

Bodycamera use in Dutch surveillance practices

Tjerk TIMAN

*Department of Media and Communication,
Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

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1. Introduction

In earlier research done by (amongst others) Timan & Oudshoorn (2012), practices of CCTV and OCTV (open-source television) were researched in different Dutch city centers at night. These technologies were analysed by interpreting them as hybrids (see f.i. Dubbeld, 2005), meaning they should be seen as unique human-technology configurations that allow for certain action, whilst denying other.

Besides the mobile phone-citizen hybrid, another hybrid was witnessed as an emerging phenomenon in the nightly public space; the police-worn bodycamera. The bodycamera is a wearable camera developed specifically for professionals in the field of public order and safety, such as police officers. The process of development of this camera was analysed, starting from policymakers who came up with the idea, to designers who were responsible for implementation of the ideas of policymakers, and finally to police officers who took part in trials of use of this camera during nightly surveillance shifts. The central question being: how does the bodycam alters police-practices and nightly public space? Where a police officer would normally encounter nighttime visitors in a face to face situation, thus creating a clear role in that encounter, now the bodycamera enters this encounter, potentially altering roles between police and citizen. From the point of view of the police-officer, new tasks include filming and recording these encounters and informing citizens about the presence of this camera.

2. Methods

Dealing with three different “phases” of development of this bodycamera, I turned to the concept of objectual practices (Knorr-Cetina, 2001). This allowed me to go beyond a linear view of processes of technological development and to look into how the object (the bodycamera) gave and was given meaning in the three different practices of policy, design and use. I used script analysis, in-depth interviews and participatory observations to investigate these three practices surrounding this camera. The results presented here are based on 3 nights of participatory observations (in 2 cities, from 22.00 to 07.00 on different nights), interviews with 3 key policymakers responsible for the introduction of the bodycamera in the Netherlands, in-depth interviews and observations at the company who produced the bodycamera for the Netherlands, and 6 in-depth interviews with police officers working with the bodycamera. These mixed-methods have lead to an exploratory investigation into the bodycamera and can be seen as an in-depth addition to f.i. quantitative research on the bodycamera (f.i. see “rapport Beke in references”, where an

inventory is provided on the amount of cameras and the amount of incidents over an x amount of time).

3. Results

The research revealed major differences about what the bodycamera should do in the nightscape. Where in the objectual practice of policymakers, the camera was to serve the purpose of protecting personnel against violence, a heavy emphasis for this stakeholder was put on developing a camera that would have a preventive function. Side-effects, or *function creep* (see f.i. Wood *et. al.*, 2001) such as accidental evidence-gathering or monitoring was taken for granted. My analysis of the objectual practice of designers showed that, although the designers tried to implement preventive functions, they mainly focussed on performance, safety and durability of the camera. This can be seen in the emphasis during development of the camera on battery life, data protection, officer safety in use and different levels of user-access (to protect the manipulation of data). In use practices, police officers dismissed the preventive function, or at least the increase of safety for themselves while carrying the camera all together. Rather, the camera was used for recording incidents, for making screenshots of potential troublemakers and in some instances to scare, or to calm down the provoking or troublemaking nightscape visitor.

After the introduction and test-phase of the bodycamera, enthusiasm and frequency of use has been fluctuating within different police departments and between them. One reason provided by users is that time plays a role in the effectiveness of the medium; once the *wow*-effect is gone, the impact of wearing a camera becomes less. Also, it was mentioned by users that everybody in the nightscape is already carrying a mobile camera, hence the impact of a bodycamera should not be overestimated. The purpose of the bodycamera rather rapidly changed from a preventive tool to a surveillance tool, pointing at the process of constant negotiations of the camera's purpose and functionality within police practice.

Besides the different meanings ascribed to the camera by police officers, ranging from the bodycamera as an empowering tool to it being a new hazard during work or an annoyance that does not add much to police-work, the watched are nowhere to be found in deliberations about what this camera is, should be, and should do. Neither policymakers nor designers took into account the watched in the development process in such a way that they are represented in the design of the camera itself. In use practices, this turned out to be an advantage for police practices: it allowed for secret, or non-permitted recording of visitors in the nightscape. In terms of surveillance, the bodycamera as a tool might seem symmetrical to the mobile phone camera (user-chosen moments to make recordings, mobile, human-leveled, direct connection between camera and operator). However, in practice, it resembles more the logics of use of a CCTV camera in the nightscape (uncertainty amongst the watched about its workings, hardly preventive according to its users, monitoring instead of filming and aimed at the surveillance of citizens).

Context

The bodycamera is one of multiple surveillance technologies that are part of a network of human- and technological-surveillance means used in Dutch city centers (the surveillant *assemblage*; Haggerty 2000). This research is part of a larger research effort to map and investigate surveillance (technology) in urban nightly city centers in the Netherlands, of which more can be found at <http://www.stadsnachtwacht.nl>. The research described above is part of a PhD thesis, which can be downloaded at <http://www.tjerktiman.nl>.

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