

# Zooming in on ‘heterotopia’: CCTV-operator practices at Schiphol Airport

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**Abstract.** Airports are places that are heavily surveilled by different (technical) means, including CCTV (Closed Circuit Television). So far, the literature on CCTV has not paid much attention to the practices behind the screens of the CCTV monitors at airports. In this article, we present an in-depth, ethnographic study of the use of CCTV in the Military Police’s control room at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. We find that, since nobody is ‘at home’ at Schiphol, surveillance through CCTV is a challenge for the police. The operators in the control room are constantly struggling with the question how to spot deviance in a situation where they believe normal behavior does not exist. Our study shows that the categories for singling out the abnormal identified by Norris and Goold are rarely used by the Military Police at Schiphol. Instead, they heavily rely on routine, transmitted, and retrospective surveillance.

Keywords: CCTV, Schiphol Airport, surveillance, heterotopia

## 1. Introduction

Salter writes that airports can be seen as ‘heterotopias’. They are places:

*“that are in relation with all other sites, but in such a way to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986: 24). The airport connects the national and the international (also the national to itself), the domestic and the foreign, in a way that problematizes those connections’ [33, cit. 49].*

Therefore, an airport forms:

*‘a space which presupposes a system of opening and closing which makes it both isolated and penetrable, not a freely accessible public place, but one which can only be entered with certain permissions and rites’ [24, cit. 121].*

As they can only be entered with certain permissions, an airport is heavily surveilled. Not only are we questioned before boarding, are our identities checked, our clothes frisked, our belongings searched, and our bodies scanned, but we are constantly watched as well, through Closed Circuit Television (CCTV). Behind the screens of the CCTV monitors ‘social sorting’ takes place [20]. The state is watching us to decide whether we are fit to use the airport and take the flights, or not. Or isn’t it? As it happens, it is individual CCTV operators who do the actual sorting. They can be officers of the Dutch Royal Military Police, but also employees of Airport Security (a private security company), KLM Airlines (to a very limited degree), or the Douane (the customs). And, as always, they form communities of practice that

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have their own rules for sorting – which might differ enormously from each other – and might have difficulties co-operating [28].

Talking to these operators, it becomes clear that they actually do perceive Schiphol as a heterotopia, a place where no one is 'at home', and therefore no one acts normally. Which practices do the Amsterdam Airport Schiphol camera room operators construct to do their sorting? How are these practices transmitted between camera rooms? How do they differ from CCTV-operator practices in different settings? How do CCTV operators surveil a space they experience as a heterotopia, where they feel no one is 'at home', and therefore 'normal behaviour' does not exist? These are the questions we are trying to address in the article.

## 2. Schiphol Airport

*'CCTV at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol seems to be effective. The camera-surveillance that recently started at Schiphol has already been effective in fighting crime at the airport. Last Wednesday, 10 February 2010, the military police officially opened the new CCTV control room at the airport that houses all the facilities. The room provides specially trained military police officers the ability to monitor the key-places on the airport continuously, 24 hours a day, by means of cameras. Moreover, the camera recordings will be stored for almost one month. The military police has used the new camera system successfully, said a spokesman. "For example we were able to use it in criminal investigations and catch a number of luggage thieves red-handed. Also, in the period before we had our images, we were able to contribute to preventing a loverboy from turning a young girl into a prostitute using Airport Security's footage.'* [32].

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol is the most important hub (Mainport) of the Schiphol Group, of which the other Dutch airports – at Rotterdam, Eindhoven and Lelystad – are also part. Schiphol is the third largest cargo airport in Europe and the fifth largest airport measured by numbers of passengers. It is one of the home-airports of Air France-KLM and the SkyTeam Alliance. The Schiphol Group has four shareholders: the State of the Netherlands (69.8% of the shares), Amsterdam (20.0%), Rotterdam (2.2%) and Aéroports de Paris (8.0%). Schiphol is an important part of Amsterdam's economy. In 2010 some 45.2 million passengers traveled through Schiphol. There were 1.5 million tons of cargo handled, and about 390,000 planes travelled through the airport. In 2010, about 60,000 people were working at the Mainport Schiphol, and some 550 different companies were housed in the Schiphol area that covers about 2,787 hectares. Since Schiphol's strategy focuses on an integral development of aviation and non-aviation activities on its site, Schiphol Plaza – the publicly accessible mall at Schiphol – is an important part of the hub. For eight years now, Schiphol – under the Military Police's supervision – has fulfilled a large number of preventive tasks in the field of security. Its personnel work together with the Royal Military Police and with qualified security staff of private security companies such as G4S. The responsibilities of the various stakeholders – of which CCTV nowadays forms an important component – are defined in the Platform Security and Public Safety Schiphol [34].

