

Publicizing insecurity, privatizing security

Chinese wholesalers' surveillance cameras in a Paris suburb

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The area that has become known, in recent years, as the 'Chinese wholesalers area' (*quartier des grossistes chinois*) lies just north of Paris, across the Boulevard Périphérique, in the southwestern part of the town of Aubervilliers. Concentrated around just a few streets and crowded together within large former warehouses and newly-built commercial centres, row upon row of almost identical showrooms display manufactured products imported from China to be sold wholesale – mainly shoes and clothing, but also cheap watches and jewellery, and all kinds of curios.

Since the early 1990s, several hundreds of Chinese wholesalers (currently estimated at over 700) have set up their businesses there. The wholesalers are not recent immigrants. They live in other, better-off suburban areas further out in the northern *banlieue* (suburb) rather than in the nearby immigrant neighbourhoods of Aubervilliers. They arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, in many cases to join family who had arrived previously or to take over businesses from uncles or fathers who had returned to China.¹ I estimate that about half of the wholesalers are the sons and daughters of immigrants; their parents helped them to start up businesses in Aubervilliers. Those who were born in France, and many of those who joined their parents at a young age, are French nationals.

Many moved their family-run shops from inner Paris to this suburb as a result of municipal policies aimed at reducing the number of wholesalers in the capital. Aubervilliers is one of the poorest towns in one of the poorest departments in France, Seine-Saint-Denis. The presence of the Chinese wholesale business is a source of income for the town, and even if they would like to limit its geographic expansion, the municipal authorities do not have the financial means to do so.² The authorities have acted pragmatically towards the Chinese, by branding Aubervilliers as the ideal port of entry for Chinese capital in a typical instance of the creation of 'monopoly rent' (Harvey 2001). They have co-opted leading Chinese entrepreneurs in their pursuit of the 'urban growth machine' (Molotch 1976).

A few entrepreneurs, often both wholesalers and real estate subcontractors, have become the main negotiators in dealing with the municipal authorities. Among them, the most important and successful businessman is Mr Wang. He was born in 1965 and arrived in the early 1970s to join his parents. He started in the import and wholesale business, but these have now become minor activities in comparison to his investments in real estate. He rents space from the formerly state-owned, recently privatized company ICADE, that owns the former warehouses, and sublets these to more than 300 wholesalers. He and his fellow entrepreneurs act as lobbyists to influence municipal policy and they regularly participate in meetings with the local authorities on matters relating to Chinese wholesalers.³

Over the past two years, the Chinese wholesalers in Aubervilliers have called for a strengthening of the police force and protection from the violent robberies they suffer. Yet, they have been urged by the public authorities to take steps to secure their own protection. One such measure was to install surveillance cameras to film people on the streets. However, this does not comply with French legislation on camera surveillance.⁴ Knowing this, why have surveillance cameras been adopted as a solution?

This question guides the ethnographic analysis presented here of a situation where the installation of surveillance cameras was locally negotiated by the main actors involved – namely, the wholesalers' representatives and the police. However, the choice of surveillance cameras was not made in a context free of constraints, since there are legal limits set on surveillance at a national level. Moreover, the use of surveillance cameras in specific neighbourhoods was the object of a debate within the Aubervilliers municipal government, and the question had not yet been settled at the time the wholesalers decided to install their own.

In the wholesalers' case, it was the one solution everyone tacitly agreed upon, in spite of the limitations and in the absence of any other solutions. In what follows I will show that this choice appeared optimal in the sense that both parties reached a tacit agreement that, considering the lack of other options, surveillance cameras were the best solution for the time being. The reason why this solution was optimal (but not ideal) may be revealed through an examination of the particular pattern of interaction between the wholesalers and the police and local authorities. Here, I make use of Gregory Bateson's notion of the 'double bind' (2000) to consider the contradictory messages that the Chinese wholesalers and the police sent one another.⁵

I will begin by showing how the Aubervilliers wholesalers publicized the problem they were facing. Thereafter I will analyze the interaction between the wholesalers and the police and examine why security cameras seemed to be the optimal solution to this situation. Finally I will show how, in the course of this interactional process, the border between private and public became an object of negotiation and reinterpretation. This led to an unsatisfactory solution that amounts to a *de facto* privatization of surveillance.

