

**SEPTEMBER 2009**

---

**CCTV**

---

**HELEN BIRTWISTLE**



**DEBATING MATTERS**  
**TOPIC**  
**GUIDES**

[www.debatingmatters.com](http://www.debatingmatters.com)

**MOTION:**

**“CLOSED CIRCUIT  
TELEVISION (CCTV)  
IS A THREAT TO OUR  
FREEDOM”**

# CONTENTS

**Introduction**

**Key terms**

**The CCTV debate in context**

**Essential reading**

**Backgrounders**

**Organisations**

**In the news**

## KEY TERMS

Big Brother (in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four)

Biometrics

Closed circuit television (CCTV)

The Panopticon

Surveillance society

# INTRODUCTION

1 of 7

# NOTES

1  
1  
2  
4  
5  
5  
6

Walk around any city in Britain and the chances are your movements will be captured by closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)] Surveillance has become a fact of life in modern societies, but in Britain, which has 20 per cent of the world's CCTV cameras, it is particularly prevalent. The government and police see CCTV as playing a role in freeing people from the fear of antisocial behaviour and terrorist attacks, a vision apparently borne out by various crime surveys taken over recent years. But more recently a number of high profile reports, including "Surveillance: Citizens and the State" [Ref: [Parliament](#)] from the House of Lords, have supported assertions that we have now 'woken up' to a surveillance society and that the growth of CCTV is a worrying development. [Ref: [politics.co.uk](#)] Throughout the twentieth century philosophers and novelists have taken the rise of surveillance very seriously. French philosopher Michel Foucault presented Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth century design for a Panopticon [Ref: [Cartome](#)] prison – enabling prisoners to be constantly observed – as a metaphor for the increasing power of institutions to control our lives in today's society. Most famously, George Orwell depicted a world without privacy where life was lived under the intrusive gaze of the telescreen and the constant awareness that 'Big Brother is watching you' [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)] . But against this wave of concern some say that talk of a surveillance society has more to do with conspiracy theories than fact. Journalist David Aaronovitch even goes so far as to suggest that depictions of 'creeping totalitarianism' are the work of 'paranoid fantasists', distracting us from the real problems of democracy in the here and now.



### Is CCTV effective in fighting crime?

One new aspect of the debate relates to public safety. Following the release of an internal report for the Metropolitan Police in August 2009 revealing that just one in 1,000 crimes are solved using CCTV evidence, few would suggest that the technology is a panacea. The question is how to proceed. [Ref: [London Paper](#)] Whilst some argue that the time has come for CCTV to be scrapped, senior police officers suggest that the problem lies with how CCTV is used, rather than the technology itself, and remain convinced of its potential in helping to tackle crime. Launching a scheme to improve the use of images from cameras, they say that there is no reason why the investigation of CCTV evidence can't become as effective as fingerprinting and DNA. Beyond detection and deterrence, they also argue that CCTV plays an important role in reassuring communities vulnerable to crime. But others remain unconvinced, and suggest that CCTV might even increase crime. Quoting a number of recent studies on attitudes to crime, they underline the fact that whilst crime figures have fallen in recent years, fear of crime has been mounting. [Ref: [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)] Rather than alleviate concern, they argue that the proliferation of CCTV has exacerbated fears and undermines 'natural surveillance' and our sense of collective responsibility.

### Surely if you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear?

Over the last year a number of high profile commentators have hit back at claims that our freedoms are under threat, both from an over powerful state and technologies such as CCTV. Worrying about CCTV, they suggest, is the preserve of the conspiracy-

minded, anti-state middle class who 'fetishise' individual freedom above all else. In doing so, they forget how CCTV can enhance human liberty, by protecting communities from those who would harm them – be they the Ipswich rapist [Ref: The Times] or the local teenage tearaway. But critics of CCTV and the 'surveillance society' remain sceptical, and suggest that the problems of CCTV are more profound and deep rooted than this 'conspiracy' caricature suggests.

### So is CCTV less like Big Brother and more like a benevolent father?

'Since Jamie Bulger's case the public see CCTV not as Big Brother but as a benevolent father', argues Peter Fry, director of the CCTV User Group [Ref: [Christian Science Monitor](#)]. In 1993, haunting CCTV images showed the two-year-old toddler being led away by two young boys who later beat him to death [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Critics of CCTV say we shouldn't make policy on the basis of horrific but isolated incidents. However, there are differences in emphasis. For some, the threat of a Big Brother state is a very real one. Others agree the 'benevolent father' analogy is more accurate, but say it's just as worrying. CCTV promotes exaggerated fear and mistrust, they believe. It's the awareness of being watched and the feeling of being reliant on CCTV to make us feel safe, not the danger of actual interference in our lives that is the major threat to freedom. These trends, they suggest, infantilise us all and transform how we relate to ourselves and one another. But given the seriousness of crimes like child abduction that are potentially preventable by CCTV, shouldn't we do what we can to fight the risks?

## DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

3 of 7

NOTES

### Have we sleep-walked our way into a surveillance society?

One of the most worrying aspects of CCTV, critics argue, is the threat it poses to private life. Described by philosopher A C Grayling as a 'margin of inviolability for our thoughts, feelings and intimacies' and the place where we might recover from 'the abrasions of life', privacy is regarded by many to be a prerequisite of both a free life and a democratic society. Citing the proliferation of CCTV in pubs, classrooms and increasingly workplaces, some, including Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, contend that we are 'waking up to a surveillance society' in which privacy is being compromised and citizens are constantly monitored. [Ref: [Politics.co.uk](http://Politics.co.uk)]m But others argue that concerns surrounding privacy are being overplayed. CCTV is not being erected in private homes, but in public spaces. Privacy, by this reading, is important 'in our homes and in our heads', not in the middle of Piccadilly Circus.



