
Rafael Barreto de Castro, Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Rosa Maria Leite Ribeiro Pedro, Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to make a psychosocial analysis of forms of government in their relations with video surveillance, especially regarding the effects produced in terms of subjectivity, a dimension of the use of technologies in city governance that urban e-planning ought not to ignore. This will contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding contemporary video surveillance in its current practices in Rio de Janeiro, and also help researchers to understand how existing policies that regulate this phenomenon are appropriated by people who live in this city. The presence of surveillance cameras as an element of everyday life in urban centers has dramatically increased in recent years. As important actants in the practice of government, these security dispositifs are articulating heterogeneous elements and “performing” very specific realities. However, particularly in Brazil, studies on video surveillance are still limited. Therefore, it is worth investigating which government performances in Brazil have been produced from the relationships established by surveillance cameras, and how those practices and knowledges are produced as effects of these same relationships. Likewise, by understanding that each subject responds differently to such actants, the authors intend to bring out the different versions that compose, specifically, this techno-scientific controversy and its resonances in the daily lives of common citizens. This article follows ideas proposed by Actor-Network Theory (ANT), especially the contributions of the sociologist Bruno Latour. As a research strategy, the authors proposed the creation of a cartography of the controversies about a particular urban video surveillance “collective” to be opened soon in the city of Rio de Janeiro - the ISCC (Integrated Security Command Center). Through mapping its associations, the authors look to increase the visibility of these issues of security dispositifs today and of the forms of government as they are performed and experienced at the scene in focus.

Keywords: Controversies, Governance, Rio de Janeiro, Security, Video Surveillance

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing presence of surveillance cameras in the daily lives of urban centers (Norris, McCahill & Wood, 2004) has raised some controversies in contemporary societies. Strongly connected to the themes of violence and security, it appears to some that surveillance has become the best option for response and prevention, a sort of “natural solution” for situations of disorder and fear that often haunt a city’s routine.

In countries such as England, France, and the United States, the academic discussion on surveillance is keeping pace with the proliferation of surveillance practices. However, particularly in Brazil, studies and scientific debates about video surveillance and its effects as a technology of electronic management in big cities are still minimal (Bruno, 2008; Castro & Pedro, 2010; Kanashiro, 2008). It is worthwhile then to invest more time in this reflection and investigate the similarities between Brazilian and international contexts and, especially, to elucidate the singularities of this phenomenon in our country.

Specifically in the city of Rio de Janeiro (RJ/Brazil), the subject of video surveillance is often taken up in discussions about security. The concern with episodes of violence and the climate of fear and chaos that they produce highlight the need for urgent and effective interventions not only by private initiatives, but by the government as well — and in this sense, surveillance cameras have become a privileged actor.

Regarding the initiatives and practices of Public Security in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the search for solutions is being catalyzed by the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Aiming to cater to both the World Cup and the Olympics, the Integrated Security Command Center (ISCC) of the Security Secretariat of the State of Rio de Janeiro (SESEG/RJ) will soon be fully launched.

The new ISCC will integrate the activities of eight different agencies – Traffic Engineering Company of Rio de Janeiro (CET-Rio); Fire Department; Municipal Civil Defense; Municipal Guard; Civil Police; Military Police; Federal Highway Police and the Service of Mobile Emergency Care (SAMU) – in order to increase the amount of data available, and improve and streamline the processes of decision making, particularly in emergency situations. Therefore, the eight agencies will have their call centers and control rooms operating in the same place. Any camera system operated by those agencies should reach the Integrated Center.

Since the beginning of public urban video surveillance in Rio de Janeiro, which officially started in June of 2005 (Cardoso, 2010), with the launch of the Command and Control Center (CCC), this is likely the first major transformation undergone in those activities. According to the Undersecretary of Technological Modernization of SESEG/RJ the proposal for the new ISCC was drawn from successful experiences, both nationally and internationally. It is mostly an enlargement of the monitoring system, with expansion of work spots and supervision of the Military Police, allowing the exchange of information and images among the eight agencies.

According to some scholars (Heilmann, Le Goff & Mucchielli, 2011; Norris & Armstrong, 1998; Pedro, 2005), the ability of surveillance to promote security, or its efficacy, is directly related to the possibility of creating an integrated database, linked to softwares of identification/recognition and to an appropriate security policy. An integrated system would be a vital strategy to manage all the information generated to yield an efficient surveillance/security dispositif.

In this sense, the ISCC will attempt to put into practice an operation considered ideal in order to achieve good results. This seems, then, an important process to be followed by those interested in discussing urban phenomena, particularly the repercussions of video surveillance practices in our lives. We are interested in investigating what kinds of city management are being “performed” by surveillance cameras: what roles do these security dispositifs play in the actual forms of planning and governing,
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