Cut to the Chase: Editing Time and Space through Closed-Circuit Television Surveillance

La fin des courses poursuites pour les policiers britanniques ? Le rôle de la vidéosurveillance dans le changement des représentations spatio-temporelles dans les courses poursuites

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Introduction

1 The UK is said to have the largest number of CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television) cameras of any European nation. Estimates place the number of cameras at around 4.2 million; one for every fourteen people (although there is no universal register of cameras and so no definite figure for the camera population; see McCahill and Norris, 2003). These cameras have been involved in a variety of changes in UK police practices. Such changes range from new evidential practices in court cases, through access to new materials, to new questions posed regarding invasions of privacy (Neyland, 2006). One unexplored area of police practices, which this paper will argue have undergone significant changes since the introduction of CCTV cameras, is police accountability. This paper will draw on recent controversies in the UK regarding police car chases to investigate the ways in which CCTV cameras have led to new and complex questions of police accountability.

2 Car chases have held a prominent place in recent UK media discussions regarding the accountability of the police. Several fatal accidents and near-fatal accidents involving police cars chasing criminals have led to concerns being raised regarding police practices (see below). CCTV cameras have appeared as a background presence in some of these incidents, being used by police forces in pursuits and providing footage for media coverage of chases which have ended badly. However, in public discussions of police car chases, CCTV cameras have been absent. Thus far there has been very little discussion of
the possible connection between CCTV cameras, fatal accidents in police car chases and issues of accountability. This paper will argue that by getting close to the practices of CCTV operatives and police officers and the ways in which they manage car chases, new and interesting questions can be asked about the prospects of UK police being held accountable for their actions. The paper will argue that at the centre of CCTV-police officer interactions around car chases are complex articulations of different geographies.

3 The paper will argue that CCTV operatives interact with police officers to produce new geographical configurations of town and city centre spaces through which car chases occur. The suggestion will be made that CCTV operatives and police officers combine a conventional sense of geography with newly emerging and more complex geographic forms. The conventional form of geography involves notions of space, time, distance and speed. It will be argued in this paper that newly emerging geographical notions involve folded network spaces. The latter are not dependent on a conventional sense of distance or speed, but instead involve the articulation of predictive visual scenes which fold together operatives, cameras, target vehicles, police officers and their vehicles. Unlike a conventional geography where distance is linear and a target vehicle is pursued, with the introduction of CCTV it will be argued that a target vehicle is surveilled, moves from monitor to monitor in the CCTV control room and police vehicles are deployed to intercept. The paper will explore what happens to geographies of the car chase once it becomes possible that chasing might be no more than monitoring, drama might become no more than prediction and the ‘chase’ as an explicit action might fade from prominence. The paper will explore the extent to which these newly articulated geographies offer opportunities for reconsidering police accountability.

4 The paper will investigate these CCTV geographies and accountabilities by, first, looking at ways of understanding accountability and CCTV. Second, the paper will look at CCTV and different notions of space. Third, the paper will explore the controversy of UK police car chases. Fourth, the paper will draw on a specific study which involved interviews with police officers about car chases to explore how senses of space have changed. Finally, the paper will analyse CCTV, space and car chases in order to ask new questions of police accountability since the introduction and proliferation of CCTV cameras across the UK.

**CCTV and accountability**

5 There has been a rapid growth in the number and variety of studies of CCTV and surveillance in recent years. For example, Webster and Hood (2001) have taken a community informatics approach to CCTV, Fyfe and Bannister (1996) produced an account of the panoptic potential of CCTV, and McGrail (2003) analysed CCTV in local-authority-provided housing. Alongside these studies there has been research on surveillance and space (see Crang, 1994; Graham, 1998) and on CCTV and space (see Koskela, 2000; 2003; Levin et al., 2002). Most prominent in the field of CCTV research have been Foucauldian-inclined criminological studies of CCTV, such as the work of Norris and Armstrong (1999) and Norris et al. (1998). These studies engage with CCTV cameras as systems for gathering data. As the number of cameras increases and new CCTV technologies are introduced (such as digital CCTV cameras, linked to computer-algorithms), suggestions are made that more and more data are gathered in ever-greater
detail. This prompts researchers to raise questions regarding the ways in which data are used and regulated (see Goold and Neyland, 2009).

6 In relation to this paper’s focus on police work and geography, there have also been studies concentrating on CCTV and its impact on public space (Fyfe and Bannister 1998; Fyfe, Bannister and Kearns 1998). For example, Reeve (1998) discusses the impact of CCTV on behaviour in public space. In these discussions of surveillance and space, McCahill (1998) analyses the growth of surveillance in reference to concepts of modernity, discussing CCTV in relation to three central themes: ‘time-space distanciation’, globalisation, and the ‘risk society’

2 However, discussions of accountability are absent from this literature. This paper will attempt to address that absence. We will suggest in this paper that ‘data’ (from CCTV, on car chases, involving police officers) are not simply picked up and recorded by CCTV systems. Instead, the suggestion will be made that the spaces in which CCTV systems operate are accountably accomplished.

