Discovering Urban Citizenship in the Surveillance Society

Mike Dee

Abstract

Cities and urban spaces around the world are changing rapidly from their origins in the industrialising world to a post-industrial, hard-wired landscape. A further embellishment is the advent of mobile media technologies supported by both existing and new communications and computing technology which claim to put the urban dweller at the heart of a new, informed and ‘liberated’ seat of participatory urban governance. This networked, sensor-enabled society permits flows of information in a multitude of directions, ostensibly empowering the citizenry through ‘smart’ installations such as ‘talking bus stops’ detailing services, delays, transport interconnections and even weather conditions along desired routes.

However, while there is considerable potential for creative and transformative kinds of citizen participation, there is also the momentum for ‘function-creep’, whereby vast amounts of data are garnered in a broad application of urban surveillance. This kind of monitoring and capacity for surveillance connects with attempts by civic authorities to regulate, restrict, rebrand and reframe urban public spaces into governable and predictable arenas of consumption.

This article considers questions around the possibilities for retaining and revitalising forms of urban citizenship, set in the context of Marshall’s original premise of civil, social and political citizenship(s) in the middle of the last century, following World War Two and the coming of the modern welfare state.

Keywords: Citizenship, urban, public space, surveillance, sensor
Introduction

Urban public spaces face a number of challenges in the relentless drive by civic authorities and developers to create and sustain ‘spectacular’ consumption precincts, many of which are situated at the centre of long established urban settlements whose destruction or transformation through processes of gentrification, is required to promote new urban lifestyle developments (Davis, 1995, Atkinson & Easthope, 2008, Leslie & Catungal, 2012).

Alongside the refashioning of urban places as ‘smart’, ‘creative’ and global ‘hubs’ are programs of securitization acting to exclude those considered unwelcome or “flawed vagabonds” too poor to be active and consuming citizens (Bauman, 1998:42). The widespread use of surveillance and other control technologies as deployed in and around the UK ‘Riots’ of 2011 may help to promote and encourage a passing sense of personal safety and confidence in using public space. Through systems of social sorting, the same surveillance assemblages can also further the physical, emotional and psychological exclusion of certain groups and individuals, deemed to be both “out of time and out of place” in these major zones of urban, conspicuous, consumption (Norris & Armstrong, 1999:243).

It is exactly at these times when so called “defensive architecture” to ward off the homeless, ne’er do wells and others, installed outside major shops, banks and other private buildings exemplifies exclusionary power (Andreou, 2015:1):

From ubiquitous protrusions on window ledges to bus-shelter seats that pivot forward, from water sprinklers and loud muzak to hard tubular rests, from metal park benches with solid dividers to forests of pointed cement bollards under bridges, urban spaces are aggressively rejecting soft, human bodies.

In this way, the humanity and citizenship of the urban setting is constantly revised, curtailed and potentially deleted, at least for some groups and individuals. This makes a consideration of the importance and complexity of notions around the concept of citizenship, as originally discussed by Marshall (1950) both urgent and apposite.

Citizenship

The classic concept of citizenship can be seen as comprising three vital elements. First, the idea of the ‘citizen’ is a way of imagining and constructing a relationship between the state and the individual citizen or resident (Lewis, 1998:48). Second, the category of citizen forms an essential and powerful expression of belonging in any given social formation, central to the process of social inclusion and the allocation of benefits and entitlements (Dean, 2013). Third, citizenship as a conduit of social status “articulates and mediates the entitlements of the individual to state-organised welfare” and to participation in the modern, post Second World War welfare state via a complex array of reciprocal rights and responsibilities (Ginsberg, 1995:41).
Marshall, (1950) theorizes citizenship as comprising three stages of broad historical evolution towards civil, political and social rights. Civil citizenship, from the eighteenth century onwards, is the individual right to personal freedom in the form of speech, movement, and assembly. Political citizenship, emerging in the nineteenth century, is the right to vote, stand for election and public office. A right may be understood as a “legitimate or socially recognized moral or legal justification for individuals to be allowed specified behaviour or to demand specified behaviour with regard to themselves” (McNeely, 1998:9).

This brief consideration of rights conveys some of the major components of Marshall’s schema of civil, political and social citizenship rights, requiring rights for all citizens, underwritten and provided by the state and also responsibilities of citizens, in a complex symbiosis. This is demonstrated in Marshall’s, (1950:47) pronouncement on education, a key element of social citizenship “Education is of such vital importance for the health and prosperity of a nation, that it is regarded as something of which the individual has a duty to avail himself, to the extent that his natural abilities warrant”. On the subject of health, again central to the enjoyment of full social citizenship, Marshall, (1950:49) notes “It is just as important for a society to have a healthy population as to have an educated one, so the right to health, like the right to education, is blended with duties”.

