

Surveillance Media



Still from *Coded Bias*

Instructor: Gary Kafer

Email: gkafer@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: by appointment on Wednesdays (virtual)

Course Description:

Surveillance media are ubiquitous: in your pocket, on the street, at school, underground, and in the air. They work incessantly and quietly, often without our knowledge but always with the goal of producing knowledge about us. But they don't do so equally. Wedded to concepts of security, risk, and crisis, surveillance is itself a technology of power. While some of us benefit from surveillance in certain contexts, many others are disproportionately targeted based on differences of race, gender, sexuality, class, religious affiliation, ability, citizenship, and more.

This course will explore how surveillance media distribute power in the United States and across its global connections. Throughout, we will understand *surveillance media* not only as the specific technologies used for surveillance, but also how these technologies differentially mediate our bodies, behaviors, communities, and political relationships. Beginning with theoretical frameworks of surveillance, this course will track surveillance media across various sites and systems. These include borders, policing, drones, algorithms, and labor. In each, we will examine both contemporary and historical materials in order to consider how our dominant ideas and values about surveillance media are rooted in the ideologies and violences of capitalism, colonialism, and empire. We conclude by exploring modalities of resistance in art and grassroots organizing that imagine more just futures.

As surveillance is a complex and multifaceted concept, our study of it will be interdisciplinary. In addition to foundational texts in surveillance studies, we will engage a variety of materials from media studies, critical race studies, social sciences, queer and feminist studies, computer

science, history, communications, and more. In addition, screenings include fictional narrative short and feature film, documentary, television, video games, contemporary art, instructional videos, webinars, and workshops.

This course is relevant for students in Cinema and Media Studies, as well as related programs and departments, including MAAD, Fundamentals, Gender and Sexuality, English, and more.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- understand key concepts, theories, and debates in surveillance studies.
- evaluate surveillance as a historical and transnational process in relation to contemporary American society.
- analyze surveillance media through an intersectional lens, including focus on race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, disability, and citizenship.
- use visual analysis as a method for critiquing the aesthetic and technological dynamics of surveillance.
- produce a toolkit to educate a wider public about a specific surveillance technology.

Readings

All readings will be available through Canvas unless otherwise indicated.

Assignments

1. Critical Reading Responses (300 points total, 50 each)

In order to deepen class discussion, all students will be required to write a brief critical response to the readings listed for Session 1 of each week. Responses shouldn't simply summarize the readings. Rather, these responses will be graded based on how they identify key quotes, concepts, and questions from the readings and expand upon their arguments. Responses should be posted online by Monday 5pm. In general, posts should be around 2-3 paragraphs in length, but please do not exceed more than 3 paragraphs. Over the course of the quarter, you may skip 2 post. In total, you must post 6 times. Week 1 will not count. You will receive a summary of your grades at the end of Week 3, 6, and 10.

2. Current Event Report (50 points)

One time over the course of the quarter, each student should complete a current event report about a specific surveillance technology.

- First, identify a current event or news article from a reputable source related to our conversations in class. The article should be no older than one month.
- Second, write a 500 word critical response to the event. What kinds of issues or concerns does the article discuss or not discuss? What questions do you have? What kind of evidence or method does the article use to report on the surveillance technology or system in question? What kind of tone does the article take? Does it have a political bias? Select one or two texts to consider in relation to your article. How does this event demonstrate key ideas or concepts from the readings? How does it complicate them or suggest the need to update them?

- Third, submit your report via email as a .doc file and post in the Canvas discussion board.

3. Midterm Paper (100 points)

An Intimate Portrait of Surveillance

In this paper, you must become intimate with a surveillance technology that you experience in your everyday life. The goal of this assignment is to call attention to something that often goes unnoticed and to think critically about how it *mediates* your affect, body, behavior, and social interactions. The choice of technology is your own. Some examples include: smart phones, fitness trackers, a social media app, video gaming systems, CCTV, credit cards, identification cards, transit passes, VR headsets, webcams, etc. Write about your encounters with this technology and consider how it does or does not enter into your frame of experience. When do you notice it and when does it recede from attention? What kinds of feelings, emotions, or moods does this technology elicit or invite? Discuss how it works and what it's designed to detect. What kind of information is being collected? How/when do you know? In addition, imagine how another person might experience this technology. For whom is this technology optimal, and how would you define what is "optimal" for this technology? For what context(s) is this technology designed? Papers should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font. This assignment is due at the end of week 4.