7 We will argue that approaching CCTV systems as mechanisms for accountably accomplishing space offers utility for interrogating the transformation of particular policing practices in the UK. Although our focus will be on accountability, we will also note the pertinence of seeking new ways of analysing space for understanding other police practices. We will suggest that by interrogating the ways in which space is understood in car chases, we can get closer to the ways in which CCTV ‘data’ are constituted and held to account and can engage in questions of police accountability.

8 We will first turn attention to notions of accountability and outline how these might help us to focus on the particular kinds of spatial accounting practices at the centre of this paper. We will then turn attention to notions of space and technology. In a general sense accountability relates to those occasions where some particular feature of activity is made available to be assessed and goes through a process of assessment. However, across the social sciences there are a variety of approaches to accountability. We will briefly outline these approaches as constitutive, directive and demonstrative forms of accountability (a more detailed analysis of these terms appears in Woolgar and Neyland, forthcoming). Although in practice these often overlap, they are separated out here for ease of presentation. In subsequent sections the complexity and blurring of these approaches in instances of accountability will be highlighted.

9 *Constitutive* forms of accountability relate to the sense in which forms of interaction are occasions of accountability. For example, conversations might involve one speaker providing an utterance to be held to account by a second speaker whose subsequent response is then available to be held to account by the first speaker (Garfinkel, 1967; Luff and Heath, 1993). This approach treats accountability as a pervasive phenomenon, constitutive of everyday forms of interaction (constitutive in that through holding each other to account, more or less mutual intelligibility is accomplished). In CCTV systems, operatives, their managers and police officers are often engaged in constitutive forms of accountability. For example, operatives looking at monitors will interact with police officers on the ground through a radio system in order to constitute a sense of what is going on. The view of CCTV operatives making sense of the monitors, words exchanged over the radio, claims by police officers as to what they perceive on the ground, each feed into this constituted sense of what activities are occurring and enable members to hold each other to account. Constituting a sense of what is happening in any scene is thus an accountable accomplishment, with each attempt to constitute sense available to be accounted for by other members of the interaction.
Directive forms of accountability, in contrast, relate to those systems of assessment where an organisation is measured according to certain principles, expectations, codes of conduct or practice, standardised measures, benchmarks, performance indicators and so on (see Power, 1997; Baxter and Chua, 2002). The measures form the focus for accountability. They draw together the aspects of the organisation to be measured and operate as principal ways in which the organisation might steer itself and through which its members might come to prioritise certain types of activities and organisational goals (Miller, 1992; Miller and O’Leary, 1994; Rose, 1999). Directive forms of accountability are often tied into further forms of accountability such as external auditing whereby organisations are expected to be able to demonstrate that they have adhered to certain measurement standards and practices. These are noted as featuring multiple unintended consequences (see, for example, Strathern, 1999; 2000; 2002). In UK CCTV systems, the Information Commissioner’s Office produces a set of guidelines to which publicly funded CCTV systems are expected to adhere. The guidelines establish the things on which the CCTV system should report and this directs CCTV systems’ accountability.

Demonstrative modes of accountability refer to those actions understood as carried out, usually by an organisation, on behalf of an often unspecified mass audience. This includes, for example, company accounts made available for the public good or in the public interest. In effect these ‘publics’ tend to be fairly narrow and specialised (for more on transparency systems, see Gray, 1992). This form of accountability includes calls for organisations to make certain types of information available and for (sometimes publicly funded) organisations to demonstrate their value for money, responsibility (social, corporate), transparency and ethical standards. Demands for transparency are made in relation to, amongst other things, the media (Media Transparency, 2003), global political campaigning (Transparency International, 2003) and corporate organisations (Shaw and Plapinger, 2001). Like directive approaches, demonstrative accountability can form a set of organisational priorities as organisations are actively encouraged to adopt particular protocols on making information available for assessment and, indeed, for public organisations their funding can depend on an ability to demonstrate that they have adhered to these protocols (Neyland, 2007). In publicly funded UK CCTV systems, signs must display who is responsible (and can be held to account) for the system, records of activity (such as footage of arrests) can be made available in courts to hold police officers to account, and the rise and fall of crime figures in CCTV covered areas are made available for public (and particularly media) scrutiny. CCTV systems are thus involved in demonstrations of their accountability.

These three forms of accountability briefly introduce some of the tensions and concerns involved in operating CCTV systems in the UK. CCTV images are not left to speak for themselves, but are actively (and accountably) constituted in interactions between, for example, CCTV operatives and police officers. In order to understand more about CCTV and the specific example of car chases, we need to turn attention to the ways in which ideas of space might be actively and accountably accomplished.

