

Privacy: watch out

by Brendan Doyle

Privacy. It's your right. From hip-hop to political activism, issues of privacy are all around us.

And so are the cameras. UNB alone features 33 interior and four exterior cameras. Reg Jerrett, head of Security and Traffic at UNB, says that the cameras were "installed as a form of increased security and safety for all campus users, and protection for UNB and personal property."

Student Union Vice President External Ellen Creighton is leery. "When you're going to infringe someone's privacy rights you need to look at why you're doing it and is it justified." Creighton makes the point that any security device must be used in accordance with established privacy regulations. Security without policy doesn't make much sense, and isn't very fair.

And because the "activity is being recorded in case we need to go back and view an incident after the fact," said Jerrett, the need for explicit policies regarding the length of time tapes are kept, who has access to them before they are destroyed, and the retention of

any personal information gathered during the recording process is paramount.

Despite Creighton's concerns regarding abuse of information collected by the cameras, and the lack of any written policy, Jerrett is adamant that the cameras on campus are for the safety and security of all - not crime prevention or exploitation.

"Prevention of crime is secondary," said Jerrett, "Providing an increased level of personal safety on campus... is the primary use for cameras."

In 2003, UNB suffered a rash of break-ins resulting in the loss of valuable computer equipment. Since the incidents, cameras have been installed "and there has not even been an attempt at theft from this location," said Jerrett. "If an unsuspecting student happened upon desperate thieves stealing equipment or committing any other criminal act - who knows how they'll react? Cameras add that additional level of personal safety."

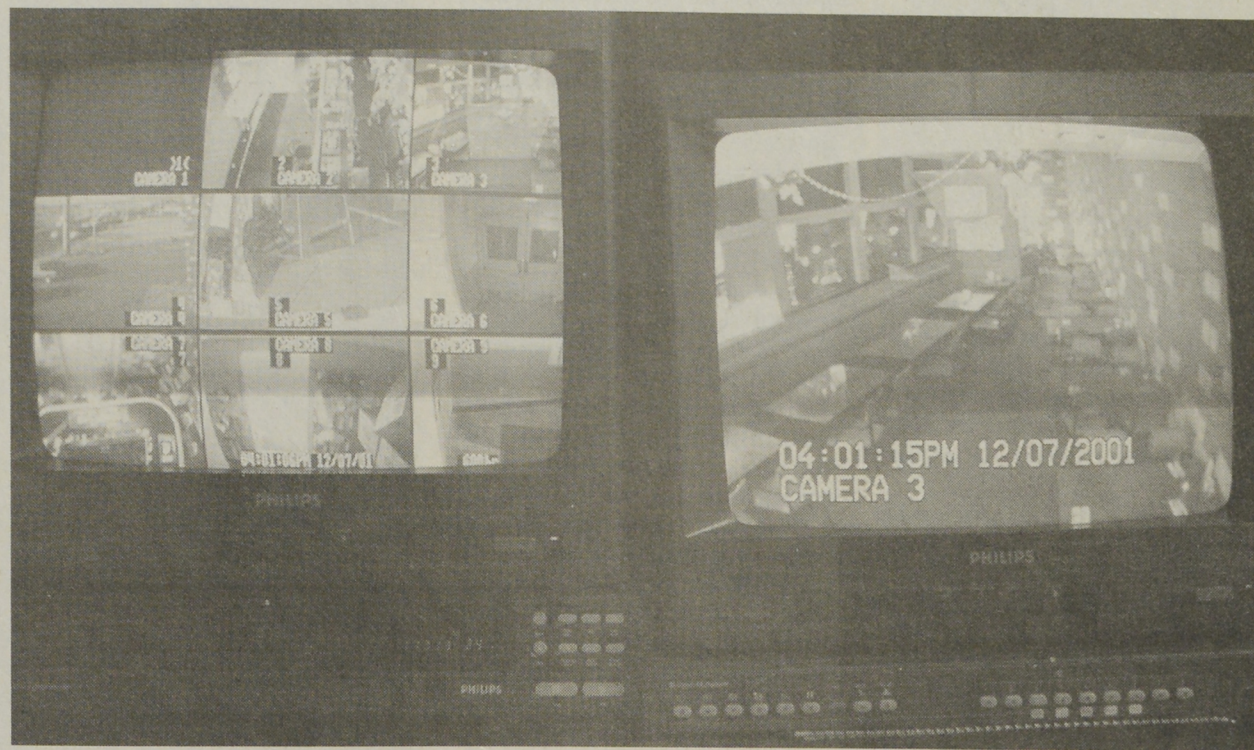
Complicating matters is the fact that UNB is not necessarily a public place. Though funded partially through public funds, UNB is a private organization with its own

rules and regulations (check out the University Act sometime).

