

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.

Facilitator Guide Frames (2019) | Farhad Pakdel (Director), Madeline Ashby (Writer)

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 Frames (2019) | Farhad Pakdel (Director), Madeline Ashby (Writer)

Synopsis

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?

Note: In analyzing and discussing this film, it is important to be sensitive to possibly triggering discussions, specifically about suicide.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about smart cities?
- What is the difference between public and private space in the film?
- Do you think that she knew she was being watched/observed?
- The deposit to the café worker's bank account was also documented by the surveillance system: what else was being tracked? Some of the imagery showed her movements being tracked, as well as her purchases and desires (looking through a store window): what do you think the information was being used for.
- There doesn't appear to be the option not to be tracked, and implied consent comes into play here (i.e. if you are in public space, you consent to monitored/surveilled). What about people who are unable to give consent, e.g. minors or people under the influence?

Facilitator Guide Frames (2019) | Farhad Pakdel (Director), Madeline Ashby (Writer)

Suggested Activities

Would you be able to track your own movements as thoroughly as the city's software can? What tools would you use, and what would you do with the information that you have gathered?

What ways can you come up with to avoid being recognized by a smart city?

Smart cities are regulated and governed through the application of collected data to achieve more efficient infrastructure and safer public spaces: what challenges or problems can you see with this data-driven approach to cities?

In Closing

The suicide ending of this film may be triggering for some viewers for various reasons. It is important to be aware of this and offer to direct people to available services as required. A growing awareness of managing a post-death online presence has grown into an industry, and a discussion on how one's internet presence should be managed after death: who does the content belong to, and who can make decisions about what should be archived and what should be erased? What would legislation around online presence need to address? What would be in your "digital will"?

This project has been funded by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC); the views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the OPC.

This project was also supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



SCREENING
SURVEILLANCE