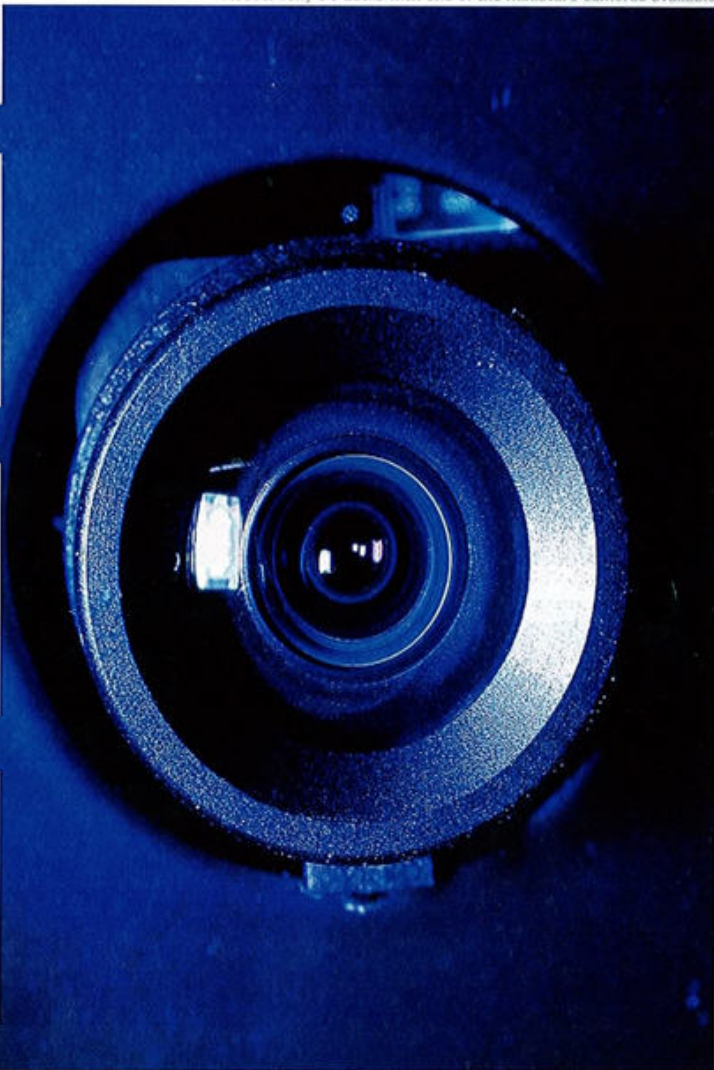


Above: Tony De Lutiis with one of the miniature cameras available



Surveillance cameras have become a part of the Melbourne scenery. But are they making us safer or stealing our privacy? SANDRA LANGDON reports. Pictures by DARREN JAMES.

They spy with

EVERY day in Melbourne we are being watched. If you live in an inner-city apartment you are probably captured on closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras as you leave home. If you withdraw money from an ATM or walk into a newsagency, your image will be recorded. On the train platform, surveillance cameras will follow you. There'll be more on your train.

If you choose to drive, the camera's gaze is likely to be heavier. You will probably pass speed cameras, red-light cameras, CityLink tollway cameras and VicRoads traffic cameras.

Finally, as you walk up the street to work a network of cameras will be watching. Your image has been captured numerous times before you've even started your working day. And it will be captured hundreds more times, especially if your workplace uses CCTV.

Tony De Lutiis, director of Trident Security Services, in Thornbury, specialises in installing video surveillance equipment in pubs, gaming rooms and homes.

De Lutiis says video surveillance took off in Melbourne in the early 1990s after it became compulsory for gaming venues. This coincided with an influx of cheap equipment and fear due to events such as the Queen Street shooting.

"We've found that 70 to 80 per cent of our inquiries are now for video surveillance," he says. "It is being accepted now as a tool that people implement in a residential situation." Some people even view their farms or holiday homes remotely.

De Lutiis points out that some licensed venues are required to install surveillance systems at entrances and bars as a requirement of their liquor licences. He has installed new technology, incorporating audio, for a local pub.

"It is more for the fact of what could be said between patrons and security if an altercation breaks out," he says. "They are not listening to eavesdrop on people."

According to Dr Adam Sutton, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Melbourne, our experi-

ence mirrors the surveillance revolution that has swept the world in the past 10 years.

Last year Dr Sutton and Dr Dean Wilson completed Open Street CCTV in Australia, a nation-wide review of street surveillance. Dr Sutton says installing a CCTV system is an obvious way to respond to insecurity and fear, but it has not been evaluated as the most effective way to reduce crime.