Privacy Commissioner of Canada, George Radwanski, wrote in a 2001 report to Parliament that "there may be instances where it is appropriate for public places to be monitored for public safety reasons. But this must be limited to instances where there is a demonstrable need. It must be done only by lawful public authorities and it must be done only in ways that incorporate all privacy safeguards set out by law."

But are cameras the way to go? Chris McCormick, professor of Criminology at St Thomas University, is not as sure as Fredericton city council. Explaining the situation in the United Kingdom, McCormick said, "what they found was in some cities the cameras seemed to have an effect and in other cities they didn't. And they couldn't explain why it worked in some places and not in others."

He makes the point that crime is not a "large, amorphous, homogeneous thing" but exists as different, clearly defined types of crime - such as property crime and personal crime. "Then there are other crimes like drug dealing and prostitution."



Video camera monitors like these could be watching you right now. All four exterior and 33 interior cameras at UNB are not monitored 24/7 but are recorded to help police identify suspicious activities and persons.

Creighton agrees, saying that, "cameras often push what's happening to the periphery where there are no cameras."

So while the cameras on campus are more for personal comfort than for deterrence, those around

town are not.

"It probably won't work and it is going to cost them a lot of money. They are saying a camera will solve their problems, when on the basis of the research I've looked at I know it won't", said McCormick.

Though this is not the message that City Hall would like to hear, it seems to be the consensus among those keeping an eye on the developments at the Tannery downtown.

Cameras on tap at a Tannery near you

by Laura McInnis

Girls in short skirts and low necklines bustle through the crowd, looking for cabs after a girl's night out. Twenty and thirty-somethings out for a night on the town have sufficiently relaxed and drowned out the dramas of a busy workweek. Random people shout random names across the Tannery. A man emerges from Dolan's and eagerly lights his pocketed cigarette. The bars empty out for another weekend.

Then there is yelling, someone gets shoved and fists are thrown. A brawl breaks out between two drunken strangers, or maybe two drunken friends. Maybe there's a cop around, maybe there's not. But one thing is for sure: everything - the short skirts, the cigarette, and the fists - will be caught on camera.

The city is installing a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) in the downtown core. It will record the Tannery 24/7 and transmit a live feed to the police station. The city is using the camera to deter crimes caused by drunken rowdiness, but not everyone thinks this is the right solution. Some say the cameras violate our rights as citizens; some say the cameras won't stop criminal activity at all.

Deputy Mayor Mike O'Brien wants Fredericton to have a vibrant downtown. That means having a vibrant nightlife as well, but this can lead to vandalism and drunken violence. The Tannery has fallen victim to such problems. Popular bars like Dolan's, Nicky Zee's and The Capital all empty out at night into a very crowded space, confined by buildings and a mass of bodies.

In the last couple of years, rowdiness has become a major concern for the city. Bruce Grandy, chairperson for the Public Safety Committee, says they were looking for a "more robust solution to the fighting".

"The Tannery is where people hang out on the weekend," said Grandy. "I have been down there and seen them. There is such a mass, an accumulation of people; that is when you get this sucker-punch violence. They are all herded into this one area and people start to go looking for fights."

Mike O'Brien and Deputy Police Chief Barry McKnight said the police received 126 calls last year, concerning vandalism and fighting at the Tannery.

The Public Safety Committee met with police as well as bar owners and local residents who wanted something to be done about downtown crime.



This image is not from the security camera at the Tannery - but it could be.

"One person suggested cameras," recalled O'Brien. The city has decided to try it out and see what happens. They hope that by installing CCTVs into the Tannery it will deter those committing the crimes. The cameras will also act as an evidence-gathering device to support criminal charges in circumstances where people continue to fight despite monitoring.

O'Brien admits the city doesn't know if the cameras will have the desired effect and that there has been a lack of research done on the effects of surveillance cameras in fighting crime. This has a lot of people frustrated with the city and its decision.

One of these people is Ellen Creighton, VP External for the Student Union at UNB. She has been vocal in the local media regarding the surveillance around bars as a student issue. In July, Creighton put together a public forum where the city, police, community, and students could discuss the decision to implement security cameras.

"When we looked at the city's plan, at that point they had no policy in place to protect people from abuse of the information that's collected on them, we saw no assessment of what the problem is and how the cameras are supposed to fix it," said Creighton, "and we saw no evaluation plan to determine if the cameras

were successful."