The formation of UCAS and publicization of the 'security' issue

In early 2011, the formation of UCAS (Union des commerçants Chinois d'Aubervilliers pour la sécurité, Huashang zhian lianmeng, or 'Chinese merchants league for public security') was announced on the internet forum Huarenjie

Fig. 1. Location of Aubervilliers in relation to Paris.



Fig. 2. Portrait of Mr Wang in the magazine megalopolis: 'Will he buy Paris?'.





Fig. 3. Logo of UCAS (Union des commerçants d'Aubervilliers pour la sécurité).

1. Almost all originate from the area around the city of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, in China and speak the Wenzhou dialect. The history of Wenzhou migration in France goes back to the end of the 19th century and the Wenzhou form the largest group among the Chinese in the Paris region.

2. I collected this information during field research conducted in Aubervilliers between November 2010 and June 2012, and in the course of interviews with the mayor and several political actors at the town level and above.

3. Part of the field research carried out has been conducted in collaboration with sociologist Chuang Ya-han who is working on a larger project on the Chinese in Paris. We attended meetings and conducted interviews either separately or together during the whole period. The meetings were held at the Aubervilliers municipal office, at the headquarters of the 'Shoe Association' and (more frequently) at the headquarters of a private company that is located in the middle of the wholesalers area. In the chapter I co-authored with Chuang Ya-han (2013) I focus on the problem of traffic in the neighbourhood and give a more detailed description of the relations between the municipal authorities and the Chinese wholesalers.

4. With some exceptions leaving room for interpretation (which, as we will see, was widened in this case), the use of surveillance cameras to film public space is illegal.

5. It accounts for situations where one person is repeatedly subjected to contradictory injunctions by one or more other persons. The predominant setting in which the 'double bind' finds application is the parent-child relationship, and Bateson uses it to build a theory of schizophrenia. He notes however that it 'involves general principles which are important in all communication' (2000: 222).

(www.huarenjie.com). It was formed after a series of violent robberies targeted Chinese wholesalers. Some (especially women) were robbed as they walked on the streets or sat in their cars, by men riding scooters; others were attacked as they closed their shops; a few were followed to their homes in the suburbs and attacked while they parked or were even robbed in their own houses.⁶ The violence appeared to have spread from the inner Paris neighbourhood of Belleville, where a similar increase in violent thefts targeted at the Chinese had led to a protest march in June 2010.⁷ The formation of UCAS in Aubervilliers was catalyzed by the collective mobilization of the Belleville Chinese community. Several Chinese merchant associations who had been among the organizers of the Belleville street march, were involved in the formation of UCAS.

The secretary of UCAS was Mrs Lian who had longstanding connections with the municipal office.⁸ She was a freelance consultant who had been employed by the municipal office to act as an intermediary with the Chinese wholesalers on previous occasions.⁹ The real leaders of UCAS were the presidents of the various associations that UCAS federates, and especially the president of the Association de la chaussure (Shoe Association). Mrs Lian organized meetings between the members of UCAS and representatives of the police or/and municipal authorities in the headquarters of this association.

UCAS took action on several levels. Its main task was to spread information among the wholesaler community on how to react in case of assault. UCAS transmitted and translated the statements issued by the police. It gave advice on how to avoid robberies (not carrying large amounts of cash money, etc.). It informed shopkeepers and their employees where to go and how to file a complaint after a robbery. While fulfilling the task of transmitting information, UCAS also took action at another level, namely that of lobbying the police and municipal authorities in order to put the issue of 'security' in the wholesalers area onto the local public agenda.