Surprisingly, we know very little about the actual use of CCTV at airports. It is clear that there is a considerable amount of reliance on camera surveillance [14,15], and that it is currently replacing examination as a means of social sorting [1,25]. We do not know exactly how this works, although Klauser et al. show that it does differ from CCTV use in, for instance, shopping malls [15]. CCTV practices at airports, including practices of social sorting, are very relevant to our understanding of everyday surveillance. Many researchers have observed that those working in a camera control room,

observing shopping malls or city centres target 'the unusual' [8,28]. Yet, in a heterotopia like Schiphol, no one is 'at home' (everyone is unusual) and all behaviour differs from that in normal situations: at least, that is what the CCTV operators consistently claim.

The citation at the beginning of this section holds a promise. CCTV at Schiphol has been introduced to make the place more safe and secure, and in the future CCTV operators will be looking for abnormal behaviour. In the remaining part of this article, we are interested in the following question: if CCTV operators find all behaviour at Schiphol to be different from that in normal situations, then what clues are they looking for?

### 3. CCTV: An overview

CCTV started in 1967, but began to grow exponentially from the mid-nineties onwards [28,30]. Webster, who studied the CCTV expansion in the UK, referred to this period as an 'era of uptake' [5,39]. It has grown 'rhizomically', by linking many small, often privately owned, networks to one another [18, 28,37]. Norris and McCahill connect it to the 'new penology': not '*the identification of the individual criminal for the purpose of ascribing guilt and blame, and the imposition of punishment and treatment*', which is what penology used to be, but '*techniques for identifying, classifying and managing groups assorted by levels of dangerousness*' [27,30]. According to Norris, who we quote literally, using CCTV in this fashion has led to very real changes in the practice of surveillance [26]:

- 1) The surveillance gaze has been expanded to a level unimaginable on the basis of co-presence
- 2) The surveillance gaze becomes removed from spatial constraints implicit in face-to-face surveillance
- 3) The surveillance gaze becomes freed from the temporal constraints of face-to-face interaction and co-presence
- 4) Surveillance and authoritative intervention become fully functionally separate
- 5) The act of surveillance becomes more democratic; all become equally subject to the surveillance gaze
- 6) The disciplinary project of the panopticon is expanded as inclusionary social control is promoted over exclusion

It has been observed that using CCTV for social sorting can lead to 'deep discrimination': affluent citizens and marginalised groups can be treated very differently, especially where their mobility is concerned. Yet, how this works exactly, especially at airports, has not been thoroughly researched. Lyon therefore asks for an ethnography of the practices involved [18,19,21]. Such an ethnography is necessary as there is usually very little supervision of CCTV operators' work and their practices therefore emerge 'on the job' [8,23]. Norris and Armstrong were among the first to study these practices. They found that there are seven reasons why CCTV-room personnel's suspicion might be triggered, which we quote/paraphrase as [28]:

- 1) Prejudice (negative attitudes towards male youth in general and black male youth in particular; certain clothing and posture)
- 2) Suspect behaviour (running and loitering)
- 3) Usual suspects
- 4) Suspicion based on a person's location
- 5) 'Otherness' (drunks, beggars, the homeless, street traders)

- 6) Those who are disoriented or unfamiliar with their surroundings
- 7) Those who challenge the right of the cameras to monitor them

Other researchers have found similar practices [11], and Goold, who we quote literally, has come up with a more elaborate set of practices [8, cit. p. 143]:

- 1) Behavioural: suspicion based on the behaviour or demeanour of the individual, such as acting aggressively towards others, appearing to be drunk in public, or running down a busy high street
- 2) Categorical: suspicion based on personal characteristics such as age, dress, gender or race
- 3) Locational: suspicion based on an individual's location. Examples might include an individual walking through a car park at night or standing close to a bank cash-point
- 4) Personalized: suspicion based on the prior knowledge of the individual, such as knowledge of previous criminal behavior or association with other known or suspected offenders
- 5) Protectional: monitoring for the purpose of ensuring the safety of the individual targeted. Examples might include following an unaccompanied child or a woman walking alone through a deserted town center at night
- 6) Routine: monitoring carried out as part of a set surveillance routine, such as watching security personnel pick up money from a high street bank on a weekly basis
- 7) Transmitted: suspicion based on information from a source outside the CCTV scheme, or where the initial surveillance was commenced because of an outside request
- 8) Voyeuristic: surveillance for the purpose of personal interest or gratification, sexual or otherwise

