

David Cotterrell: Paranoia of a London Attache Case (v)

Date: 3rd June 1996

Materials:

Seven Channel Video Installation (22mins) filmed with the Bank/Monument Underground CCTV security system

CCTV's on London Underground are involved in a frantic tracing game of an unidentified attache case

Cotterrell produced The Paranoia of a London Attach Case as part of his final year degree show at Winchester College of Art and Design. First shown at the London Transport Museum, the installation of 7 videos played concurrently on 7 monitors, follows the journey of an attach case as it is carried through the maze-like platforms, corridors and escalators of Bank/Monument underground station.

All footage is filmed using the stations security cameras, which Cotterrell was granted access to in the time leading up to morning rush hour. A microphone concealed in the case records the accompanying audio, a succession of muffled bumps, footsteps, beeps and screeching wheels. Edited live on site, the film is difficult to follow: although we are able to hear the movements of the case, the cameras cannot always show us where it is. That this extensive CCTV network has such gaps in its perception becomes a point of paranoid concern: what exactly is going on when we cannot see the case and its carrier?

The 22-minute film begins with a woman placing the case on an empty platform. The woman leaves and the case is effectively abandoned. Soon, footsteps are heard, and a man appears. He takes the case and walks away to have his movements tracked by the 81 cameras. Ultimately, the case arrives where it was first placed: the man places it on the platform and exits, leaving the case ready for its next transport circuit. The work is accompanied by a series of photographs, ostensibly portraits of passers-by on the streets above the station. However, all images share a common feature: somewhere in the frame lurks a CCTV camera.

While Cotterrell gained consent to photograph people, his real subjects, the surveillance cameras, are legally protected from such close scrutiny. While Article 8 of the 1998 Human Rights Act allows for the right to privacy for individuals, it does so only when this right does not interfere with matters of national security, public safety or economic prosperity. So, while people travelling in a law abiding manner have no right to oppose the recording of their movement, the surveillance systems which track these people possess a right to anonymity denied their subjects.



Unattended Package Credit: David Cotterrell (1996)



Approaching DLR Platform Credit: David Cotterrell (1996)