Social citizenship as considered by Marshall, connects closely with elements of the United Nations Human Rights enactments of the 1940s, contemporaneous with and helping to shape the background to when he was writing Citizenship and Social Class (Heater, 2004). Marshall’s work, particularly on social citizenship or “socioeconomic rights” (McNeely, 1998:10) was influenced by and reflects the concerns of the era of post war social reconstruction and the welfare state. These concerns were manifested in the 1947 C.I. Marshall Plan for European Recovery, and the creation of political institutions pledged to secure European unity (Heater, 2004). The signing of the Charter of the United Nations on 26 June 1948, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 and The Declaration of the Rights of the Child proclaimed on 20 November 1959 are significant milestones in the pursuit of universal human rights (Rees and Wright, 2000).

Social citizenship, a creation of the twentieth century, is more amorphous (than civil and political citizenship), including economic security and equal access to health, education and employment opportunities (Dee, 2008). In Marshall’s, (1950:12) own words, social citizenship is “The whole range from a right to a modicum of economic welfare and security, to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being, according to the standards prevailing in a civilized society”. Social citizenship involves participation in society in a variety of forms and while Marshall states that the system of education and social services are institutions most closely connected with social rights, he did not say in detail how social citizenship might be achieved (Marshall, 1950:11). It falls then, to others, to illustrate this picture, with more
contemporary analyses and ideas for social change (Roche, 1992). Social rights differ from civil and political rights because they are provided by the state in order that a minimum standard of living is available. The level of and conditions governing accessibility to this standard of living, is a major and contemporary issue (Noguera, 2004:3):

Social and economic citizenship is going through a period of bad health, and does not seem to be able to recover in the near future; it was always a conditional part of citizenship, but today that conditionality—especially work-conditionality—is being intensified, and workfare and welfare-to-work proposals are increasingly popular among governments and policy-makers and among a growing part of public opinion.

Marshall’s thesis has been reappraised from a number of positions, specifically in relation to the “diminished citizenship” of women, children and young people (Jones & Wallace, 1992:143, Walby, 1994, Yeatman, 1994). Marshall offers an Anglo-centric and historically specific conceptualization, based on the continuing existence of a social democratic welfare state with a white, male, married breadwinner chiefly at its core (Hughes & Lewis, 1998). Coles (writing with the benefit of fifty years of hindsight), criticises Marshall’s acceptance of the sustainability of policies of full employment. He also questions Marshall’s key assumptions around the stability of the nuclear family and its underpinning of unwaged work, by married women (Yeatman, 1994, Coles, 1995).

Marshall “Developed a theory of ‘social citizenship’ that claimed to be universal but was constructed in such a way as to be applicable only to men” with men placed at the centre of a breadwinner’s welfare state (Finch, 1996:196). In this regard, the key architects of citizenship and the welfare state in the post war period, Marshall and Beveridge appear to have shared similar assumptions about the supposed dependent place of women in the post war world (Lister, 2007).

Sustained criticism of aspects of Marshall’s approach to the concept of citizenship are posited by Walby, (1994). In particular, his theorizing of citizenship as comprising three stages of broad historical struggle towards civil, political and social citizenship seems only to understand and validate the struggles and success of men in gaining civil, political and social rights. Marshall was confident that it was possible “to assign the formative period in the life of each to a different century—civil rights to the eighteenth, political to the nineteenth and social to the twentieth” (1950:89). Walby however, argues that Marshall’s ordering of civil, political and social rights does not reflect women’s experience of having first to gain political rights in order to secure civil rights such as the right to make contracts, to own property and also to “body integrity” (Walby, 1994:387). She goes on to state that “without political victories neither civil nor social citizenship would have occurred” (Walby, 1994:389). This view is supported by Yuval-Davis in advocating for a “citizenship of difference”, that validates both the position of women and also their cultural diversity (Yuval-Davis, 1999:41).
A key to understanding Marshall’s framework is the connection between citizenship and community (Jayasuriya, 1996, Hall & Williamson, 2000). Marshall, (1977:70) observes that the status of citizenship brings with it “full membership of a community where membership entails participation by individuals in the determination of the conditions of their association”. However, Dahrendorf, (1996) argues that what really counts when considering citizenship is what people actually do and the extent and quality of their participation in urban community life.

