Camera Project

During a daily walk through IU’s campus and my commute to and from campus I encountered 27 security cameras. In buildings and buses, these cameras are almost exclusively installed near doors or stairways where the volume of foot traffic is highest. The only exception to this were cameras placed over cash registers, but again this is another area with high foot traffic though I suspect the placement of these cameras serve another purpose in discouraging theft. In my opinion, the location of all these cameras makes sense and therefore I believe they are an effective use of video surveillance.

Buses, for example, contain two cameras placed over the front and rear doors. There is another camera at the front looking backwards with a view of the entire bus. Countering that is a camera at the back of the bus with a view of the entire bus looking forward. Finally, there is a camera sitting over the driver. I speculate that these buses also likely have a dash cam of sorts but I was unable to spot one. The cameras viewing the front and rear doors make sense as it gives the bus system operators a view of every passenger entering and exiting the bus. The driver can view the rear exit camera so they can monitor the number of passengers leaving the bus as well as catch anyone trying to sneak into the bus without paying the proper fare. The camera over the driver likely monitors the conduct of the driver in their interactions with passengers. In my opinion, this camera critically provides a layer of security for both driver and passenger as any misconduct by either party will be captured and reviewed if necessary. Overall, I feel like the security camera system on buses is extremely effective as it covers every corner of the bus. This can greatly decrease the likelihood of theft or violence on the bus as these cameras provide excellent evidence in any potential criminal case.

The monitoring of every common space in a building through camera surveillance is a much more difficult challenge. As I reported earlier in this document, almost all the cameras I observed in buildings were located at entrances and exits or near stairwells, excluding those over cash registers. In my opinion, the cameras over cash registers provide an almost identical layer of security and surveillance as the camera placed over the bus driver. In addition to being a student, I also work part-time for the university. My office is located in the Poplars building. Just inside the main lobby is a reception desk where there is a guard stationed every week day during normal business hours (8am-5pm) who has multiple monitors where they can view every security camera in the building and notify the proper authorities if they observe any suspicious or malicious behavior. I was unable to find another guard station at any other building I observed, but I assume there is at least a centralized location where folks can monitor these cameras.

I don’t believe we are giving anything up by allowing these security cameras to be placed on public transportation, academic buildings, or offices. There are many threats we could potentially face on a daily basis and I believe the placement of security cameras in the locations described above maximizes security while minimizing personal privacy invasion. We should also expect the presence of security cameras in public spaces as they serve more purposes than just protecting the personal safety of people within that building. Businesses and similar offices need to protect themselves against theft and unauthorized entry and security cameras provide an effective tool for catching and discouraging this behavior.

If I were the bad guy there are a few strategies I could use to defeat the cameras. First, I could try to obstruct the cameras. There are a few ways you can obstruct the camera. You could block the camera by covering it or moving objects between yourself and the camera. Also, some cameras are vulnerable to having things like lasers or flashlights shown at them as they create a blinding effect for the camera. If obstructing the camera isn’t an option there is always trying to disguise yourself to conceal your identity. You could wear clothing that covers your face like a hat or a hooded sweatshirt. Also, if the security camera is in a store you could try to make yourself look like an employee by imitating their uniform. This might make it more difficult for a security guard observing the cameras to differentiate between your disguise and a legitimate employee therefore making it easier for you to carry out your plan.
If you’re trying to counter bad guys as the owner of an establishment with security cameras there are a few options. Most cameras on the market today have protective domes that are specifically designed to protect the cameras from being directly tampered with. They also have dark shaded domes which conceal the direction the camera is looking. Additionally, many retail stores contain cameras that are also placed at eye level or lower than the normal ceiling or wall-mounted camera. This helps reveal the identity of someone by giving a clear view of their face, even if they are covered with a hood or hat. These cameras could be placed at a cash register or at an exit as this is likely a location where the individual will need to look down. Another option is to connect your security camera system. By this I mean your cameras should be placed in a setup that allows each camera to see the location of another camera. If one camera is obstructed or knocked offline, another camera in your system will have a view of that that can be used to investigate who might be responsible and how they tampered with that camera. Finally, it is important to have cameras outside the establishment as well as someone looking to commit a crime likely won’t try to disguise themselves until the last possible moment to avoid looking suspicious.