4. Final Group Project (400 points)

Surveillance Tech Toolkit

For your final project, your assigned group (approx. 4-5 students) must create a toolkit about a surveillance technology of your choosing. Each toolkit should aim to introduce a general public to a given surveillance technology (how it operates, who uses it, where it is used) and provide strategies for collective critique and resistance. The toolkit is *not* a research paper. Instead, the toolkit should be considered to be a creative project that is helpful for understanding surveillance technology and its broader social, political, and cultural effects. The final toolkit can take a number of forms – e.g. a dossier, a zine, a film, a policy report, a game design document, a podcast... Reference materials will be discussed in class.

The choice of technology is your own. However, be *specific*. Instead of "biometrics," opt for iris scanning, fingerprinting, facial recognition, gait detection, or speech detection. Other examples include automated license plate readers, backscatter x-rays, low-earth orbit satellites, thermal imaging cameras, cell site simulators, police body cameras, prison video visitation systems, tethered aerostat radar system, and ground sensors. You might also choose to focus on a company-specific technology (e.g. PredPol, ShotSpotter, EdgeRank, CLEAR, Google Earth, Zoom). Take advantage of office hours ahead of time to begin discussing your technology and toolkit with the instructor!

Abstract: In week 7, your group will submit an abstract (300-400 words) for your final project along with a short (3-5) bibliography of sources necessary for studying your technology. In the abstract, introduce your project and comment upon the type of work necessary to produce your toolkit, any prerequisite research and technical experience, and division of labor within the group. The abstract should also connect the final project to key concept and themes from the

course and provide an indication of the theoretical, conceptual, and/or artistic dimensions of the project and why this might be innovative or compelling for a general public audience.

In-class Presentations & Critique: During our final class session, each group will present their project in its current state (i.e. in-progress). Each presentation should be about 12-15 minutes. Your classmates will provide peer-critique to help develop the project and answer any remaining questions.

Individual Reflection: Along with your final group project, each student should submit an individual reflection (8-10 pg, double-spaced) about the project that does three things. First, it should provide the student's *own* analysis of the toolkit. Of course, groups should collaborate on their toolkit, sharing resources, and analyzing media together. However, this reflection is meant to encourage each student to express their own perspective on their toolkit and how it intersects with the theories, concepts, histories, and aesthetic issues that we explored together in class. This part of the reflection should cite from texts we read in class and delve into any necessary outside research required to thoroughly study your technology of choice. Second, each reflection should comment on the collaborative experience and how this might reflect something about collective organizing, solidarity, and/or community engagement. Remember: this final project is a group project because we take it as a given that any and all serious resistance against surveillance must always be collective. Consider the following questions to write this part of the reflection: What was it like working with peers from similar or different disciplines? What kinds of questions emerged from collaborative discussion? What kinds of things might you have not considered on your own? How did different viewpoints reveal something about the operation or use of your specific technology? How did different viewpoints reveal something about resistance to that technology? Third, if given more time and resources, what might you revise or expand upon in your toolkit? How and where might your toolkit be distributed? What kind of audience or public might your toolkit best serve and why?

Due Date: Both the final toolkit and the individual reflections are due at the end of Week 11 (specific date/time TBD).

Grade Distribution

Attendance + Participation: 15%
Critical Reading Responses: 30%
Current Event Report: 5%
Midterm Paper: 10%
Final Project: 40%

Class Policies

Attendance: The quarter is short and we have only so little time together. As such, attendance is critical to the success of this class and students are expected to come to every meeting. Of course, situations arise. If there are illnesses and emergencies, absences can be excused. However, no more than one unexcused absences will be allowed for the quarter. More than this

will result in a lowering of one's grade. If you know you will be missing a specific meeting, you should approach the instructor ahead of time.

Late work: Life happens, and sometimes the best of us can't complete assignments on time. In the case of personal, medical, or family emergencies, you may request an extension *up to 24 hours before* the due date (no last minute requests). Extensions are not available for the final project.