CCTV, technology and space

Car chases historically involve a police vehicle or vehicles in pursuit of a suspect vehicle (perhaps a stolen car or a vehicle carrying a wanted suspect). The spaces of these chases were linear (a police car would pursue a suspect and attempt to follow or get beyond and
stop the suspect). Using police radios it was possible to try and get police resources ahead of the suspect in order to intervene and halt the chase. However, this was always noted as problematic; the suspect could turn in any number of directions and the chase developed at a high pace meaning it was difficult to get resources in position. The introduction of CCTV cameras appears to offer a change in this situation. Switching from monitor to monitor allows multiple views to be witnessed from one place – the CCTV control room. This overview of spaces might offer opportunities for greater co-ordination of resources and new opportunities to predict the path a suspect vehicle might take. This appears to introduce a new practical geography to police work; in place of pursuit appears to come monitoring, in place of linear, fast-paced chases come multiple spaces viewed from one location. How might we develop a better understanding of these new geographies?

One starting place is provided by ethnomethodological studies of the accomplishment of the visual. These studies analyse the ways in which ‘professional vision’ can be constituted. Such professional vision produces an organised and visual “apprehension of the world” (Goodwin, 1994, page 608). Organising and standardising practices for the production of vision, according to Cole (1998) and Jordan and Lynch (1998), further enable claims to evidence. For Jasanoff, this organised approach to seeing the world provides for a “visual authority” (1998, p. 713) that further provides for claims about ‘what is going on’ to be witnessed as factual accounts of ‘what has happened’. Drawing on these studies, CCTV operatives and police officers attempts to constitutively account for what is occurring in any moment could be analysed as instructions in how images of that moment should be read. The instructions might form claims as to what ‘important’ features of the image should form the focus for reading the image and the focus of what the image is evidencing. In this way, the account and image should not be treated as analytically separable. The image, claims about the image, and implicating within the claim the form of professionalism oriented toward in making the claim would all be features of the accomplishment of the visual account. Thus CCTV staff predicting that a suspect car was likely to head toward a particular street, could be understood as a professionally articulated and constitutive account of witnessing/evidencing to which the police might respond and corroborate by moving resources or disputing the account. Any dispute would also involve a professional articulation of a new account, evidencing, witnessing and so on. In that all accounts are recorded by the CCTV system (in line with directive forms of accountability and in case of any particular need for future demonstrative accountability), non-responses and responses characterised by an absence of professional articulation, witnessing and evidencing, are dis-preferred.

These forms of visual-account production have found a recent focus in ethnomethodological studies of control centres (for example, Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996; Heath and Luff, 1999; Suchman, 1993). These studies offer insights into the socio-technical production of accounts of activity. Heath et al. (1999), in their work on tube drivers on the London Underground, argue that: “The appearance, position and conduct of passengers allow the drivers, in the moments available, and from the limited viewpoint of the moving vehicle, to assemble a sense of the scene and in particular to discriminate between the waiting passengers with regard to categories which are of relevance to the activity in which they are engaged” (p. 561). In short, they develop “occupationally relevant ways of perceiving the scene” (p. 561).

According to Heath and Luff (1999) the work of building accounts of activity “is not simply a matter of contrasting some event or appearance with what might ordinarily be
expected to happen, but rather learning to see particular events, activities, people or
objects in particular ways” (p. 4). This fits closely with the work of Goodwin (1995) and
Goodwin and Goodwin (1996). Goodwin and Goodwin suggest, in their study of airport
staff attempting to pick out correct aeroplanes, that a quick glance at activity is
“structured by larger organizational structures” (1996, p. 62). They argue that aeroplanes
are not just seen by the staff, but are noted within a web of activity involving the
positioning of people, runways, aeroplanes, and various other elements. Goodwin and
Goodwin suggest that seeing is a socially organised activity sustained by a community of
practice.

17 Utilising these ideas, we could say accounts of space are achieved and thereby space is
accomplished through each occasion of interactive accounting. We could then attempt to
distinguish further between characteristics of the ‘professional vision’ of CCTV operatives
and that of police officers, CCTV managers and so on. However, we might need to know
more about the nature(s) of spaces through which car chases are occurring and the
technologies operating in those spaces.

18 Science and Technology Studies (STS) can provide useful insights into aggregations of
multiple interactive entities (spaces, operatives, technologies). One such approach can be
found in Latour’s notion of immutable mobility (1990). Latour suggests that in a
convincing account “the ‘things’ you gathered and displaced have to be presentable all at
once to those you want to convince... In sum you have to invent objects which have the
properties of being mobile but also immutable, presentable, readable and combinable
with one another” (p. 26). We might then say that CCTV operatives work hard to produce
a sufficiently durable association of account and image, an aggregation of visual, textual,
verbal, and material, which travels in a stable manner from CCTV control room, to police,
to town centre, back to CCTV staff (and perhaps further in courts of law, in the media,
and so on as required). We might then employ Garfinkel’s (1967) suggestion that accounts
accomplish identity in each occasion of their use in order to investigate this possibility of
stability. How would, for example, the CCTV operatives’ ‘professional vision’ (or perhaps
‘professional aggregation of spatial accounting’) achieve stability? However, this
theoretical shift is not straightforward: if we draw on the history of actor-network theory
(for example, Callon, 1986; Latour, 1990; Law, 2002) to investigate how such aggregations
draw together (translate, displace) entities into particular formations, we might be
moving away from ethnomethodologists’ concern with members’ methods for making
sense of the world. More importantly, would we be moving closer to an adequate spatial
analysis for this paper?