These practices are not neutral. They are aimed at watching some people more than others. Young, black males are amongst those targeted most, most researchers find; especially if they belong to some or other subcultural group, or display too-confident behaviour [3,4,17,22,23,26,29]. Naturally, by focusing on certain groups, CCTV neglects others. Women are nearly invisible to the cameras' gaze [16,28]. Obviously, who gets watched is also a function of the location the cameras are aimed at. CCTV operators at a railway station have been noticed to look out for people who raise their arms, who get too close to the platforms, and for unattended children running around [17]. In a Berlin shopping mall CCTV operators mainly watched the fire alarm [11]. Of course, those under constant surveillance sometimes know they are being watched. According to Smith, shoplifters, prostitutes etc., have devised methods to avoid the cameras, or to use them to their advantage, which has an impact on CCTV effectiveness [9,29,36]. And there are more obstacles to the effective use of CCTV, for example, an operator practice that is surprisingly rare is that of 'retrospective surveillance': running back through the video tapes. Operators rarely do this because it is too time-consuming, although it is expected that the use of digital technology will change this situation [12,17,26].

When we look into the question of how CCTV is actually used, we observe that different parties are involved in its use, and that they do not always co-operate smoothly. CCTV operators often assist the police, but do not always have a clear understanding of police work. Yet, as research shows, the effectiveness of the operators' work depends on effective co-operation with the police [8,17,23,28]. A similar phenomenon has been observed concerning the co-operation between CCTV-operators and doormen at clubs [35]. If CCTV schemes are led by the police, co-operation turns out to go much more smoothly than if they are not (Goold 2004: 126–138). Naturally, the police realize that CCTV operators can observe them, which is why the cameras tend to have the effect of slightly reducing police use of force. Police officers also sometimes signal to the operators that cameras should be turned away in certain situations, and, in some instances, try to embezzle tapes to destroy evidence of police brutality. The opposite also occurs: police officers asking CCTV operators to move the cameras in their direction as a back-up. However, the overall consensus is that the effect of CCTV on police work is minimal [7,8,11,28].

#### 4. Methodology and methods

This article is based on a field study that was undertaken at the camera control room of the Royal Military Police at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. Grounded theory [6] has been integrated with insights from CCTV surveillance literature. The grounded theory approach is inductive and moves from specific to more general analysis. It starts from the data and tries to explain the key phenomena in the data. It then tries to categorize the relationships of the key elements informed by theory. The main concern here is to understand the practices at the camera room of the Military Police.

Extensive ethnographic research and field work was carried out, focused on the everyday practices of the members of the camera room. The grounded theory approach incorporated literature about camera room practices combined with the empirical data from multiple sources at Schiphol. This organizational, ethnographic research has enabled a study of the life-world perspective of the organizational members [41]. The complexity of everyday practices in the camera room was the main focus of the research. Doing ethnographic research means an intensive, qualitative investigation for which multiple sources of information were used: observation, informal talks, semi-structured interviews, and document research [10]. The camera room was visited 10 times in the period November 2010–May 2011 for periods of six days each, including one evening shift. During the fieldwork period, representatives of the responsible Safety Region Kennemerland and of Schiphol Amsterdam Airport were interviewed. Unfortunately, the interviews could not be tape-recorded due to the control rooms' privacy rules. However, the 60 hours spent in the camera room of the Military Police provided the opportunity to collect ethnographic data.

A main concern in carrying out this study was to determine how the camera room's management and the operators use CCTV and the way in which they give meaning to the images. It was important to understand what kind of images triggered the attention of the camera room's personnel and what kind of action they took on the basis of these images. Next to the literature on CCTV, discussed in the previous sections of this article, in particular Weick's concept of 'sense making' is consistent with this approach. For Weick, sense making is about '*...such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning*' [40, cit. p. 6]. Following Weick, we see the sense making of CCTV by the management and dispatchers as an ongoing process, which is grounded in the camera room practices and rooted in the culture of the organisation.

The remaining part of this article presents the sense-making processes by means of the ethnographic description. Vignettes are used, as Orr puts it, containing '*some combination of the scenes that follow or variations on these themes [that] make up the events of most days*' [31, cit. p. 14]. The vignettes represent a combination of stories about surveillance told by the Military Police, a description of their task complexity, and detailed examples of surveillance practices. Throughout the article, some illustrations about surveillance practices are given, but the vignettes contain the rich descriptions of such practices. The vignettes enable a taxonomy of surveillance in practice at Schiphol.