They had two main demands: first, they asked for an intensified police presence, and second, for the installation of cameras on the streets. This lobbying was sustained by the pressure put on the local authorities by a higher-level actor, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in France. After officials from the embassy stepped into the mayor of Aubervilliers' office to ask him to safeguard the security of their citizens, two meetings were organized, on 23 December and 24 January, which brought together the Chinese ambassador (his representative at the second meeting), the mayor of Aubervilliers and the vice-president of Plaine commune (the higher level federation of municipalities of which Aubervilliers is part). The ambassador, who was present at the opening ceremony of the Chinese New Year festival along with the mayor of Aubervilliers, alluded to the issue of insecurity in the speech he gave.

'Double bind': French republicanism and ethnic particularism

Both the Chinese wholesalers and the police sent each other contradictory messages that simultaneously both rejected and embraced ethnic particularism. This 'double bind' was not restricted to discourse; the messages were also communicated via the kinds of action undertaken. On the one hand, the Chinese and the police appealed to French norms of good citizenship – i.e. being devoid of any ethnic particularism – and, on the other, they claimed or acknowledged that the Chinese wholesalers, targeted as an ethnic group, were entitled to protection.

The initiative of UCAS's formation was to some extent viewed with suspicion by the police, who saw it as a kind of militia or attempt at self-protection. During the meetings I attended, one representative of the police voiced his

concerns explicitly, stating that the Chinese should not be tempted to take the law into their own hands. One officer, at the beginning of one of the first meetings, told the mainly young, French nationals of Chinese origin sitting in front of him, that 'in this country, that kind of behaviour is not allowed'. He implied that France was a country where the state held a monopoly on the use of violence, in contrast to China. This was understandable however, considering that to legitimize the existence of UCAS, Mrs Lian had occasionally made references to the self-defence movements (*ziweidui*) formed by peasants in the Chinese countryside.¹⁰

The police seemed uncomfortable with the ethnic community base upon which UCAS relied, or at least they resorted rhetorically to the official republican denial of particularism and 'communitarianism' (*communautarisme*). Nevertheless, they did not deny that crimes were directed towards the Chinese as members of an ethnic minority; on the contrary, they took the ethnically targeted assaults very seriously.¹¹ Moreover, the problem of security raised by the wholesalers was explained by the police in ethnic terms. One of the police officers explained at length that to prevent being targeted by robbers, the wholesalers had to change the image of the 'Asian community'. 'The "Asians" have a reputation for carrying loads of cash on them', he said. 'Before calling for more police etc., you should change this image of yourself'.

Furthermore, the police stressed that a characteristic of the Chinese was that they did not file complaints; yet if no complaint was filed, there would be no record of any security problems in a particular area. The police insistence on these two points shows that they attributed the cause of the problem to the wholesalers' behaviour which was (presumed to be) determined by being part of a particular ethnic community. The fact that the police came to meetings organized by UCAS reflected their perception of the Chinese community as insular and difficult to communicate with. The police saw the UCAS initiative and the meetings they organized as an opportunity to establish contact with the Chinese.

The wholesalers' discourse was also framed in ethnic terms, in that they called for solidarity among the Chinese community to remedy the situation. At the same time however, they were aware that the creation of UCAS could have a negative impact due to French suspicions towards communitarianism, especially if it began to resemble a self-defence ethnic organization. Therefore, they were careful to present their cause as one shared by all French citizens, and their action as within the limits of legality. This is shown in the foundational statement of UCAS as reported by an overseas Chinese journal:

Law enforcement by the police needs short-term improvement in Paris as well as in many French cities. (...) Chinese merchants associations and enterprises have decided to make a 'break through', to break the vicious circle of "not being protected and not able to defend oneself". They have spontaneously united to establish the Chinese merchants league for public security, with the goal of "maximizing" rights to protection within the limits of the law, by taking concrete steps, and obtaining the understanding of the local government, in order to contain crime, the goal is to unite for protection.¹²