Last month, Melbourne City Council's city safety and health committee voted to suspend operation of its network of 23 street surveillance cameras pending proof that it was an effective contribution to safety and a necessary service for the council to fund. The decision was reversed two weeks later after outrage from some councillors, police and the public.

Dr Sutton, who is on the council's City Safety Taskforce, says the ability of a CCTV system to help reduce crime depends on a number of factors: whether a system is monitored 24 hours a day, who is monitoring the footage and the relationship between the monitor and the police.

"CCTV didn't help protect James Bolger (security footage at a shopping centre in Liverpool, England, in 1993, captured the toddler being led away by two 10-year-olds before he was murdered)," he said. "There was a responsibility to intervene as they were taking the toddler."

"We're probably becoming over technologised with security," Dr Sutton said. "We forget that what makes people feel safe is a human presence to intervene and to take responsibility in a public space."

To a large extent, Melbourne's taxi, train and tram surveillance systems rely on someone raising the alarm in order for staff or police to respond.

Taxi surveillance is undertaken at two levels - cameras in taxis and at Safe City taxi ranks such as those at Flinders Street Station and in King Street.

The Transport Workers Union, which called on the State Coroner to hold an inquiry into taxi safety following the stabbing death of a taxi

their million eyes

driver in Brunswick in March, believes the cameras have increased security.

Branch secretary Bill Noonan says: "They (cameras in taxis) are a major deterrent, however nothing in a camera physically stops someone making a violent act. No one pops out of the camera," he says. "If someone is killed, it's the ultimate evidence to apprehend the offender, but it does not help that person."

All train station platforms have CCTV and all new and refurbished trains have cameras in each carriage. However, as Connex operators only flick between the cameras at different stations, someone needs to press the red emergency button in order for them to bring up the relevant images and contact emergency services.

Yarra Trams recently installed CCTV on 13 new low-floor trams and will soon equip another 46. External CCTV devices were fitted to three trams following a series of rock-throwing incidents late last year. In addition, the company has been trialling other external CCTVs, known as "tram cams", which monitor cars passing stationary trams or obstructing their progress.

Yarra Trams CEO Hubert Guyot says it is too early to say whether the tram cams will be effective in reducing the number of motorists putting passengers at risk.

"It is efficient in terms of enforcement but the ideal is not to enforce, the ideal is to prevent," he says. "It will be efficient only if the car drivers are aware that they are at risk to be caught by this camera."

Schools have embraced surveillance technology in a bid to end vandalism, theft and other crime. The Department of Education and Training estimates that more than 250 Victorian state schools have CCTV.

The schools must gain permission from the department, demonstrating that other crime prevention methods are unsuitable. The cameras cannot monitor the performance of staff or students, or be installed in toilets, change rooms or staff rooms.

The rapid expansion of CCTV has prompted calls for the industry to be more strictly controlled.

Earlier this month, the State Government's Private Security Bill was passed by the lower house. The bill will require all CCTV installers to be registered for the first time.

However, Australian Security Industry Association Limited spokesman Bryan de Caires says the legislation falls well short of

what is required and contains loopholes that can be exploited.

"It was an opportunity for the government, with the Commonwealth Games approaching, to do something about inappropriate people getting into the industry," he says.

The other major concern is privacy.

A UK study in 1998 showed that surveillance cameras can target people according to the prejudices of the camera operators. Male operators targeted one in 10 women for voyeuristic reasons. The young, males and black people were systematically and disproportionately targeted. Drunks, beggars, the homeless and street traders were all subject to intense surveillance – as was anyone who directly challenged the camera.

Liberty Victoria president Greg Connellan believes the State Government needs to move swiftly.

"It has been obvious for at least a decade now that it's an issue," he says. "The State Government needs to act to put legislation in place to protect privacy, regulate the placing of cameras and control the use of recorded film."

"It's not just a question of CCTV, there's a whole range of new technologies, which can paint a detailed picture of a person."

"We need a bill of rights, a charter of rights – a fundamental level of protection."

In response to the concerns, the State Government is in the early stages of looking at ways to supervise the use of monitoring cameras and CCTV.

A spokesman for Police Minister Andre Haermeyer says: "We are currently assessing whether there is a need for an overarching framework to take into account issues such as privacy, access to information and the ability of such technology to provide definite crime reduction benefits."

He said the government's Crime Prevention Victoria unit had been working with stakeholders to get feedback on current and emerging issues. The research may or may not result in legislation or regulation, but would take into account the interests of both CCTV users and the public.

Tony De Lutiis says he's all for regulation of the industry. "There is no hard line drawn in the sand that you can't cross as to where you can install these things," he says. "These cameras are getting smaller and smaller and you can just about put them anywhere you want."

