complain rather than as a public that could be formed, cohered and ultimately act, the potential ‘public’ of citizens was constructed as a mass of victims. In this therapeutic political environment, it was important not to offend; as such, the confrontation and refutation of people’s experiences was absent from the ‘debate’. The tone of the meeting encouraged a framework of complaint and elevated the experiences of victimhood into a new form of ‘truth’. The more emotionally a story was portrayed the more authentic it was, and the more difficult to repudiate. To challenge, argue or confront these troubles would have been ‘offensive’, potentially hurtful, and to cause further pain – perhaps to ‘doubly victimise’ the person. Rather than challenging others’ opinions – the essence of democracy – here, the new thera-politics led to a form of recognition and a show of respect for how people ‘feel’.

The absence of politics at the public meeting did not prevent the MP from raising his profile or from ‘selling’ himself. But this superficial projection has no relationship with establishing a wider meaning in the community or in society itself – rather, any attempt at developing a public or political sense was bypassed. This ersatz form of politics was subsequently reflected in the largely impractical, underused,

²¹ This is something the Home Office paper *Assessing the Impact of CCTV* has also noted at a national level (Gill and Spriggs 2005).

phantom-CCTV cameras that were less a helpful form of crime prevention than an empty advertisement for the local MP.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to raise a question about the dynamic behind the rise of surveillance in the UK, both questioning the ‘objective’ arguments that CCTV cameras are simply a practical solution to crime and raising disagreements with some of the current academic explanations and depictions of our surveillance society, particularly with regard to the argument about neo-liberal ‘othering’ and of an aggressive enforcement of (class) power over certain groups in society. On the issue of the practical benefits of CCTV cameras, questions have been raised nationally; however here, the case study above suggests that to some extent the efficacy of CCTV cameras is largely irrelevant. A key aspect – if not the only one – in understanding the rise and rise of CCTV cameras, especially surveillance schemes in public spaces and housing estates, is the nature of today’s political elite coupled with a risk averse cultural climate. Consequently, rather than studying the use and abuse of surveillance, the argument made here is that the prior process in the developing stage of surveillance schemes should be studied, with particular reference to the outlook (or more specifically the lack of one) of this elite, and the newly developed (hollow) relationship being established with a ‘vulnerable public’.

Despite the limitations of the personal nature of some of the research carried out in Pollokshields, here an attempt has been made to show that it was the local member of parliament who was largely responsible for the surveillance scheme. This was certainly an image he was keen to promote, and one that officials involved in the funding and development of the scheme also believed to be the case.

It is worth reminding ourselves, in an era when CCTV cameras have become so passé, that until the early 1990s they were an insignificant feature of modern life. The idea of increasing surveillance across society was something that was opposed by those who defended the idea of public space from the left, but also by those who had a sense and belief in the idea of individual freedom.²² In 1990 for example, 45 percent of Labour voters were opposed to the idea of identity cards. This compares with only 15 percent in 2005. As Professor Conor Gearty, author of a Social Attitudes Survey in 2007 has noted with reference to the declining sense of and defence of ideas associated with liberty, ‘[i]t is as though society is in the process of forgetting why past generations thought...freedoms to be so very important’ (*Guardian* 24 January 2007).

The arguments about ‘neo-liberal agendas’ or forms of governance and the enforcement of ‘unregulated capital’ connect recent developments in surveillance with right wing political trends that grew in the 1970s and 1980s. However, it appears that the collapse of class based political contestation in society and the coherent framework that this gave to competing groups in society has resulting not in the victory of right wing neo-liberalism nor a new aggressive form of individualism. Rather, the collapse of public and collective life has equally resulted in a collapse of a robust sense of individualism – both within the elite and amongst the public. Rather than a powerful sense of collectivity and a strong sense of individuality being mutually exclusive or opposing phenomena, they have proven to be dialectically inter-connected. We do indeed need to go beyond left and right, as Giddens (1994) has argued, to understand current developments in society, but more than this, we need to understand that the Third Way is, as Heartfield argues, a *process without a subject* (Heartfield 2002).