Technology: Computers make for wonderful teaching and learning devices. Unfortunately, they also make for wonderful distractions. Please be mindful of how you engage with computers and phones in class so as not to negatively impact the learning experience of your classmates. If I notice that technology is beginning to become a hinderance, we will have a collective conversation about how to move forward to create a better learning environment.

Class climate: Above all, be respectful towards each other. This means listening and learning from one another, leaving space open for others to talk, and being constructive toward other's ideas.

Accessibility and Accommodation

I am committed to making this course accessibly to all University of Chicago students, including those with mental, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illness, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that tends to negatively affect one's equal access to education. If you find yourself not able to fully participate in the course or complete requirements, I encourage you to contact me in order to discuss your needs and potential solutions. I also encourage you to contact Student Disability Services for resources and procedures: <https://disabilities.uchicago.edu>.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated in this class, and will result in a failing grade. Documented instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean's Office. If you have any questions about your essay and following proper guidelines, feel free to attend office hours to discuss your work. For a guide to the university's policy on academic honesty, please see: <http://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/Policies>

Course content, stressors, and student wellness

Moving images draw upon the vast world for its representations, and the material in this course contains the full range of that world. I am sensitive to the possibility that certain types of images may be upsetting to some students, and thus I will do my best to flag certain content in the introduction to each screening. However, as this may be different for each person, I encourage anyone in the class who is aware of being triggered by specific material to communicate with me in advance so that we can try to make a plan together. Please also know that UChicago has a wide range of support systems to help you navigate the challenges of student life. Many of them are listed here: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/about/services>. For academic-related stress, I strongly encourage you to make appointments for office hours early in the quarter and as often as you need.

Citational Ethics

While the design of this course is my own, I found inspirational a number of syllabi for courses on surveillance studies from Simone Browne, Marnie Ritchie, Amber Hickey, and Torin Monahan.

SCHEDULE

UNIT 1 | FRAMEWORKS

Week 1: Models of Surveillance – Discipline and Control

Session 1 (9/28)

Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,” in *Surveillance Studies: A Reader* (1975/2018), 36-41.

Screening

Citizenfour (Laura Poitras, 2014, 113min)

Session 2 (9/30)

Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (1992): 3-7.

Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson, “The Surveillant Assemblage,” in *Surveillance Studies: A Reader* (2000/2018), 47-50.

Optional

Bart Simon, “The Return of Panopticism: Supervision, Subjection and the New Surveillance,” *Surveillance & Society* 3.1 (2005): 1-20.

Week 2: Crisis in the Post-9/11 (In)Security State

Session 1 (10/5)

Torin Monahan, “Securing the Homeland,” in *Surveillance in the Time of Insecurity* (2010), 15-25.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Chap. 11 “Foresight – and Hindsight,” *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), 339-360.

Optional

Michel Foucault, Chap 11, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76* (2003)

Screening

Black Mirror, “Arkangel,” (S4E2, 2017, 52min)

Electric Dreams, “Safe and Sound” (S1E6, 2018, 48min)

Session 2 (10/7)

Inderpal Grewal, “‘Security Moms’ and ‘Security Feminists’: Securitizing Family and State,” in *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First-Century America* (2017), 118-143.

Optional

Rachel Hall, “Expecting the Worst: Active Shooter Scenario Play in American Schools,” in *Future Proof: Security Aesthetics and the Management of Life* (2020), 175-199.

Week 3: Racializing Surveillance

Session 1 (10/12)

Simone Browne, “Notes on Surveillance Studies: Through the Door of No Return,” *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), 31-62.

Malkia Cyril, “Watching the Black Body,” in *The End of Trust* (2018), 134-146.

Federal Bureau of Investigations, “Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers” (2017), 1-12.

Screening

Arab American Action Network, selection of Youth PSA videos (2014, 6min)

Muslim Youth Voices, “Identity Crisis” (S1E17, 2015, 3min)

The Feeling of Being Watched (Assia Boundaoui, 2018, 87min)

Session 2 (10/14)

Saher Selod, “Introduction: Racialized Surveillance in the War on Terror,” *Forever Suspect: Racialized Surveillance of Muslim Americans in the War on Terror* (2018), 1-29.