Moreover, one of the main activities of UCAS at its inception was to disseminate the message issued by the police, as part of the solution to the problem of security that they were facing. As we have seen, this consisted in fostering individual behaviour that would potentially prevent crimes and encouraging victims to report to the police. In short, they were informing members of the community how to act as good citizens while also trying to play down the suspicion that they were an ethnic self-defence organization. At the same time, however, the fact that UCAS

Fig. 4. Showrooms displaying manufactured products imported from China to be sold wholesale.



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6. According to the police, the assaults were perpetrated by gangs of youth from the nearby poor immigrant neighbourhoods.

7. This event had been given much public attention in the French media, as it was the first time that a street march was organized by an ethnic community, and, more remarkably, a community that has a reputation for being low-profile and trouble-free.

8. Her name has been changed.

9. She is not a wholesaler, and she does not originate from Wenzhou as almost all most wholesalers do (cf. note 1).

10. Fieldnotes, UCAS meeting, 7 April 2011.

11. The superintendent in charge of the 'thefts and violence group' (*Groupe Vols Violences*) at the commissariat of Aubervilliers stated that 'in France the Chinese community is very much targeted, that means that there are neighbourhoods where they are targeted by delinquents'. He added 'there are delinquents that specialize in Chinese'.

12. <http://voice.oushinet.com/172-2963-104194.aspx>, 7 January 2011 (translation is mine). The mention of 'within the limits of the law' alluded to the event that had triggered the Belleville street demonstration in June 2010: the arrest of a Chinese restaurant owner who had shot an assailant who attempted to rob money during a Chinese wedding (the restaurant owner had turned himself in, but was celebrated on internet forums as the hero of the Chinese community). Moreover, the street march itself had ended up in looting on the streets of Belleville, hence the attention it had been given by the media.

13. Hortefeux made this statement two weeks after Nicolas Sarkozy's infamous speech in Grenoble on 30 July, who declared a 'national war on delinquency' and in particular, the withdrawal of French nationality for certain crimes and offenses.

14. Field notes, UCAS meeting, 7 April 2011.

15. The cameras had cost 96,000 euros. The money had been collected by voluntary contributions from the wholesalers; most (around 300 of them) had given 200 euros, and a dozen had given up to 3,000.

was acting as an intermediary between the police, the local authorities, and the Chinese wholesalers underlined its status as an ethnic Chinese community organization. UCAS translated their messages into Chinese and spread the word via community networks.

Contradictory messages were thus sent on both sides, and the police and the Chinese were caught in a mutual double bind. The Chinese were taking action as a group in order to provide for their own security, but at the same time they insisted that they were claiming rights to which all citizens were entitled. The police acknowledged the fact that a specific group was being targeted but constantly reminded them that they did not have the right to ensure their own protection.

Limited solutions in a context of reductions in public spending

I will now turn to the other possible actions that were discussed by the wholesalers and the police. Among the wholesalers who had settled earlier, some remembered that there used to be a police station in the neighbourhood. This station had been closed down as a consequence of the suppression of the *police de proximité* (proximity police) just after the arrival of the Sarkozy right-wing government in 2002.

There had been a partial step back to a form of 'proximity police' under a disguised name, UTeQ (*Unités Territoriales de Quartier*, Territorial Neighbourhood Units), the first of which was put in place in Seine-Saint-Denis. In August 2010, Nicolas Sarkozy's minister of the interior, Brice Hortefeux, announced their replacement by specialized field brigades (*Brigades Spécialisées de Terrain*, BST), stating that 'they will not be social workers'. This was meant to make it clear that these policemen would be repressive and not just there to relax. This fierce announcement masked the fact that instead of doubling the numbers of BST policemen, as had been planned and proclaimed by the Sarkozy government, their numbers were reduced.¹³ Aubervilliers has one BST located at the central police station.