19 One way to address these questions is provided by turning to the work of Hetherington
on museums (1997; 2002). Hetherington (1997) (who draws on STS research in
combination with ideas from Derrida (1976), Foucault (1970), and Serres (1991) argues, in
his study of the space of museums, that museums are classifying machines, separating,
cataloguing, and suggesting readings for space. He looks at an example of a museum
exhibition that is based around objects placed in chronological order, the chronology
establishing a means to read the space and to read it as something quite specific. The
space is a linear representation of history. Yet it is more complex than this: in the centre
of the chronology is the museum’s key and most popular exhibit (an ornamental owl),
which is placed in the centre because of its popularity, but effectively disrupts the spatial
account the museum has previously elaborated. Its central location is chronologically out
of place.
Hetherington suggests that this creates a fold in the chronological space, linking the past and the future totems together in a disrupting relationship. The space is effectively folded around the museum's display objects, the objects constituting a potential reading for the space, and the folds in the space (between and around objects) disrupting the conventional linear reading. This is not just about vision though: “to see is not to understand. Understanding, rather, is performed through the material semiotics through which such arrangements of things come to be performed” (2002, p. 191). By incorporating concepts of materiality, issues of the spatial beyond and around the visual are opened up. Such a focus on materiality can also be found in (amongst many others) the work of Law and Mol (1995). As Latour (2002) suggests, “The folding mingles beings into an heterogeneous existence and inaugurates an unexpected history by multiplications of aliens which henceforth intervene between two sequences of action” (p. 254).

Latour and Hetherington both position the fold as a drawing together or aggregation and a disruption or tension. We might then utilise the fold to explore the ways in which the verbal, textual, visual, and material are folded together in accomplishing spatial accounts. That is, the verbal, textual, visual, and material might be drawn into an aggregation and form a focus of tension or disruption. This elaboration of new practical geographies of police work takes us some way in understanding the potential for change in police car chases since the introduction of CCTV. However, this does not provide us with a strong sense of how these geographies tie in to our initial concern with accountability. The next section will focus on the recent controversy in the UK over police car chases. The paper will then proceed to look at how police officers talk of car chases since the introduction of CCTV. It will investigate the ways in which police officers view their accountability in relation to this new technology.

Car chases as controversy

The last twenty years have seen an increase in UK media focus regarding the accountability of the police involved in high speed car chases resulting in fatal accidents. A rise in the number of deaths and serious injuries occurring as a result of high-speed pursuits by police officers has led to increased calls for tougher codes of practice by both the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.

However, despite these calls for changes in codes of practice the situation has remained largely unchanged. As early as 1987, guidelines approved by the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) outlined the need for proper training for police drivers involved in high-speed chases. Within these guidelines, 29 recommendations focusing on improved training were made. A couple of years later, on the 15th June 1989, a new code of practice for police car chases was published by the ACPO proposing, amongst other things, the greater use of helicopters. One article states that the new code of practice follows a “disturbing increase in the number of fatal accidents during police pursuits”.

In March 1999, the Daily Mail launched a campaign for a “crackdown on bad police drivers” alongside the calls for tougher legislation governing car chases a narrative in the UK media can be seen involving ‘innocent bystanders’, ‘innocent people’, ‘victims’, ‘innocent vehicles’, and ‘blameless pedestrians’ (this mirrors Lee’s (1984) textual analysis...
of media reports which structure relations in the text between innocent victims and evil doers). Reports such as: “A typical tragedy occurred last week. The mother of two young children died from multiple injuries when a police patrol car, chasing a driver who had failed to pay for petrol, rammed into her vehicle after going through a red light” are used to strengthen the media’s argument for greater accountability and responsibility to be taken by the police with regard to high-speed car chases ending in fatalities.

In 2000, the Daily Mail named a ‘high-speed culture’ amongst police drivers. A few years earlier, The Observer described the reasons for this development as “both the chaser and the chased delight in the excitement that such a lethal hot pursuit creates. The modern version of the gunfight at the OK corral is a burn-up after some villains through city streets at 80mph”, adding that a report by the Policy Studies Institute argues that “car chases offer the kind of excitement that police officers particularly hanker after”. This is reiterated by another article stating that “car chases can be huge fun for all participants”, and that further; “a police driver will always be tempted to embark on a chase too lightly”.

