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Security games

Bennett

Mega-events like the Olympics leave behind much more than fond memories

by Peigi McGillivray

When the world comes to town for a "mega event"—like the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver or the upcoming Olympics in London—the pressure for increased security is intense. Everyone wants to make sure that nothing goes wrong.

So, budgets for surveillance and security increase. The latest security gadgets are purchased. Closed circuit TV cameras are installed. Checkpoints and barriers are established. Backgrounds are checked. Email, web traffic, and phone calls are scrutinized. Laws restricting public behaviour are enacted, and police presence grows.

We all breathe a sigh of relief when a large event like this comes to a close without incident. But what about all those technologies and laws? Do things go back to the way they were?

"Unfortunately not," says Dr. Colin Bennett, a University of Victoria political scientist and an expert in privacy and surveillance. "Once security is increased, people get used to the new level. It becomes the 'new normal.'"

In addition to the technological and physical reminders of these events, says Bennett, data-bases of personal information have become an enduring legacy, hidden from public scrutiny but shared with other venues and events.

For more than 20 years, Bennett has focused his research on the politics of privacy, and on the profound and varied impacts the "information society" has had on our lives. His 2011 book *Security Games: Surveillance and Control at Mega-Events*, co-edited with Kevin Haggerty, presents one of the first comprehensive assessments of the major security and surveillance implications of large sporting events around the world.

"An enormous amount of money is invested in security for these events," says Bennett, "but it's very difficult to discover what it has been spent on, and whether it has been used wisely or effectively. We know that nothing bad happened, but not why. And because we don't know what worked and what didn't, each new venue bases its security on the last event—and then ratchets it up another notch."

Bennett notes that the security and surveillance legacies from the Vancouver Olympics are still with us. "Closed-circuit TV cameras set up for the Olympics remain," says Bennett. "They were used during the Stanley Cup riots, although how useful they were in police investigations is unclear. I have no doubt that these cameras—and more—will be used for security during future big events too."

Bennett's research informs his teaching of undergraduate and graduate students. He teaches undergraduate courses on US and comparative politics, and a specialized course on the "politics of information."

His graduate students investigate a broad range of security- and privacy-related issues, including identity cards, surveillance of personal data on the Internet, BC's enhanced drivers license, ID scanning in bars, Aboriginal health databases, online advertising and surveillance, and human resources databases.

Bennett's goal is to stir people to think more critically about security and privacy issues and the effects of "creeping surveillance" on society.

"We all need to be aware of our rights, know when and how they might be at risk, and speak up when we need to," says Bennett, "The growing obsession with security is potentially damaging to our personal freedoms and human rights, and to the structure and nature of our cities. It's something everyone should be concerned about."

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In a post-9/11 world, security budgets for the Olympics have ballooned—from just over $180 million Cdn at the 2000 summer games in Sydney, Australia, to about $900 million Cdn at the Vancouver winter games in 2010. Security costs at this summer's Olympics in London are set at a staggering $2.4 billion Cdn.

At the Vancouver Olympics, the RCMP set up about 900 closed circuit cameras at and around event venues, and the Vancouver Police (VPD) installed another 70. After the Olympics, the RCMP cameras were mothballed, but the VPD cameras remain, along with an emergency operations centre for monitoring them.

Surveillance is not just about cameras. It refers to all new technologies and their use by modern institutions to capture personal data. Mega-events such as the Olympics generate unprecedented cooperation among the military, law enforcement and the privacy sector.

For more information on Bennett's book, *Security Games: Surveillance and Control at Mega-Events* or news and information on surveillance issues in general, visit *www.security-games.com.*

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