On this note, research undertaken with over 1100 young people aged 13-25 in Australia around what the concept of citizenship meant to them and the impact of CCTV surveillance on their daily lives, provides some important data on their perceptions of these issues. The research was carried out through a self-completion survey, designed by young people in social planning and focus group sessions. The methodology included a modified Grounded Theory approach to data collection, coding and sorting, to excavate key themes emerging from the data for further, exhaustive analysis (Glaser, 2003). The challenge for any researcher employing grounded theory as a research methodology is formidable, due to the “labour intensive nature of the procedures of the management and processing of data and the development of theory” necessitating great dedication and due to its complexity, it may well diminish the active participation of children and young people as researchers (Dick, 2004:3). The researcher has to make grounded theory work for them and also the specific context, circumstances and subjects, of their research endeavours (McCarthy, 1999:2).

The promise of grounded theory is that it is rigorous, comes from the data, and is useful as a catalyst for social change because it both “fits and works” with the context in hand (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:7). Theory is “discovered from data” but it is necessary to avoid preconceived ideas or theoretical formulations that 'force' the data into existing intellectual silos or patterns of thought. In the course of my research work and the many conversations with young people, I sought to register the issues important to them, rather than those of paramount interest to others. The young people contributed to the setting of the research agenda, directly informing focus group sessions and development of the survey instrument. The key tasks are to listen well to what children and young people have to say and interpret this material faithfully in the data analysis (Moss & Petrie, 2002).

The self-report method adopted, where participants themselves completed the survey instrument, has grown in acceptance as a reliable methodological tool. Its use reflects the research values of treating young people with respect, based on both listening to and taking seriously the young person and what they have to say. The pursuit of rigour in the research process is of equal status to accepting what young people have to say about a wide range of issues that affect and interest them, as legitimate data for analysis, as Measor and Squires (2000), discovered in their work with young people in Brighton, England. Grounded theory as an approach to researching children and young people offers the opportunity to grow theory from the data so that what the young people say in their survey responses can be
listened to, even if this data is at variance with existing accounts of the lives and practices of young people (Grover, 2004).

Grounded theory begins with the text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A grounded theory is “readily applicable to and indicated by the data” and further, is “meaningfully relevant to and able to explain the behaviour under study” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:3). In the spirit of grounded theory, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss in their 1968 work with hospital patients, *Time for dying*, the drafting of the survey instrument came from the young people themselves, in order that theory emerges from the data and the situational context, rather than from an existing body of accepted knowledge. They found hospital patients to be at the receiving end of the decision-making and power structures inscribed within the institution of the hospital.

Arguably, the social world of young people is no less complex than that of nurse-patient – doctor-institution interactions, as there are a range of disparate, contradictory discourses structuring the category of ‘youth’ (Saggers et al., 2004: 20). Young people are often situated as anti-social and delinquent as well as the “guardians of the future” and also as vulnerable in a cruel, adult world, where innocence must be guarded (Loader, 1996; Malone, 2002). Young people also frequently find themselves at the receiving end of decision-making processes (White & Wyn, 2013) and this provides a relevant context for employing grounded theory as an analytical methodology (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). The direct involvement of the young people in the design of the survey instrument provided an “active” and dynamic element to the fieldwork (Denscombe, 2010:7).

In my research, asking respondents what the word ‘citizenship’ meant to them yielded a large amount of qualitative data, ranging from one or two words, to sentences and a meta-narrative emerged from aggregating similar responses constructing a system of meaning, positioning citizenship within a cluster of related concepts; *community-belonging-involvement-inclusion*. The word citizenship carries important meanings for most young people around belonging, community and taking part in community and national life. The importance of a sense of belonging to positive and secure identity formation and good physical, psychological, emotional and even spiritual wellbeing has been gaining prominence over a number of years (Zapf, 2010). Viewing urban public space from a range of perspectives encourages different vantage points to emerge and questions around health, wellbeing and public space are increasingly topical and important in the broadest of public policy terms, with public space being a key arena for physical activity, mental health, commercial, cultural and community life and the possibility of social inclusion.