In 2001 the Chairman of the Police Complaints Authority is quoted as saying that (in response to statistics highlighting that the number of people killed in high speed car chases has almost trebled over the past 3 years, since 1998) the number of deaths is “totally unacceptable”. A year later, on the 27th June 2002 a report entitled Fatal Pursuit was published by the Police Complaints Authority, highlighting once again the rise in fatal road traffic collisions involving police pursuits and the need for tighter controls. The report also argues that police control-room managers should have a greater role in controlling and managing car chases. Two years later, at the launch of two more reports on safety, the head of the Police Complaints Authority (Sir Alistair Graham) once more called for a stricter code of practice for car chases from the Home Office. Just over a year later, another call for an overhaul of the rules covering high-speed car chases was made by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

More recently the Association of Chief Police Officers is reported as considering fitting black boxes into police vehicles, which they state could help identify when officers are responsible for accidents from car crashes resulting in death or serious injury.

From these reports we can discern several notable, regularly repeated features of police car chases. There is talk of danger, recklessness, speed, unnecessary fatalities, innocent victims and death. At the same time, we also find a regular refrain regarding the need for police officers to be regulated and accountable and the need for a more effective code of conduct to be developed. However, within this reporting, we find no mention of CCTV. In the next section we will introduce the ways in which police practice in car chases has (at least partially) changed since the introduction of CCTV cameras.

**CCTV, police officers and car chases**

Police officers suggest that CCTV can act as many extra sets of eyes, enabling them to see many spaces from one location. In the particular town in which this research took place, the CCTV system was operated by the local authority in collaboration with the police. The operatives were employed by the local council and the control room was situated within council offices. Police officers had a monitor in the police station where operatives would share images they thought officers ought to look at and officers and operatives were
connected by a radio system. It was through this system that the many spaces into which CCTV looked, the views of CCTV operatives and those of police officers came together. Through the radio, accountable sense would be accomplished of what was going on across the town. It would be straightforward to assume from this point that the new geographies of police-CCTV operative interaction was characterised by a hyper-post-modern geography of everywhere folded into one location, neatly interconnected by fibre-optics, transcending conventions of space.

To an extent, this new kind of spatial drama was played out. Many parts of the town were folded into the control room, the police officers could move through the conventional space of the town and this new folded space in the control room, guided from camera to camera by CCTV operatives. The radio system could also help accomplish this folding, with verbal cues offered between CCTV operatives and police officers to direct sense-making of the folded spaces of the town. However, at the same time it should be noted that within this sense-making, many spaces and images were ignored, many police responses came to nothing, on mid-week night shifts CCTV operatives often had nothing to look at and police officers would complete town centre ‘beats’ with little to report. The sense in which CCTV involved a dramatic change in conceptualising the space of the town centre needs to be understood alongside this relatively dull rendition of nothing much happening, equipment lying idle and cameras being witness to little more than plastic bags blowing around the local supermarket car park.

Alongside this folding of many spaces into one space, multiple times were also folded together into one location – the CCTV control room. In the past it might have been the case that police actions were relatively easy to forget. However, since the introduction of CCTV cameras to the town future moments of accountability were incorporated into interactions between police officers and CCTV operatives. All parties were aware that the CCTV system was also recording their responses to events. Police officers and CCTV operatives continually paid attention to directive forms of accountability (notably the CCTV code of practice to which they oriented their actions) and the possibility of future occasions of demonstrative accountability (where tapes might be made public in, for example, court cases and operatives and officers’ actions could be replayed and accounted for). Thus any non-responses by police officers to CCTV operatives’ suggestions that something was or might be about to happen had to be accountably accomplished in such a way that during any future occasion of accountability in which CCTV taped archives would be used to replay society for a few minutes, police officers who had not responded to something which was now considered an event, could comfortably replay why they had not responded. Hence we can find multiple spaces (from the viewpoints of 32 cameras) folded into one space (the CCTV control room) and multiple times (for example, real time actions and their future replay-ability) folded into a single account. Simultaneously, we need to avoid jumping to any premature conclusions regarding the drama of such folds; much CCTV work is banal, whole shifts can be characterised by nothing out of the ordinary and, due to possibilities of future occasions of accountability, police officers probably have to respond to a greater number of unimportant non-events just in case one turns into an event.

With this backdrop of CCTV operations, one might assume that a car chase would be a moment of high excitement. To an extent this is the case. For CCTV operatives, receiving an instruction from police officers that a suspected stolen car is heading towards the town’s CCTV system is an opportunity for some activity. However, for police officers, the
advent of CCTV has led to a decrease in the drama of car chases. Counter to the media reports’ focus on danger, recklessness, speed, unnecessary fatalities, innocent victims and death, since the introduction of CCTV, police officers talk in detail of surveilling suspect cars as they move from monitor to monitor, having more time to predict where a car might be heading, getting police resources into position in order to intercept the suspect vehicle and having an evidential record of the movement of the vehicle.