#### 5. The camera control room in action

##### 5.1. Setting the scene

Some 1,350 cameras are in use in the public parts of Schiphol Airport Amsterdam. Their number is growing and will probably double in the near future. At present, there are still blind spots, but these are

not many, and cameras can often be moved to cover them. About 20% of the cameras are aimed at the gates, and the rest watch Schiphol's publicly accessible space (Schiphol Plaza), baggage reclaims, part of the luggage hall, and a number of aircraft stands. At the research site, the camera room of the Military Police, images from these cameras are watched. This room has a dual function. On the one hand, it functions as an emergency control room where dispatchers take incoming calls from the public or their colleagues concerning safety issues. In this respect, the control room has tasks that are similar to that of any other emergency response room in the Netherlands [2,38]. On the other hand, the control room of the Military Police is supposed to contribute to the security aspects at Schiphol airport. The CCTV system and the camera control room are meant to support this function.

The design of the control room corresponds to this dual function. In the largest part of the room, the dispatchers (or centralists) use four tables to respond to incoming calls about safety issues. On the other side of the room, shielded by a glass wall, are the monitors of the CCTV system, where specialized CCTV operators are at work. The cameras in use can be operated by using a digital floor plan and a mouse, but also by a joystick and a keyboard if the camera numbers are known. An experienced operator knows about half of the camera numbers by heart. The current system has been in use for about a year. Before that, Schiphol also had CCTV, but the Military Police never used it, as it was mainly a matter for the airport itself. There are 13 operators who work eight-hour shifts and take a fifteen minute break after every hour.

The Schiphol CCTV system is unique in that four parties can make use of the cameras. These are the Military Police (who only operates three workstations), the customs, Schiphol Security, and KLM. Each party uses its own login, as does every individual operator. A fifth party, not participating, is the Railway Company. The Military Police can use its cameras, but not retrieve images itself; a difficulty subject to ongoing debate with the Railways. There are protocols for deciding which party can use which camera when: there are primary and secondary users. As there are more parties watching, there are also more CCTV operator workstations at the airport. The total number of these is about 50. Military police CCTV operators sometimes share shifts with other parties, or with officers in the field, to further their understanding of other parties' work. They also send the images to the workstations in the rest of the emergency response room of which they are part.

CCTV operators receive three and a half days' training with a privately owned training company called *Politie Opleidingen Centrum Nederland* (Dutch Police Training Centre). There is additional training, of similar duration, at the *Netherlands Police Academy* (Dutch Police Academy). Then there is training on the job, and training in knowledge of the terrain under surveillance. This is especially important for those CCTV operators who have a background in border patrol only. Those with a background in policing often already know Schiphol. Being a CCTV operator at the Military Police is usually not a career in itself, as the Military Police makes its personnel change work every three to five years. Having to change work so often causes a lot of stress, especially because officers do not receive tenure below a certain rank, and studying is necessary for obtaining higher rank. One of the perks of being a CCTV operator is that the job allows for such study, as there are usually few night shifts. A solution to this stress can be leaving the Military Police, but keeping employment in a civilian capacity, because then the rules for tenure and job rotation no longer apply.

## 5.2. *Surveilling high-risk flights (routine operations)*

What do the Military Police operators actually do? It is striking that, contrary to what Goold, Norris, McCahill and others find, a large part of their work consists of what Goold calls 'routine surveillance' [8].

There are places that simply need to be watched at certain moments; usually this has to do with high-risk flights. When El Al boards passengers at Schiphol Airport, for instance, one of the two Military Police CCTV workstations observed in this research does nothing but watch this. Naturally, other safety precautions have been taken as well and there is a large Military Police presence in the field during such moments. El Al observation can take four hours, and there can be several El Al flights a day. Such routine observation also occurs when US troops are shipped via Schiphol and when very valuable goods are transported. Routine surveillance – all of it knowledge- and information-based at Schiphol – happens as well during the landing of so-called ‘100% inspection flights’. These are often flights from the Caribbean, which are inspected because of the suspicion of drug trafficking. The Military Police are especially looking for people waiting for drug smugglers to arrive. These can be found waiting in the arrival hall. CCTV operators cooperate closely with plain-clothes teams in the field during such observations, and communicate with them all the time.

There are certain clues for recognizing drug-smuggler reception teams, which can be summed up as ‘conspicuously inconspicuous’ behaviour. Clearly belonging together but maintaining a five meter distance, looking ‘Caribbean’, looking like a member of a subculture, smoking marijuana, standing at a considerable distance from the counter while waiting for passengers, being present in the arrivals hall much too early, looking over their shoulders all of the time, but not at the arrivals, and – for some reason or other – carrying two cell phones, these are the clues CCTV operators look for during such observation.