As a result of the removal of the local station, if a wholesaler or one of his employees was assaulted and wanted to file a complaint, the only option was to go the central police station much further away, in downtown Aubervilliers. This, the wholesalers argued, was one of the reasons why they were reluctant to file complaints.

Furthermore, they argued, the lack of a local police station and a police presence created a climate that was favourable to potential lawbreakers. The wholesalers, therefore, asked for increased patrolling. Police representatives responded that the rearrangement and redeployment of police forces did not mean that the police were not there. They explained that other neighbourhoods in Aubervilliers had much higher rates of criminality and needed police intervention far more than the wholesalers' area, where the crime rate was officially very low because few complaints were filed. However, they also admitted that they did not have enough officers, due to cuts in public spending.

During one of the meetings, some Chinese wholesalers asked how they could help the police to enhance their presence and efficiency. One verbal exchange was remarkable in that it caused visible embarrassment on the side of the police. It was one of those instances Goffman (1974) would define as a breach in the normal interactive situation caused by a lapse, a *faux pas*, by one of the interactants.

It occurred when the head of the Shoe Association, an older wholesaler, suddenly offered to pay for scooters. This, he added, would make it easier for the police to catch criminals. Not being fluent in French, he gestured to emphasize what he was saying. The other, younger wholesalers who were sitting around the table supported his offer and explained that they also wanted to help the police and considered this their duty as citizens.

The superintendent escaped the awkwardness of the situation by answering in general terms and in an official tone of voice that this would require the establishment of a 'public/private partnership' which would be difficult and slow to put in place. While he was saying this, Mrs Lian turned toward the wholesaler who had made the offer and whispered in Mandarin Chinese: 'you should not say "give" (*song*), but "lease" (*zu*)'. She was aware that the offer did not conform to the expected norms of interaction with the police.¹⁴

The embarrassment of the police representatives was initiated by the blunt words: 'we will pay' as voiced by the wholesaler, but not only that. When the wholesaler told the police that he could pay for scooters, there was a subtle shift in the balance of the interaction. Until that moment it was the police who were in a position to tell the wholesalers what they were doing wrong. The offer exposed the inability of the police to give the wholesalers what they wanted: more means to prevent crime. The whole situation

Fig. 5. Police patrolling during the Chinese New Year festival, February 2011.



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16. Private individuals have to make a special request at the prefecture to be authorized to film within places open to the public such as restaurants and shops. In both cases, it is required that the public be informed of the presence of cameras. No authorization was needed for an installation in private places or offices that are closed to the public.

17. (Elles permettaient de confier à des personnes privées la surveillance générale de la voie publique). The Constitutional Council censored 13 out of 142 dispositions of the law project, including one that enlarged the powers of municipal police officers, authorizing them to control IDs, and another that extended the principle of ‘minimal sentences’ to minors. Law number n° 2011-267, or LOPPSI law was promulgated on 14 March 2011.

18. ICADE, the company that owns many of the warehouses rented by the Chinese wholesalers, had already installed a network of cameras on the streets that run between the buildings. This is considered to be private space, since it lies inside the business parks. The manager wanted to know whether they could install cameras that would film the entrance to the parks, and thus the street – public space.

19. Fieldnotes, lunch meeting at a private company in the wholesalers area, 21 June 2012.

20. Although this nomination remains in conformity with the republican setting, the nomination of a police officer is shocking, for its connotation is that of a regime of police administration rather than a rule of law; the two powers are normally clearly separated and, in a democracy such as France, the administrative power of the police is subordinated to the rule of law.

21. Interview conducted by Chuang Ya-han, 5 March 2012, personal communication.

was framed by the larger problem raised by this offer of private sponsorship, namely that law enforcement and the security of citizens are the prerogative of the state, and are a public matter.

