

## Introduction

In light of recent surveillance developments — social media breaches, smart city projects, workplace monitoring — we need to consider the implications and critically examine the logics and practices within big data systems that underpin, enable, and accelerate surveillance. As part of an international multiphase project on Big Data Surveillance, in 2018- 2019 the Surveillance Studies Centre produced three short films speculating surveillance futures and the effects of deeply embedded and connected surveillant systems on our everyday lives. Intended as public education tools to spark discussion and extend understandings of surveillance, trust, and privacy in the digital age, each film focuses on a different aspect of big data surveillance and the tensions that manifest when the human is interpreted by the machine.

Each film is approximately 10 minutes long, and here are short descriptions of each:

- *Blaxites* is a film that follows the story of a young woman whose celebratory social media post affects her access to vital medication. Her attempts to circumvent the system leads to even more dire consequences. In *Blaxites*, we highlight issues that arise when different data systems are connected.
- In *A Model Employee*, to keep her day job at a local restaurant, an aspiring DJ has to wear a tracking wristband. As it tracks her life outside of work, she tries to fool the system, but a new device upgrade means trouble. In *A Model Employee*, we examine data ownership and the need to earn a system's trust.
- In *Frames*, a smart city tracks and analyzes a woman walking through the city. Things she does are interpreted and logged by the city system, but are they drawing an accurate picture of the woman? In *Frames*, we highlight the problems in trusting sensor data and facial recognition to interpret human behavior.

The films raise issues in our understandings of trust and surveilled relations. This facilitator guide is intended to support organised screenings and discussions of the films. Each guide provides a brief film synopsis, questions for discussion, suggested activities, and offers a closing conversation.

### How to analyse a film

Film analysis combines literary, audio, and visual analysis—you will need to pay conscious attention to narrative, audio cues, and visual elements (including written text): characters, setting, dialogue, sound design, music, cinematography, shot composition, lighting, etc. To analyse a film, you engage with all the different elements, and analyse and evaluate them. Questions to guide film analysis include:

- What is the film about? What themes are addressed?
- What is its narrative structure? How does the plot unfold?
- Are there any recurring visual elements?
- Who are the characters, and what roles do they play? What are they wearing, and what does this say about them?
- Where is power located in the film, i.e. who has power, who acquires power, who loses power, who is powerless? Why?
- Where is the film set? And in what time period (e.g. futuristic, contemporary, historical)?
- What are the different locations throughout the film?
- What do you think the director is trying to achieve through this film?
- How did you feel throughout the film? Why?

For example, the three films here are all set in urban environments in a very-near future. All of the protagonists are young women of colour, in possession of smartphones, and all are being monitored and regulated by technology in different ways. Each film presents the possible implications of a particular surveillance technology, and through this facilitator's guide, invites the viewer to develop some kind of sociotechnological literacy to address the privacy and surveillance concerns raised.

The facilitator's role is to guide discussion about the content of the films, and the larger social context of the implications of surveillance technologies. As a teaching tool, these films offer many different discussion nodes about the intersections of technology and society. Topics for discussion include smart cities, mental health, workplace safety.

## Facilitator Guide *A Model Employee* (2019) | Leila Khalilzadeh (Director), Tim Maughan (Writer)

### Synopsis

In *A Model Employee*, to keep her day job at a local restaurant, an aspiring DJ has to wear a tracking wristband. As it tracks her life outside of work, she tries to fool the system, but a new device upgrade means trouble.

### Discussion Questions

- What do we know about Neeta in this film?
- What motivations do you think each of the characters have for the decisions they make: Neeta, Mr. Singh, and Rupa? Why do they make the decisions and choices they do? What are their values?
- The monitoring system informs Neeta that she is in a particularly undesirable neighbourhood—where does the system receive this information from? And related, what information is the system compiling about Neeta?
- Is it possible that, in monitoring Neeta's movements, nearby police may be notified about her presence in a high-crime area and place her under increased surveillance as a suspected victim or perpetrator of a crime?
- Neeta's mother is an invisible presence in the film, and yet she finds out about Neeta's clandestine night-time movements. While it's never made clear in the film, the implication that Neeta's mother may have access to the information collected by Mr. Singh and the *A Model Employee* software raises questions about how Neeta's data is collected, stored, and shared. What concerns are raised by data sharing?

**Suggested  
Activities**

A small business employer is implicated in the monitoring and regulation of his employees. Guided by a desire to increase efficiency and therefore profit, his subscription to a reward-based system that becomes increasingly intrusive further blurs the line between labour and leisure. For example, Mr. Singh comments on her sleeping habits and suggests that she should go out more. What workplace boundaries are being violated (if any)?

Both Neeta and Mr. Singh want to make more money. Neeta is concerned with appearing as a model employee so that she can receive bonuses to buy DJ equipment and Mr. Singh is trying to motivate her to work harder in order to increase the restaurant's profits. Workplaces may monitor employees for various reasons: increasing efficiency and productivity; protecting property; maintaining standards; awarding bonuses or applying penalties; dispute resolution. The arm bracelet that Neeta is required to wear contains echoes of an electronic ankle monitor used for prisoners on house arrest. What are the ethical implications of monitoring (and commenting on someone's movements)? What parallels are there to monitoring and controlling someone's movements as a crime punishment or deterrence?

Often, when dialing into customer service lines, you will be informed that a call may be recorded for monitoring or training purposes. Sometimes, the recordings are used to collect biometric data under the auspices of using voice recognition to verify identity. By law, companies are required to provide you with these recordings if requested, however, you have no control over how they are used (the law in Canada states that companies can only use the recordings for the stated purpose, and so your recording can be used in training settings). If you do not wish to be recorded, you need to find another way to receive the service you need, e.g. in-store or online. This type of monitoring has set the precedent for the increasing surveillance in workplaces and consumer exchanges—what other types of workplace monitoring can you come up with?

**In Closing**

At the end of this film, we see Rupa being picked up and arrested by an unknown security force—she is being punished for wearing Neeta’s monitoring arm bracelet. Neither sister was aware of the illegal implications of their actions, and the appearance of the legal warning on the screen was an echo of the End User License Agreements very few people actually read. The fallout for a young, racialized daughter of a single mother can be devastating, and these technologies of surveillance will unfairly discriminate and disproportionately affects members of marginalized groups. In what ways can these effects be countered?

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