These findings are consistent with what Klauser et al. describe for Geneva Airport: it is not certain categories of people, who are suspicious, it is certain places at certain moments [15]. Yet CCTV operators at Schiphol do sometimes focus on specific social groups: they have very clear ideas about what members of drug-smuggler reception teams might look like. With the actual drug smugglers themselves it is a different matter. They might very well be middle-aged and inconspicuous-looking. Again, Klauser et al. observe a similar thing regarding airport thieves [15].

### *5.3. Calls for assistance (transmitted)*

Then there are what Goold would call ‘calls for assistance’ [7]. Usually, it is not individual officers in the field who ask for it, as many of these have not yet grown used to the possibility of doing so. Yet, it does sometimes happen, for example, if officers in the field suspect they might be heading for a situation where the use of force is necessary. Other observed examples of calls for assistance were a call about a man with a knuckle-duster, or a (false) holdup alert at the Schiphol border exchange. There are also certain incidents that make calls for assistance from the field obligatory. Examples are ‘incapacitations’, or unattended luggage. When unattended luggage is signaled, usually by Schiphol Security, the public is kept at bay, and the Military Police are called to see if the luggage can be opened. If not, then a specially trained sniffer dog is called for, which can smell explosives. If the dog actually finds explosives the entire hall is cleared and a detonation team is sent for. During this process, the Military Police CCTV operators watch the environment, looking out for people with detonators. Vignette 1 gives three examples of calls for assistance concerning unattended luggage.

(False) bomb threats are a regular occurrence as well; they happen once a week. Usually, though, it is teams on the lookout for pick-pockets, drugs traffickers or illegal immigrants who ask for camera assistance. An example is: CCTV operators receiving photos of a girl in a black Adidas sweater, accompanied by her child, and her mother. The plain-clothes Military Police officer asks the operators to follow her, and to report on her every movement. Both workstations start looking for her, and soon find her. They start observing her. Sometimes the girl in the Adidas sweater disappears into a blind spot, and

**Vignette 1: unattended luggage**

The first message 'unattended' is sent to the response room by a team of the SDBV. SDBV stands for Schiphol Service BV; the private security service of Schiphol, whose surveillance personnel usually are the first to identify the luggage and make a report. In this case an unattended suitcase is found at Schiphol Plaza. By following the police officers by means of the camera images, two SDBV people are seen standing next to the luggage. They are the ones who have called the control room of the Military Police, who now send a unit, including a dog team, to the place of the unattended luggage. In this case the dog observes nothing unusual. There are four bottles of liquor in the bag. The whole incident takes about half an hour and necessitates the deployment of five Military Police officers in the field, two operators in the control room, and a dog.

The second message 'unattended' is about two pieces of luggage found unattended at Schiphol Plaza. The CCTV images show that two SDBV professionals are keeping an eye on the luggage. They put a yellow ribbon around it. According to John, the head of the emergency room who is present in the control room during this incident, it makes a big difference to the perception of the public if the ribbon is stretched by the SDBV or by the Military Police (who use red and white ribbons). The latter produces much more anxiety. In this case, the unattended baggage turns out to belong to a man who has consumed too much alcohol. Such a case is a heavy burden for the Military Police because they constantly have to follow the man to force him to keep an eye on his bags.

The third call comes from a SDBV professional who has found an unattended plastic bag close to the check-in point. The dispatcher calls a Military Police unit in the field, who respond with: 'I think this is the luggage of a passenger who we have previously addressed'. The dispatcher responds, 'Are you sure that the luggage indeed belongs to passenger you talked to before, and that nothing is wrong?'. The dispatcher explains to the researcher that a remark like 'probably there is nothing wrong' is quite difficult to respond to – you have to be sure that everything is all right. The dispatcher urges the unit in the field to check the luggage carefully.

then the operators discuss her whereabouts with the plain-clothes officer. Eventually, she goes through the customs, and then the operators can no longer follow her. Finally, there is physical safety. When a luggage cart catches fire, the Military Police CCTV operators watch it, until firemen have put out the fire. Planes with malfunctions are watched as well. An example is a high-speed landing of a plane that cannot get its flaps down, or the landing of a plane with a flat tire, as Vignette 2 shows.

**Vignette 2: physical safety**

The dispatchers in the control room use standardized protocols to take action at the time of an incident. If something is wrong with an airplane the airport safety organizations use the VOS system. VOS is the Dutch acronym for *Aircraft Accident Schiphol*.