## ESSENTIAL READING

4 of 7

NOTES

The Big Question: Are CCTV cameras a waste of money in the fight against crime?

Andy Mc Smith *Independent* 07 May 2008

Studying the 'surveillance society'

Gavin John Douglas Smith *Guardian* 14 April 2009

### For

Paranoid, suspicion, obsessive surveillance – and a land of liberty destroyed by stealth

Henry Porter *Daily Mail* 11 August 2009

As seen on CCTV

Jeremy Watson *Scotland on Sunday* 5 August 2009

We don't need no CCTV in our classrooms

Leia Clancy and Sam Goodman *Guardian* 3 June 2009

Big Brother is not earning his keep

Gillian Bowditch *The Times* 15 February 2009

### Against

Next time you tread in dog mess, you'll wish I'd been there

Cosmo Landesman *The Times* 16 August 2009

Not my kind of freedom

Conor Gearty *Guardian* 02 February 2009

The 'surveillance society' has led to many terrorists being imprisoned

Peter Clarke *The Times* 09 September 2008

This strange backlash against CCTV

Johann Hari *Independent* 17 March 2008

### Further Reading

Surveillance: Citizens and the State

*House of Lords Constitution Committee Second Report* 21 January 2009

'Politicians mess everything up' – wrong

David Aaronovitch *The Times* 26 February 2008

We know where you live

AC Grayling *Guardian* 05 December 2008

Why we must stop deferring to authority

Dolan Cummings *Spiked* 15 June 2007

Essex University's 21st Annual law lecture by David Blunkett



## BACKGROUNDEERS

CCTV is a typically New Labour response to crime – both authoritarian and useless

Ed West *Telegraph* 24 August 2009

Someone to watch over you

Jessica Shepherd *Guardian* 4 August 2009

Don't condemn CCTV: it has a vital role in the fight against crime

Simon Adcock *Guardian* 03 July 2008

Pubs and Police fall out over CCTV in bars

Matthew Taylor *Guardian* 16 May 2009

Give us back our private lives

Alasdair Palmer and David Barrett *Telegraph* 25 April 2009

The need for a 'snooper's charter'

Carole Cadwalladr *Guardian* 20 April 2009

Police v citizen: the Orwellian struggle

Robert Reiner *Guardian* 8 April 2009

A convention of can't

Conor Gearty *New Statesman* 19 March 2009

Lords: rise of CCTV is threat to freedom

Alan Travis *Guardian* 6 February 2009

Anthony and Tracy White

*Guardian* 4 February 2009

Ignore the paranoid fantasists

David Aaronovitch *The Times* 26 February 2008

Watch yourself

Judith Kneen *Guardian* 17 April 2007

Dilemmas of privacy and surveillance

*Royal Academy of Engineering* March 2007 (pdf)

Northern Ireland Police Force use CCTV facial recognition to solve crime

*Public Technology* 17 February 2007

## ORGANISATIONS

Convention on Modern Liberty

CCTV User Group

Digital Bridge – Shoreditch TV community cameras

Privacy International

5 of 7

NOTES



## IN THE NEWS

1,000 cameras to solve just one crime, Met Police admits  
*Telegraph* 25 August 2009

Teachers distrust CCTV in the classrooms  
*Guardian* 18 August 2009

Police launch 'Flying Saucer' CCTV camera  
*Telegraph* 16 August 2009

Big Brother Britain has more CCTV cameras than China  
*Daily Mail* 11 August 2009

Smart CCTV spots suspicious moves  
*The Times* 02 August 2009

School installs CCTV cameras in pupil toilets  
*The Times* 22 July 2009

Street CCTV has little effect on crime  
*Kable* 18 May 2009

Ahead of G20 summit, council told to switch off illegal £15m  
CCTV network  
*Guardian* 30 March 2009

Pub landlord wins fight not to have to install CCTV cameras  
*Guardian* 12 March 2009

CCTV vital after taxi driver bitten  
*Hull and East Riding* 05 February 2009

Seven of ten murders solved by CCTV  
*Telegraph* 01 January 2009

Talking CCTV cameras 'a vital tool against crime' says Humberside  
police  
*CRP News* 12 May 2008

Paris to quadruple the number of CCTV cameras  
*Telegraph* 16 October 2008

Airports to get 'virtual tripwire' CCTV  
*Telegraph* 12 April 2008

Five prostitutes strangled - and killer 'may not have been alone'  
*The Times* 17 January 2008

Talking CCTV cameras accuse wrong person  
*Guardian* 12 April 2007

Public webcams, not CCTV, urged to avoid Big Brother society  
*Guardian* 27 March 2007

6 of 7

NOTES



## ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas & Pfizer Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.



## FIND OUT MORE

Debating Matters engages a wide range of individuals, from the students who take part in the debates, the diverse group of professionals who judge for us, the teachers who train and support their debaters, and the young people who go on to become Debating Matters Alumni after school and help us to continue to expand and develop the competition. If you enjoyed using this Topic Guide, and are interested in finding out more about Debating Matters and how you can be involved, please complete this form and return it to us at the address below.

Debating Matters Competition  
Academy of Ideas Ltd  
Signet House  
49-51 Farringdon Road  
London  
EC1M 3JP

- Yes, I'd like to know more. Please send me further information about the Debating Matters Competition:
- I am a teacher and would like further details about events in my area and how to enter a team
- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

First name

Surname

School/company/  
organisation

Professional role  
(if applicable)

Address

Postcode

Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone



**“DEBATING MATTERS  
TEACHES A WAY  
OF THINKING.  
INTELLECTUAL  
ARCHITECTURE  
IS CREATED BY  
ENGAGING WITH  
IDEAS”**

**TRISTRAM HUNT, HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER**