**Interview with police officer:**

Officer: we have used it [CCTV] in this way in that somebody left in a car from [NEIGHBOURING TOWN] um and they drove up the [MAIN] road towards the high street and the high street camera in preparation the police said turn it round looked down the [MAIN] road at [NEIGHBOURING TOWN] and then saw the car coming up towards the high street and so there was a super, follow of this vehicle and then the police resources they were down at [SMALL] street say could could get to the right and the right direction and and it’s been used to sort of partner up to do the missing links they can turn it round so it has quite a lot of coverage if you imagine from [NEIGHBOURING TOWN] all the way up the [MAIN] road and then into the high street and then down this road it finishes here heading towards [BIG CITY] you’ve got quite a few minutes worth of knowledge of where someone’s going before you lose sight of them so that’s quite good

In this excerpt we find a local police officer talking about the ‘super follow’. But it is not just the police cars which are doing the follow. What makes this follow ‘super’, is the CCTV cameras. Having the conventional spaces of the town folded into this new singular geography of the CCTV control room and having these future times (of where the car might be going, where police resources ought to be deployed in what time frame) folded into the developing account of the chase, accomplishes the ‘super follow’. And yet the drama of the media stories about car chases is notably absent. A geographical drama of times, spaces and folds, stands in for the more visceral drama of speed, risk, life and death.

**CCTV, police officers and accountability**

The notable drama of a car chase unfolding through CCTV is the speed at which events have to be constitutively accounted for. Most often it is the police (rather than CCTV operatives) who will alert the CCTV system to the possibility of a vehicle which requires following. This results from neighbouring police forces reporting stolen or suspect vehicles heading toward the town. Police officers in the town then inform CCTV operatives who will try and identify any possible vehicles. They may have the make, model, colour or some amount of the vehicle’s number plate to go on. CCTV operatives will also have the direction and possibly the road on which the vehicle is heading. The CCTV operatives may then quickly show several different potential cars to officers in the police station using their shared monitor. Police officers and CCTV operatives will have to rapidly constitute a decision as to which candidate car is the one to be followed. Having made this initial decision, other vehicles will either be dropped from the follow, or
monitored with less intensity than the now prime target (this will depend on the extent to which operatives and officers are certain of their targeting).

CCTV operatives and police officers will then stand witness to the speed, direction and nature (erratic, dangerous, quite normal) driving of the target vehicle. The speed and direction are particularly important for making a judgement about where to locate police resources and how soon. Constituting an unfolding path for the car to travel down involves many real-time rapid judgements. At the same time as these judgements are happening police officers will already be leaving the police station to perform an interception, or a search will be on for police officers who are already close to where the latest guess is that the car will be. Constituting this sense of which vehicle should be targeted, where it is going and how the police should intercept it, requires many judgement per minute of the unfolding scene. If each of these moment-to-moment judgements turns out to be correct, then the end of the ‘follow’ involves police officers deploying their resources to intercept the vehicle. These resources usually involve the deployment of a ‘stinger’ which is placed across the road and lightly punctures the vehicle’s tyres causing them to deflate and bringing the vehicle to a gentle stop. Each judgement is oriented toward an awareness of the possibility of future occasions of accountability. For example, officers might be held to account for the extent to which they have adhered to their directive sense of accountability (sticking to the guidelines). Also officers might be subject to demonstrative forms of accountability, with footage made publicly available through the media if a target car is not intercepted and the police have to ask the public for further information or if something goes wrong in the interception and the police are accounted for accordingly. Any judgements which turn out to be incorrect (a vehicle going a different route, a failed interception, a suspect vehicle getting away with no interception) are each likely to be the subject of further questions. Officers and operatives can then be caught between wanting to momentarily hold back on decisions as to where to deploy resources in an attempt to see if the suspect vehicle sticks to their predicted path and making decisions quickly in order to have time to deploy resources.

Future occasions of accountability engage the other modes of accountability through which car chases/’follows’ might be assessed. Alongside the ‘real-time’ constitutive accountability of the car ‘chase’/’follow’, there are forms of directive and demonstrative accountability at work. The introduction of CCTV provides for a history of the times, places and notable characters (cars, suspects, police officers, stingers, etc.) of the ‘chase’ to be recorded and archived. Who made what decision is also recorded and checked against police logs. On these occasions of accountability, police officers emphasise that the system is operated by the local council (not the police) in order to emphasise its independence and integrity.

Interview with police officer:

Officer: accountability their um tape storage and management of it all up there [AT THE LOCAL COUNCIL] is all down the line as it should be which is ideal and also continuity is kept so that it’s much better that they keep the tapes rather than hand them over say to the police because you’ve got another continuity link when you come to the court hearing it absolutely um . the person who puts the tape in and does the tour of duty and sees the events >or may or may not have seen the events< the statement will read that
that individual has done this and this and this and this and there’s a great deal of continuity where as if you started handing on tapes to all sorts and it’s gone all round the houses then you lose you can lose the plot.