During a research visit to the control room, an incoming VOS call was witnessed. The call, which was hard to miss because a loud buzzer went off, immediately attracted the full attention of the dispatchers and the information manager. In this case, the captain of an incoming airplane had announced a 'pan pan' call to signify that there was a situation on board (a mayday call is reserved for more serious issues). The captain announced he needed to make a high-speed landing, because he could not get his flaps down.

The people in the control room were fully alert. The CCTV operators found the right camera to get the plane in sight. Apparently there was nothing wrong with the airplane. Schiphol, however, did not take any risks. One could see the fire brigade waiting for the landing on the screens. Within five minutes of the incoming 'pan pan' call the plane landed safely and, according to the VOS system, the dispatchers in the control room continued with their daily operations. The dispatchers and the information manager told the researchers that the CCTV images really helped them to get a better understanding of what was going on with the airplane, and that the images gave them a better impression of the actions of the fire brigade.

**5.4. Voyeurism**

A category of CCTV surveillance practices that figures prominently in the work of Norris and Goold is voyeurism [8,26]. This hardly appears to occur in the Military Police CCTV observation room at Schiphol. If operators spot football fans dressed in orange, the Dutch national colour, they comment on it. The same goes for stag parties, and people waiting to receive a child they have adopted, carrying welcome banners. It is possible that operators were displaying socially desirable behaviour when

the camera room was visited, but that does not seem likely, as checking their hotmail and Facebook accounts, or reading sports magazines during particularly slow periods behind the screens, proved to be no problem for them during the research observation. The fact that many observers are female – which is an important difference with other CCTV control rooms that have been studied – and that others present in the emergency response room can see what the observers are looking at, probably contributes to the apparent lack of voyeurism.

#### 5.5. 'Free surveillance' (behavioural, categorical, locational, personalised)

'Free surveillance', surveillance other than routine or transmitted, is relatively rare. The Military Police CCTV operators usually do not have the time for it. They consistently reported that, when they do engage in it, they are confronted with the problem that they are on the lookout for unusual behaviour, but that quite a lot of behaviour is unusual at an airport/railway station. Running is not unusual behaviour, as people can be trying to catch a train. Loitering is not strange either: people are waiting to board. Being disoriented or nervous is normal, as many people do not fly that often, and, at an international airport, going by ethnicity is not possible either. Nevertheless, CCTV operators have devised practices to go by. Targeting youths from the west of Amsterdam who sometimes show up at Schiphol Airport is one of those. Watching the group of about fifty homeless people living at the airport is another. Some of these are known recidivists, and CCTV operators sometimes check their hang-outs to see who is present. The Military Police do not particularly mind their presence, except for the 10 to 15 of them who steal or harass passers-by. Yet, most of the street people at Schiphol just use the airport as a sleeping place. Some of them even make themselves useful by acting as Military Police informers. Pickpockets and luggage thieves are a different matter. Pickpockets usually operate during rush hours, at the railway's ticket vending machine, and are recognizable for not queuing up, observing the queue to spot victims, working in teams, and for 'tailing' people. Luggage thieves can be found near the car rental counter, or near KLM's check-in. CCTV operators watch these spots, when they have the time, trying to catch thieves red-handed; usually unsuccessfully. 'Anglers' are another category that is watched. They are people who try to steal money from pay phones, and usually are homeless. Vignette 3 illustrates this practice.

#### **Vignette 3: an 'angler'**

The CCTV room's operator has signaled an 'angler' – a person who tries to steal coins from a payphone using a piece of wire. He informs the centralists in the control room and also makes sure that they can follow the angler through CCTV. The person that is surveilled behaves suspiciously near a public phone at Schiphol Plaza. The operator's suspicion is founded on the fact that the angler does not use the phone, but is still bending over it. The angler stands with his back to the camera. The operator carefully follows him after he walks away from the phone. The man walks through the Plaza, takes the escalator to the first floor (near the check-in desks), walks around aimlessly and then disappears. Meanwhile, the dispatcher of the control room informs a unit in the field about the angler's suspicious behavior. A description of the man is given: he is wearing jeans, a jacket and a green backpack. The field unit locates the angler quickly.

Meanwhile the dispatchers and the CCTV operator engage in a discussion about the angler's behavior. The information manager asks everybody to look at the images again. The question then is: can we actually see that he is trying to steal money from the machine? In other words, can we see illegal action on the basis of which we can arrest him? The images are played back and the finding is: no, these images are not sufficient proof. The man stands with his back to the camera in such a way that the operator and dispatchers are unable to see what he is doing. And although the field unit reports that this man is known to the police, he cannot be arrested because he has not been caught red-handed. The information manager is disappointed that the suspect cannot be arrested, but concludes: 'once the day will come . . .'