The following comments from the survey indicate the importance of citizenship, as an expansive rather than exclusionary sense of *belonging* within an overarching notion of community:

- *Citizenship is being a citizen of an area or community, which is involved in its activities etc.* (Female 15)
• Citizenship means belonging to and participating in a community—be it local, national or global (Male 17)
• Citizenship is being a part of the community. Trying to help make your community a better place (Male 14)
• That word to me, (citizenship) means people in the community who are civilised, responsible, trusting (Female 15)

For many young people feeling wanted and being a part of their local and wider community is central to their identity formation and coherence both as a human and as a citizen. In this way as Chawla (2002), suggests, the link between public space being the public realm and a sense of oneself as a citizen, is constructed from the earliest good and bad, experiences:

The criteria by which young people evaluate their local environments form important indicators for several reasons. Children’s happiness is a good in itself, to be prized in the moment. A further benefit is that through satisfying experiences in the public realm, children have opportunities to grow into new roles and competencies. In the long term, the experiences of childhood form a foundation for the ‘habits of the heart’ of adulthood, in the sense of people’s accustomed relationships to their community, public life and public space (p. 221).

For the young people in this study, the word citizenship had a broad span of meanings, centred on belonging within a local community, indicated by a sense of inclusion and opportunities for involvement in the life of that community. Young people have an important contribution to make in community building and along the way can consolidate their personal sense of belonging as citizens. This is an important departure from the often negative feelings towards and about young people reported in the survey comments and also in the work of Bolzan (2003). Rarely, however are children and young people actively and respectfully brought into planning and governance processes and consequently many urban public spaces are essentially adult places, where control and ongoing surveillance are the key concerns and inclusion of children and young people a commercially driven afterthought (Harris, 2013).

While researchers argue that surveillance is not inherently designed to perpetuate inequality, they note that in contemporary society, where everyone is subject to some forms of surveillance “not everyone is monitored in the same way or for the same purposes” (Gilliom, 2001:48). Surveillance practices tend more often than not, to “coagulate more heavily on the more disadvantaged members of society” such as young people (Henman and Marston, 2008:201). Children and young people are highly visible users of urban public space as they have limited resources to effectively shield their presence from public view (White 1990; Dee 1995, Crane & Dee, 2001). According to Loader (1996) this visibility is a major factor:

More than any other social group, young people are dependent on a range of public places, especially in relation to the pursuit of leisure. Denied access (initially, at least, by reason of age) from a whole host of cultural amenities, young people come
to rely on local streets, city centres, shopping malls and the like as a means to build cultural identities away from the direct supervision of adult authority. Their social practices – both legal and illegal – are thus rendered public and visible (p.69).

Their “visibleness” (Dwyer, 2010:2) is a key issue for civic authorities increasingly concerned not just with what they do or might do in public space, but with what they wear including the now infamous ‘hoody’. As frequent “hanging out” (White, 1998:8) users of public space, children and young people are the target of a range of surveillance and control strategies including being ‘moved on’ (Spooner, 2001) “over policed” (Blagg & Wilkie, 1995:2), “under policed” (Loader, 1996:50) and in the UK, subject to “Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Dispersal Orders and Curfew Orders” (Flint, 2006:53). As Norris & Armstrong (1999), noted presciently, the CCTV surveillance-control gaze is far from neutral:

The gaze of the cameras does not fall equally on all users of the street but on those who are stereotypically predefined as potentially deviant, or through appearance and demeanour, are singled out by operators as unrespectable. In this way youth, particularly those already socially and economically marginal, may be subject to even greater levels of authoritative intervention and official stigmatisation, and rather than contributing to social justice through the reduction of victimisation, CCTV will merely become a tool of injustice through the amplification of differential and discriminatory policing (p.279).

Key respondents observations from my research were as follows:

- Public spaces such as streets, parks and transport nodes need supervision by human agents- camera surveillance alone does not give confidence that personal safety is assured;
- CCTV did not make respondents feel safe when using public places;
- Conversely perhaps, roughly equal numbers of respondents said there should be more CCTV as were opposed to further installation of CCTV;
- Key issues for many respondents centred on appropriate locations for CCTV, and its effectiveness in protecting them from harm in public space, rather than buildings.