At a basic level, illustrated not just in Pollokshields, but nationally, the rise of ‘antisocial behaviour’ as a problem that needs formal policing, council action and even surveillance cameras to resolve, is illustrative

²² Indeed, for many on both the left and especially the right, Western freedom was regularly contrasted to the more surveillance type society seen as existing in the Soviet Union and none democratic societies.

of the decline of informal public life and of active individuals who, historically, have resolved things for themselves and with their communities.

At a more abstract level, what we are witnessing today, illustrated in the rise of CCTV cameras across the country is the fall out of Baudrillard's 'black hole' and of C. Wright Mills' discussion of a diminished public life. Not only are personal 'troubles' not being made into public 'issues' today, but politics has changed and politicians are increasingly attempting to connect directly with these 'troubles', with an individual's feelings, often with their feelings of insecurity and fear, out with any wider attempt to cohere either a moral or political sense, or any outlook of 'us and them'.

At one level then, it can be argued that CCTV cameras (perhaps especially those developed on local housing estates) are significant more in the process of their development than in their actual operation – acting both as an expression of, and an attempt to forge a new relationship between, the 'silent majority' and the empty politician. Once in place this 'eye in the sky' – the distant disconnected aloof camera sitting way above and beyond the public, observing rather than engaging with public space and public life – reflects and reinforces this relationship.

The cameras have no language; they give off no Political signs and express no interests. There is no enforcement of rule, no Big Br'othering' or moral coherence forged or even attempted. The silence of the scanning cameras – cameras that people forget are even there – replicates the faceless politicians – who nobody knows – and who have nothing to say.

As such the CCTV revolution has little to do with 'social' control. There is no social component to surveillance, no political dimension, no Cold Warriors or battle with an enemy within, no attempt to reinforce meaning and authority. Rather social meaning and authority are side stepped: The technical enforcement of the camera replacing the politics of the elite. A distant apolitical relationship with fragments – a disaggregated public managed by an insecure elite. The politician constantly yearns for 'participation', for a connection, for involvement. But lacking meaning this yearning is only ever half hearted and the closer the political elite get to the 'masses', the silent majority, the further away they wish they could be. There is a constant magnetic tension of attraction and repulsion: The isolated elite needing to engage the energy of society – the public – who they ultimately fear and loath. A hatred of an imagined mob they sense they cannot control.

The postmodern and also the Foucauldian description of society and indeed of surveillance and forms of governing is often the most accurate today. Society has indeed changed from one predicated upon subjects and class, and of the moral enforcement of authority. However it is not a subjectless 'power' or 'discourse' that gives the dynamic to surveillance today; nor is it the juggernaut of 'neoliberalism', the catch all term used to explain all societies ills:²³ Rather it is the new non-role of politics that is key – a politics without purpose. The irrationality of never ending surveillance is real but reflects neither neoliberalism per se, class domination, or a new discursive form of knowledge and power.²⁴ It is in the main the consequence and a symbol of power without meaning. We may live in a neoliberal society – if by that we mean a market society – but there is no drive behind it, no Politics, but rather a black hole, not simply where the public once stood, but where an elite with political authority once acted.

Living in the shadow of the silent majorities the empty elite are constantly anxious, staring out onto a world they sense is beyond their control: A world that has been filled with ever more laws, regulations and

²³ Indeed, at a purely self interested economic level, with the expensive burden of funding and running cameras, CCTV often makes little sense for either the public or private sector.

²⁴ Although as discussed in endnote xii the Foucauldian approach illustrated by Lemke (2001) recognises to some extent the less dynamic and more technical nature of neo-liberal governance.

forms of surveillance that have become a replacement for morals and politics. This increasingly technical, managerial and authoritarian elite are not Orwellian but are anxious authoritarians. This is a weaker and wetter political elite, not stamping down on us with their boots, but shaking in them.

Only a few generations ago Britain had nearly 3.5 million adult members of political parties, today there are around 4 million CCTV cameras in the streets of Britain: CCTV cameras manned by Big Brother on Prozac.

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