Then there are recruiters for illegal taxi services, who take up position outside Schiphol Plaza. Trying to catch these is something CCTV operators are sometimes formally instructed to do. Vignette 4 illustrates this.

**Vignette 4: recruiting for illegal taxi drivers**

One of the cameras at Schiphol Plaza is aimed at the taxi stand. A young man is walking around there, apparently aimlessly. The CCTV room's operator considers this to be suspicious behavior. The dispatcher in the control room explains the situation: at the taxi stand recruiters regularly try to lure passengers into illegal taxis. Proving they are doing this is difficult, however, because the operators can see that people are addressed by the recruiter on the screen, but the conversation itself cannot be overheard. The only remedy is to send a unit to the recruiter, and so disrupt his practices.

According to the information manager the images again are not legally sufficient proof to arrest the man, let alone to prosecute him. This is common knowledge among the dispatchers in the control room. However, one of them argues that '... if one particular colleague had seen the pictures he would have taken action'. The reaction of the centralists is: 'Yes, indeed, but he instructs field units to arrest someone quite easily'. Apparently there is always a personal element in the decision whether or not to arrest a suspect. This incident does make the dispatchers send extra personnel to the taxi stand, though, despite the fact that illegal taxis have a low priority for the Military Police.

**5.6. Retrospective surveillance**

A category that hardly figures in the work of CCTV scholars like Norris and Goold, but that is very prevalent at Schiphol, is retrospective surveillance. When Norris did his research, camera images were usually recorded on tape, which made it very cumbersome to play them back. Nowadays technology is digital. If it is known when and where a certain incident has occurred, finding images can be a matter of minutes. The fact that there are sometimes several cameras that can have recorded the incident, and that cameras can have been looking in the wrong direction (they are not preset, because of technical complications), complicates matters. Retrospective surveillance is always transmitted. Special teams working on illegal immigration or theft ask for it by e-mail. If the camera room manages to find images – which are stored for the legal maximum term of 28 days - it saves these to a DVD in a special format, with a special media player attached, so the images cannot be tampered with. Dutch judges accept these DVDs as legal proof.

**Vignette 5: confronting a frontier-runner**

The CCTV room's operator is trying to find the footage of a people smuggler at Schiphol Plaza. The suspect has been arrested together with his 'client' just before they wanted to board. The police, looking for evidence, requested the CCTV room to find out whether or not the two men were familiar to each other – something the smuggler denied on interrogation. His 'client' denied having ever seen the smuggler before as well. If the operator can come up with images that show the two men walking together at Schiphol Plaza, then at least the police can confront them with these images.

At the day of his arrest the smuggler wore a green cap, so he can be recognized quite easily. And indeed the operator is able to find the images. The camera footage reveals that the two men arrived together at Schiphol Plaza. The smuggler – the man with the green cap – remains detached from his client, who is following him, in order to give the impression that they do not belong together. The operator tries to find out the precise route the two men are taking. She uses a hand-written time-line to reconstruct the smuggler's whereabouts. The images that she found already suffice for detaining the smuggler for some more days.

The operator reflects upon this situation. To her, it is very satisfying that she has been able to help the police with the images. 'This is why I do this job in the first place', she tells us. 'It is exciting that we can use the CCTV system this way, although it is disappointing that the smuggler will be released again after a few weeks'. CCTV to her is a very good help. The only problem with the Schiphol system is that more than one party can use the cameras, which means she never knows beforehand whether the cameras have been pointing in the right direction, or have not been left zooming in too much.

If a theft is reported to the Military Police, the CCTV operators try to retrieve stored images. But their role in tracing the place of departure of undocumented aliens is much more prominent. If asylum seekers manage to get rid of their passports and plane tickets on arriving, their countries of origin and their ports of departure cannot be determined. This means that they are liable to enter a lengthy and costly asylum procedure in The Netherlands. If, however, the Military Police manage to establish from which country these immigrants came, they can report their findings to the immigration service. Then the

immigrants can be sent back, and the costs can be shifted to their country of departure, and to the airline they arrived with. This saves The Netherlands 70,000 Euro per case, roughly estimated, which is why the Military Police camera room claims it earns its keep just by this activity. Every passenger bridge used for flights from destinations asylum seekers often come from is watched, and if the immigration team finds immigrants without proper documents, quite a lot of retrospective surveillance takes place. Sometimes 10 to 20 arrivals need to be checked before the asylum seeker is spotted, a thing that is complicated by the fact that they sometimes change clothes. Frontier-running is a related issue. The camera room also uses retrospective surveillance to supply proof of this, as is illustrated in Vignette 5.