In addition to CCTV, there are recent innovations in the repertoire of public space controls such as the mosquito, a device emitting a high pitched noise directly targeting children and young people under the age of 25 because their hearing is not yet fully developed (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006). Clearly, such a blunt instrument with blanket coverage over a forty metre range fails to differentiate fairly between groups or individual children and young people and more importantly, brooks no discussion about rights to use and enjoy public space in the same way that other age groups do (Ivseon, 2006). There is now a substantial body of critical material pointing to a social sorting and ordering of public space (Zurawski & Czerwinski, 2008) by civic authorities around the world that is almost
entirely driven by support for ‘conspicuous consumption’ and the exclusion, or at best, conditional inclusion, of ‘flawed consumers’ or ‘vagabonds’ (Baumann, 1998:14). CCTV and other modes of surveillance are central to attempts to govern and contain the potentially “dangerous classes” (MacDonald, 1997:47) who are financially poor or simply maladapted to meet the required neo-liberal value set of “gentrified” and “creative cities” as places fit for conspicuous consumption (Atkinson & Easthope, 2009:71). Efforts to erect ‘rings of steel’ around Central Business Districts to give comfort to desired users of public with pledges of ‘safe’ family shopping/entertainment/lifestyle environments, are sustained at public expense to ensure private accumulation, but often run counter to civic advertising playing on the importance of ‘celebrating diversity’ and the inclusion of all in ‘the community’ including children and young people (Clavell, 2011; Dee, 2015).

Urban Citizenship

The case can be made for the retention of concepts of universal civil, political and social rights, alongside and in a creative tension with, a contemporary recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity. Lister, (1998:42) seeks to increase the inclusionary potential of citizenship, while acknowledging its “power as a force for exclusion”. To this end, she suggests a refurbishment of Marshall’s concept of social citizenship, to take account of the “multiple citizenships and identities” reflecting the complexities of contemporary life (Lister, 1998:42).

Reconstituting Marshall’s work in this way, using his schema as a basis for contemporary analyses is supported by Cohen, (2005:222) in adding cultural, ethnic and gendered citizenships to the existing civil, political and social mix of ingredients. A further argument can be put that a distinctive urban citizenship exists in many Western societies forged in large measure, from the political, economic and social processes and struggles over time, set out in Marshall’s paradigm (Tonkiss, 2005). There is not the space here to consider similar arguments for rural settings and this task rests with further work to be undertaken. For many people around the globe the city, or urban settlement, still acts as a magnet for jobs, housing and aspects of social improvement and freedoms, despite particularly in some developing countries, the persistent presence of poverty, disease, social unrest and other issues. Writers like Hollis propose that “Cities are good for you” (2013:130), pointing to the Janus faced challenge that population density, the very marker of most globalizing cities, holds in bringing together in a certain economy of scale resources, people, markets and opportunities This stands alongside and in a rasping tension with, overcrowding, domination of the motor car, worn out urban infrastructure and racial and other tensions:

Density defines a city, and therefore the community. It is the key problem when there is overcrowding, the network through which diseases can decimate a neighbourhood; when things get too crammed, density turns old parts of the city into slums, where poverty huddles and becomes stuck. It is the overfull bus that forces you to wait for the next one. It is the social-housing waiting list that leaves some children in poverty only a few hundred yards from the richest enclaves in London. It is the equation behind the
queue for the water tap in the Mumbai slums, and the ten-hour traffic jam in Lagos. With the prospect of increased urbanization in the next thirty years, particularly in parts of the world where there are already problems of managing the infrastructure, density could easily be the biggest challenge of our age.

The growing, ubiquitous edifice around the world of the ‘smart city’ in all its forms, offers both promise for positive change and renewed citizen participation and threat, in a furthering of the security crackdown of the ‘fortress city’. So much of the ‘smart city’, sensor driven discourse is accepted as plain ‘commonsense’ with little critical examination of consequences as well as ‘win-win’ outcomes, so beloved of the development lobby (Minton, 2012). For Gabrys, (2014:2) “The intersection of smart and sustainable urbanisms is an area of study that has yet to be examined in detail, particularly in relation to what modalities of urban environmental citizenship are emphasized or even eliminated in the smart city”.

Conclusion

In current times, with conflicts in numerous parts of the globe, the threat of health pandemics and continuing fallout from the Global Financial Crisis, questions of urban citizenship may appear to be the concerns of a bygone age, but it is in urban spaces and places that many of the possibilities for a society are staged, day to day, with ramifications, both intended and unintended that need to be scrutinized and brought under public, rather than private, control ownership and oversight (Sleight, 2013). When the governance and control aspirations of civic authorities, centred on a palette of surveillance measures, are factored in to the urban equation, then in tandem with Marshall’s, (1950) scheme of political, social and civil citizenships a rights-based urban citizenship which offers rights to data protection, accountability over all forms of surveillance, entitlement to employment, housing, a good environment and city planning and development, has much to offer (Minton, 2012).
References


Contact Mike Dee: m.dee@qut.edu.au