According to Bateson, ‘double-binding is a type of struggle and commonly one or the other has the upper hand’ (2000: 237). In this particular struggle over how security should be implemented, the police, as a law enforcement authority, in theory should have had the upper hand. The scene I have just described however reveals that this was not the case. The contradictory messages of the police can be accounted for by the fact that they had limited room to manoeuvre. They could not meet the demands for intensified patrolling or the re-establishment of proximity police because of the reduction of public spending; they could neither accept the Chinese offer nor let them set up a militia, since this would imply a privatization of law enforcement. Surveillance cameras, in this immediate context, therefore appeared as the most available and viable option.

Surveillance cameras

Surveillance cameras were the most immediate response the wholesalers could make to the problem they were facing, and one that they could provide for themselves without having to rely on the police. By June 2011, they had set up a network of 41 cameras, several of which were filming the street.¹⁵

In the meantime, the possibility of installing a public, municipal network of cameras in the streets of Aubervilliers were being examined by the authorities. The responsibilities and powers of French municipalities in matters of security have been increased in the past decade. Mayors have been granted a central role in the field of prevention since the 2007 law on the prevention of delinquency, and in October 2007 a ‘videoprotection plan’ has been launched by the Ministry of the Interior, along with a ‘Fund for the Prevention of Delinquency’ (Fonds Interministériel de Prévention de la Délinquance, FIPD) that finances the installation of municipal surveillance systems and their connection to police stations. Municipalities are thus encouraged to implement their own systems of surveillance. This has given rise to debates on these issues in a large number of French cities over the past few years.

While awaiting the outcome of the specially appointed commission’s conclusions, the mayor of Aubervilliers was counting on the passing of the new law on video protection in early 2011; he saw therein the most ready response to the wholesalers’ demands.

This law, named LOPPSI (Orientation and programming law for the performance of interior security/*Loi d’orientation et de programmation pour la performance de la sécurité intérieure*) was expected to expand the scope of the use of ‘video protection’ by private individuals. The existing legislation allowed public places to be filmed only by public authorities; private persons could film private places but were not allowed to film public space (*la voie publique*).¹⁶ Article 18 of the LOPPSI law, if adopted, would allow private individuals to place cameras ‘in the surroundings of (*aux abords de*, a very vague term) buildings’ and to film public space.

However, on 10 March 2011, the French Constitutional Council censored several articles of this law, including article 18, declaring it unconstitutional on the grounds that it would amount to ‘entrusting the task of general surveillance of public space (*voie publique*) to private persons’¹⁷ and thereby breach the constitutional principle according to which, security in the public space should be enforced by what in French is called the ‘public force’ (*force publique*).

Therefore, this clause was not inscribed in the final version of the law. Apparently, however, the local actors in Aubervilliers had held such an expectation that the change in legislation would go through, that they either did not take in this information or simply ignored it. The wholesalers went on with their project to film the street; the police turned a blind eye to it. Actually, they even congratulated the wholesalers on their purchases.

During a later meeting in June 2012, over lunch, the superintendent of Aubervilliers told me that he had seen the ‘surveillance system’ and that the images were being used by the police. One of the ICADE managers present asked the superintendent whether he would be allowed to film the street like the Chinese.¹⁸ The superintendent answered that it was tolerated, and that the department that delivered clearances was rather easy-going on this matter.¹⁹ Any installation of a protection system using video to film public space in places such as banks, airports or restaurants, requires prior authorization by the prefect, the representative of the state at the local level of the department. Exceptions can thus be made for closed, privately owned places frequented by the public, but not for the street as public space (*voie publique*).

Since article 18 of the Loppsi law has been censored, the use of surveillance cameras to film people in the street (by anyone other than the public authorities) remains illegal. The superintendent’s remark on the leniency of the departmental direction showed he knew the law but considered

Fig. 6. The Chinese ambassador, with the mayor of Aubervilliers (to his left) at the opening ceremony of the Chinese New Year festival, 3 February 2011.