According to this view, through the taped archive, the police can accomplish a directive and demonstrative sense of accountability. They can use the archive to talk of how their actions were directed by police best practice in performing ‘follows’ and they can demonstratively account for their actions by drawing on the taped archives. This makes accountability appear straightforward. However, as we noted in the real-time decision-making of the car chase, accountably constituting a sense of what was going on was complex. This complexity does not reduce simply as attention switches from real-time to taped archives. There are three areas of complexity involved in this accountability based on the taped-archive.

First, the officer in this excerpt notes that without work to produce and maintain continuity in the ownership of the tape archive (who has had access to what, who has been able to view what), it is possible to ‘lose the plot’. Losing the plot is equivocal to losing the integrity and independence of the taped archive. Continuity of ownership of the evidence is seen as vital. Even though most of the CCTV taped archive will never be subject to future occasions of accountability, pre-emptive work is carried out to maintain continuity just in case of such accountability. And ownership continuity is positioned with the local council – the police wish to be able to call on the tape archive as an independent (non-police) witness to events. Thus boundary work is also important.

Second, it should not be assumed that the taped archive can simply and straightforwardly be replayed. To recapture society for the few minutes or hours which are to be replayed requires many, many hours of searching for suitable footage. It is not the case that the footage simply makes history transparent. In line with all occasions of transparency, some things are made visible and some things are retained as invisible (Neyland, 2007). In this case, searching through the archive for suitable footage is an editing process. The things to be replayed are selected and made available for further witnessing. Demonstrative accountability of police actions is subject to a selection and editing process of the footage to be made available. We should also not assume that after selection, replaying footage is an easy and neutral act. CCTV images are not left to speak for themselves and even footage held in the archives over a long period can be subject to further constitutive sense-making when replayed, for example, in courts of law (Neyland, 2006). Any assumption that histories can simply be replayed for occasions of demonstrative accountability requires scrutiny.

Third, there are further complexities in making decisions regarding accountability. Attributions of who has done what to whom or what and who should take responsibility for whom or what and what should follow from attributions of responsibility, are each complex decision-making processes. Indeed, several hundred years of philosophy (going back to the work of Hume, 1740) suggests that switching from asking what the nature of something ‘is’, to asking what ‘ought’ to follow is logically challenging (the cut of ‘is’ from ‘ought’ is known as Hume’s guillotine; Black, 1964; for more on this see Woolgar and Neyland, forthcoming). Although we are not engaged in problems of logic here, we can note the practical challenges of both these directions of questioning. Firstly, using tapes to establish what has gone in any particular incident in order to render the police, for example, demonstratively accountable for their actions depends on selecting footage,
editing footage, producing a constitutive account of what is happening in the footage (and this account is subject to dispute). Second, deciding on what has happened and using that decision to declare further attributions of responsibility requires an extra leap; what should responsibility entail, what would an adequate form of responsibilisation look like and what would be the purpose of attributing responsibility. For example, are attributions of responsibility designed to discipline police officers who have made incorrect choices, even though they had to make those choices under pressure and to the best of their ability in the time available? Or is a designation of responsibility an attempt to encourage officers in similar situations in the future to follow a different (more correct) path of action, but then what would that path look like and what is the connection between one officer being held responsible for an action now and other officers’ future actions? Alternatively, are designations of responsibility following a problem, a means to publicly demonstrate that actions have been taken, without any necessary correlate in future police actions? These questions will be addressed in the Conclusion.

**Conclusion**

What we can discern from this analysis is that the introduction of CCTV has led to some transformations in the practices of police officers in car chases. In place of a possible focus on danger, recklessness, speed, unnecessary fatalities, innocent victims and death we find new geographies of folded times and spaces in the CCTV control room. The linear drama of the chase is translated into the folded monitoring of the super follow. What we also find are new practices of accountability. CCTV operatives and police officers use the radios, cameras, monitors and what they perceive to be occurring in order to constitute and agree on (and hold each other to account over) a particular scene. Constituting the scene enables police officers to draw out predictive paths down which they think suspect vehicles may travel and deploy resources in order to intercept and stop the suspect vehicle. What was a high speed, high risk chase, becomes a matter of prediction and interception. This suggests that many of the concerns of the media reporting on car chases, regarding risk, speed, innocent victims and so on, might be manageable through CCTV.