### *5.7. Co-operation*

The Military Police use three workstations to operate Schiphol's many cameras, of which two have been observed, but there are about 50 at the airport, as other parties use the CCTV system as well. Private security is one of these, as is the customs, and KLM Airlines. These parties exchange information regularly, although the Military Police are mostly a receiver of information. Naturally, as their tasks differ, so does the information they need. Schiphol Security does not only provide protection, it also tries to ensure passenger flows do not come to a halt, and it is concerned with the tidiness of the airport. The latter is the reason why – contrary to the Military Police – it is on the lookout for street people. Security's use of the cameras also appears to be less transmitted than the Military Police's. Customs is mainly interested in the surveilling of objects, not people. Most of the time the different parties appear to be cooperating smoothly. Sometimes, they put the cameras in the proper position for each other, they receive training together, and regularly visit each other's work-place. Competencies are clear, but sometimes Security exceeds their authority. This happens when they tail suspects, or open unattended luggage. Yet, how exactly this 'surveillance web' works cannot be said, as the Military Police are the only party that has granted research access to their camera room.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

Which practices, then, do the Schiphol Airport camera room operators construct to do their sorting? How are these transmitted between camera rooms? How do they differ from CCTV-operator practices in different settings? How do CCTV operators, who feel Schiphol is a heterotopia where no one is 'at home', and therefore 'normal behaviour' does not exist, surveil? If we look at Table 1, it immediately becomes clear that there are huge differences between Dutch Military Police routines and the surveillance described in Norris and Armstrong's work [28]. The Military Police rarely surveil Schiphol using behavioural, categorical, locational, or personalised surveillance (clustered by us under the header 'free surveillance') looking for abnormal behaviour.

As it happens, most of the Military Police camera use at Schiphol is 'routine' or 'transmitted'. For example, watching El Al planes board – routine surveillance – consumes four hours of attention of one of the workstations almost every day. Tailing suspects - transmitted surveillance – can go on for hours as well. These activities have priority over all others. Even watching 100% inspection flights stops when a call for assistance arrives. Thus there is very little time for 'free surveillance', the kind Norris and Armstrong [28] and McCahill [23] have researched, and the sorting they describe hardly exists either. For that reason the Military Police's surveillance is not really part of the 'new penology'. Most of it is still aimed at detecting certain types of crimes, rather than certain groups.

Table 1  
Types of the military police surveillance at Schiphol Airport in order of priority

<b>1. Routine</b>	High-risk flights (terrorism, drug trafficking, US troops)
<b>2. Transmitted</b>	Calls for assistance (unattended luggage, CYA, criminal investigation, safety)
<b>3. Retrospective surveillance</b>	Theft, human trafficking
<b>4. Behavioural, categorical, locational, personalised</b>	Free surveillance (‘anglers’, illegal cabs, thieves, pickpockets, homeless people)
<b>5. Voyeurism</b>	Hardly exists

What *does* often occur is ‘retrospective surveillance’: playing back the images to try and spot undocumented aliens or thefts. And there is a reason for this: the Military Police are highly successful in retrospective surveillance, which is also a very rewarding activity in terms of tax money saved, whereas ‘free surveillance’ is difficult, and the sums that can be saved are minimal. It is hardly surprising that ‘free surveillance’ rarely occurs at Schiphol, which CCTV operators experience as a ‘heterotopia’ that in principle could not be surveilled using the routines Norris and Armstrong [28] describe. What is remarkable is that the same does not go for shopping malls or town centres, as the aforementioned authors point out that successes of free surveillance there are not impressive either.

Yet, we need to be cautious in our conclusions. There are about 50 workstations for watching cameras at Schiphol, and only two of these have been observed in this research. The other 48 workstations have different purposes, and therefore – in all probability – different routines. What these are is not known, because persistent attempts to gain research access have failed. However, it is clear that some of the activities behind other workstations overlap with the Military Police’s. The reason that entry was not granted is that most of the unresearched workstations are privately owned, and, as has been observed before [13], when security is privatised, accountability suffers. The ‘rhizome’ comes with very real dangers – a sad note on which to end this article.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank First Lieutenant Ruud Arends – Chief of the Command and Control Room of the Royal Military Police at Schiphol Airport for his cooperation. He has raised no objection to the publication of the article.

## Endnote

An earlier version of this paper was presented at: the 33<sup>rd</sup> European Group for Public Administration Annual Conference, Bucharest, Romania, September 2011, the Public Administration Theory Network Conference, 2011 and at the 16th World Congress of the International Society for Criminology, Kobe, Japan, August 2011.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors contributed equally to this article..

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