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that there was nonetheless some latitude for interpretation. I would suggest that this margin for interpretation may be increased in a context where a kind of 'regime of exception' has been put in place, such as in the Seine-Saint-Denis department. The highly mediatized appointment of its new prefect, Christian Lambert, in May 2010, by President Nicolas Sarkozy, was considered provocative, since he was not chosen from among the usual state civil servants, but was a police officer. This appointment was intended to symbolize the war on delinquency declared by Sarkozy.²⁰

The very situation in which this dialogue took place shows how such more or less formal gatherings – here, a rather informal one, during lunch, where the police superintendent might be less expected to speak as a superintendent – foster the dissemination of information between the lines, on what is tolerated and what is not.

Conclusion

Although what I have detailed above may seem to indicate a kind of collusion between the police and the wholesalers in Aubervilliers, resulting in a collaboration over the use of the images filmed by the wholesalers' cameras, this was not exactly the case. Although there was a tacit agreement, there was no active cooperation.

Video surveillance is a tool that lends itself very well to the idea that surveillance can be carried out without human presence. But when it is installed, the question remains of who will keep watch. The wholesalers, although they had pooled their money to buy expensive surveillance material, were not willing to pay a proper salary and training for someone to monitor the screens and pass on information to the police. Instead, two underpaid and undeclared employees did the job for a few months and were eventually fired. The police expressed frustration at the way the wholesalers managed their surveillance system. A police sergeant stated that the Chinese tended to go down to the street to chase thieves as soon as they saw something happening on the screen, thereby suggesting that they were using these cameras to enforce security for themselves. He added that the Chinese had a radically different way of thinking about those things.²¹

After more than two years of talks between the police and the Chinese wholesalers, the misunderstandings – or rather, the mutual 'double bind' – remained unresolved. The wholesalers managed to organize collectively by appealing to ethnic solidarity. At the same time, they considered that security and law enforcement was a

public matter that should be accomplished by the police and required a stronger police presence. The police and municipal authorities, although they were wary of the ethnic framework and self-defence connotation of UCAS, were conscious of their lack of resources and anxious to keep the wholesale business in Aubervilliers. Therefore, they implicitly encouraged the formation of UCAS and the actions undertaken. The double bind is, according to Bateson, a type of struggle. In this situation the struggle was between two parties who found themselves taking actions that stretched the limits of legality while, at the same time, denying that this was the case.

The French case does not fit David Garland's (1996) observations on the British state's qualification of its own claim to be the primary provider of security and crime control; the French state, as the Constitutional Council's decision shows, still claims absolute monopoly on the use of force. And yet, because the state seeks to reduce costs, it is unable to deliver the levels of crime control that citizens expect. Therefore, what is at stake here is a kind of nested double bind: as a result of the state's contradictory messages, the police force has to respect the principle of the monopoly on the use of force, but faced with budgetary reductions, it is inclined to let citizens who have the means to do so, ensure their own protection.

Video surveillance appears to be a battleground where the boundaries between the public and the private are negotiated in the context of a retreating state. Although today French law still draws a clear distinction between public and private space in matters of surveillance, in the field, actors are ignoring this distinction while pretending they are not, and wishing they need not. In this sense the case examined here is a typical example of the double bind situation sketched by Bateson.

The compromise between the police and the wholesalers was a local response to neoliberal policies that encourage such conciliations by reducing other options, such as an increase in the number of police officers and patrols. In this case, powerful economic actors who have the means to lobby the public authorities have been tacitly allowed to use video surveillance in public space for their self-protection. This reveals the conflicting tendencies in today's neoliberal context between the demand for public intervention and the state on the one hand, and the privatization of state attributions on the other. The neoliberal policy reforms that have led to budget cuts in public spending and the privatization of public services results in a *de facto* privatization of the enforcement of public security. ●

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