However, counter to police officers’ own views, we should not jump too quickly to assume that CCTV cameras can straightforwardly manage issues of directive and demonstrative accountability. Figuring out whether or not police officers have maintained directive best practice guidelines during a chase, using CCTV footage, still requires work. Holding police officers to demonstrative account through taped footage also requires multiple decision making practices. Taped archives have to be searched, footage edited and compiled, an account of what is occurring in the footage needs to be narrated and decisions over who has done what to whom need to be articulated. Furthermore, issues such as poor image quality need to be factored into the decision making process. The identification of people from CCTV footage has been shown to be difficult, and images captured and used in a court of law come with a cautionary note of possible unreliability. Beyond this, figuring out what forms of responsibility should follow from such decisions and why, remains largely unexplored in media discussions of police accountability and in police officers’ own claims regarding the advantages of CCTV.
In sum, the introduction of CCTV cameras has transformed some aspects of police car chases. A visceral linear chase involving risk, speed and potential death, has been replaced by a geographical drama of times, spaces and rapid decision-making folded into the CCTV control room. However, we should not assume from the existence of CCTV taped footage of incidents that police officers’ actions are all universally and equally subject to greater accountability as a result.

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NOTES

1. Whereas Foucault’s (1977) work considered at least three areas of panoptic activity (making disciplinary connections to bodies, amassing vast amounts of data, and convincing individuals to pay attention to and demonstrate awareness of their visibility), Norris and Armstrong (1999) particularly focus on panoptic data gathering.

2. This draws connections to the work of Giddens (1990) on globalisation and the reconfiguration of times and spaces.

3. This mode of accountability is often tied to calls for greater transparency. Transparency has been considered from a number of different perspectives in poetry (Gordon, 1969), postmodernism (Vattimo, 1992; Baudrillard, 1993), philosophy (Westphal, 1986), political analysis (Wall, 1996), psychology (Tagiuri et al., 1955) and studies of accounting (Humphrey et al., 1995; Gray, 1992; Zadek and Raynard, 1995; Sikka, 2001; Canning and O’Dwyer, 2001; Drew, 2004).
4. Attempts are made to render CCTV systems accountable by, for example, introducing guidelines outlining the activities on which systems should report. However, whether these guidelines prioritise the production of appropriate forms of information and whether or not the information matches the internal activities of CCTV systems remains unclear. Furthermore, the extent to which this information enters into the public realm, is picked up on or analysed appears minimal. Opportunities for public participation in holding CCTV systems to account seem non-existent.

5. This draws on a history of ethnomethodological studies including the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Sacks (1972).


9. Ibid.


11. The Observer 20th October 1991 ‘Danger of the lawmen who are above the law’ p. 6.

12. The Daily Mail 30th March 2000 ‘18,000 police to face driving tests’ p. 1.


15. The Independent also argues here that the more training an officer receives the more likely he will push the pursued driver to beyond their limits of capability. They suggest that there is a strong case for banning car chases completely – “no stolen car is worth a human life”, ibid.


18. The Mirror 3rd March 2004 ‘Too many are dying in police chases; 58 deaths in past two years’, p. 20.


21. This section is based on research carried out between 1998 and 2006. The research involved ethnography in CCTV control rooms, interviews with managers, operatives, police officers, retailers and residents in one town, just east of London.


ABSTRACTS

The UK is said to have the largest number of CCTV cameras of any European nation. These cameras have been involved in a variety of changes in UK police practices. Such changes range from new evidential practices in court cases, through access to new materials, to new questions posed regarding invasions of privacy. One unexplored area of police practices, which this paper will argue have undergone significant changes since the introduction of CCTV cameras, is police accountability. This paper will draw on recent controversies in the UK regarding police car chases to investigate the ways in which CCTV cameras have led to new and complex questions of police accountability.
Le Royaume-Uni est souvent présenté comme le pays ayant le plus grand nombre de caméras en Europe. Ces caméras ont joué un rôle dans bien des changements intervenus au sein des pratiques de la police britannique, depuis la production de nouveaux types de preuves devant les tribunaux, en passant par l’accès à de nouveaux matériaux et à de nouvelles informations, jusqu’à la mise en lumière de nouvelles questions touchant aux violations de la vie privée. Un des aspects peu explorés parmi ces nouvelles pratiques policières concerne la question de la responsabilité et le fait, pour la police, de rendre des comptes. Cet article porte précisément sur les changements significatifs provoqués par l’introduction de caméras de vidéosurveillance dans la façon d’accomplir les activités policières. À partir du cas de controverses récentes au Royaume-Uni autour de courses poursuites dans lesquelles sont engagés des véhicules de police, il s’intéressera aux façons dont la présence et l’usage de caméras de vidéosurveillance ont amené des questions à la fois nouvelles et complexes, concernant la justification des actions de police.

INDEX

Mots-clés: course-poursuite, espace, police, surveillance, temps
Keywords: Accountability, Car Chase, Police, Space, Surveillance, Time

AUTHORS

DANIEL NEYLAND
David Neyland est senior lecturer à l’Université de Lancaster, en Grande-Bretagne. Il s’intéresse aux questions de gouvernance, de responsabilité et de justification (accountability) que soulèvent différentes formes de sciences et de technologies, par exemple dans le cadre des systèmes de surveillance, de la gestion des déchets, de la gestion des flux routiers, des maladies rares ou encore des universités. d.neyland@lancaster.ac.uk

INGA KROENER