Because students frequent the bars during the school year, they will end up on the video recordings whether or not they have done anything wrong. Creighton believes the students of Fredericton should be concerned about the loss of privacy they now face. Many of the students and speakers who attended the forum echoed her concerns.

Criminal defense lawyer Danny Watters has been a strong voice in the media as well, saying the new cameras foreshadow an Orwellian future out of 1984. He doesn't believe the crimes at the Tannery warrant such an extreme solution.

"There's George and there's Maynard, and they are fighting over Gertie..." said Watters. "Liquor tells you that you can beat the snot out of that guy. Now there are these people trying to protect us from what... ourselves? You wake up in the morning feeling awful, and swear you will never do it again... No one wants a camera up their ass."

But many local residents and bar owners disagree. They feel the fighting and vandalism has gotten out of control during the last few years, causing expensive damages and creating an unsafe environment. Grandy says this space belongs to the city and it is the city's responsibility to handle the situa-

tion. It is a public space so no one has any expectations of privacy. Many of the downtown bar patrons agree with Grandy, including students who say they don't care if the camera goes up. Some think it might even work as a long term deterrent once people realize how easily charges will be laid if someone commits a crime with their face caught on tape.

Justice LaForest is a retired Supreme Court Justice living in Fredericton. He has written an extensive opinion piece based on video surveillance as an infringement on civil liberties. In the article he wrote that, "it is not only criminals who are harmed by intrusions on liberty. In the absence of compelling justification, we should all be free to move around without fear of being systematically observed by agents of the state."

Grandy doesn't think the cameras would infringe on people's civil liberties; he says it is about protecting the community. "This is not just about the students," said Grandy. "There are permanent residents who come down to the bars and have a few beers and then go looking to hit something. We want to make sure the student population is safe too."

Creighton's major concern is that the city has done so little research to determine if video surveillance is the right solution.

"I am afraid people misconstrue it as us wanting to defy authority," said Creighton. "It is not. We feel the authorities are not doing everything they can. The city has not shown this to be a good option. They have not identified the problem. The city has no numbers. There are more crimes happening on the walking trails and Albert Street. This is a knee jerk reaction to a poorly defined problem. There is no protection for privacy."

Criminology professor, Dr. Chris McCormick remains skeptical of using CCTVs to deter rowdy bar crowds. He has done extensive research on the use of surveillance cameras in other parts of Canada and throughout the world. He thinks it is unfortunate that the city has not looked at other cities for research to see what the results have been.

"I think what we have here is a situation where we have a highly visible problem. It doesn't rate too high on the grand scale of things, but people get upset, so it becomes a political problem for the city. The technology has been grasped as a solution without looking at research to see if it will actually solve the problem."

According to Dr. McCormick's research, surveillance cameras are very effective for deterring some crimes but don't work at all for others.

Dr. McCormick acknowledges

that opportunistic crime can be effectively deterred by video surveillance. CCTVs work well in parking garages where people may only commit a crime because they have the means and opportunity.

Criminal activity like prostitution and drug trafficking will not be stopped by cameras because the crime will only be displaced. The individuals will leave the newly watched area and find a place that isn't watched.

McCormick doesn't believe drunken rowdiness belongs to either one of these categories.

"I think it will be insignificant for public disorder crimes, because public disorder crimes are often spontaneous," said Dr. McCormick. "They are what we call irrational crimes because they aren't pre-planned. They are tipping over flowerpots, ripping out real estate for sale signs, getting in fights in the streets, smashing beer bottles. Quite often it is because the person is drunk, or angry. So a CCTV program won't deter those crimes because of they are emotional and spur of the moment."

Grandy does not expect that installing the cameras will deter crime in the Tannery completely. With that in mind, the city has come up with other solutions that will be implemented at the same time as the camera.

The city plans to put better lighting in the Tannery and run a bus from the bars at night to empty the area out faster. There is also talk of pumping classical music into the Tannery as the bars let out. Other cities have implemented this technique and found the music has a calming effect on bar patrons, making spontaneous fights less likely.

McCormick sees the benefits of better lighting and a busing system, but maintains that flesh and blood cops will always be more effective in policing than cameras.

"We need to hire cops on overtime or hire police auxiliaries," said McCormick. "Hire them to walk around and that is far more effective. That is what people want. People must prefer natural surveillance than technology surveillance."

Grandy agrees, but says it is too expensive to hire all the police officers that would be needed. The city can only afford to put out so many cops at a time, and Grandy thinks a camera is the next best thing. Despite the recent controversy, the cameras will be ready to record in September. Students, bar owners and patrons alike will be watching the Tannery to see what develops. And the Tannery will be watching back.