Optional

Sara Kamali, “Informants, Provocateurs, and Entrapment: Examining the Histories of the FBI’s PATCON and the NYPD’s Muslim Surveillance Program,” *Surveillance & Society* 15.1 (2017): 68-78.

Jasbir Puar, “‘The Hat is Not a Turban’: Queer Diaspora and the Practices of Profiling,” *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), 166-202.

UNIT 2 | TECHNOLOGIES, SYSTEMS, SITES

Week 4: Algorithms – Proxies, Patterns, Discrimination

Session 1 (10/19)

Boaz Levin and Vera Tollmann, “Proxy Politics: Power and Subversion in a Networked Age,” in *Proxy Politics* (2017), 9-13.

John Cheney-Lippold, "Categorization: Making Data Useful," *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Digital Selves* (2017), 37-92. **Available to read online through the library.

Optional

Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page, "The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine," *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems* 30 (1998): 107-117

Louise Amoore, "The Learning Machines: Neural Networks and Regimes of Recognition," *Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others* (2020), 56-81.

Momin Malik, "A Hierarchy of Limitations in Machine Learning," arXiv.org, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2002.05193>

Screening

Frames (Farhad Pakdel and sava sahel singh, 2019, 11min)

Blaxites (Josh Lyon and sava sahel singh, 2019, 12min)

A Model Employee (Leila Khalilzadeh and sava sahel singh, 2019, 16min)

Coded Bias (Shalini Kantayya, 2020, 90min)

Session 2 (10/21)

Ruha Benjamin, "Default Discrimination: Is the Glitch Systematic?" *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (2019), 77-96.

Optional

Cathy O'Neil, "What is a Model?" *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (2016), 15-31.

Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru, "Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification," *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research* 81 (2018): 1-15.

**** Midterm paper DUE by end of the week****

Week 5: Policing – Data, Prediction, Blackness

Session 1 (10/26)

Christian Parenti, "Antebellum ID: Genealogies of Identification and Registration," *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America: From Slaves Passes to the War on Terror* (2003), 13-32.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, "Introduction: The Mismeasure of Crime," *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (2010/2019), 1-14.

Optional

Simone Browne, “‘Everybody’s Got a Little Light Under the Sun’: The Making of *The Book of Negroes*,” *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), 63-88.

Joshua Reeves and Jeremy Packer, “Police Media: The Governance of Territory, Speed, and Communication,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10.4 (2013): 359-384.

Screening

PredPol, “The Science Behind and Street Level Testing of PredPol” (2015, 33min), excerpted
PredPol, “PredPol Analytics Dashboard Training Video” (2018, 2min)

StopLAPD Spying Coalition, “Surveillance Teach-In Part 4” (2020, 61min), excerpted

Session 2 (10/28)

R. Joshua Scannell, “This is Not *Minority Report*: Predictive Policing and Population Racism,” in *Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life* (2019), 107-129.

Stop LAPD Spying Coalition and Free Radicals, “The Algorithmic Ecology: An Abolitionist Tool for Organizing Against Algorithms,” <https://stoplapdspying.medium.com/the-algorithmic-ecology-an-abolitionist-tool-for-organizing-against-algorithms-14fcbd0e64d0>

Optional

Aaron Shapiro, “Predictive Policing for Reform? Indeterminacy and Intervention in Big Data Policing,” *Surveillance & Society* 17.3/4 (2019): 456-472

Week 6: Borders – Biometrics, Screening, Mobility

Session 1 (11/2)

Louise Amoore, “Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror,” *Political Geography* 25 (2006): 336-351.

Shannon Mattern, “All Eyes on the Border,” *Places Journal* (2018):
<https://placesjournal.org/article/all-eyes-on-the-border/>

Optional

Kelly Gates, “Biometrics and Post-9/11 Technostalgia,” *Social Text* 83 23.2 (2005): 35-53.

Joseph Pugliese, “Biometrics, Infrastructural Whiteness, and the Racialized Zero Degree of Nonrepresentation,” *boundary 2* 34.2 (2007): 105-133.

Simone Browne, “B@anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness,” *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), 89-130.

Screening (complete at home!)

Selection of TSA Cares Instructional Videos (approx. 15min)

Papers, Please (Lucas Pope, 2013, play for at least 2 hours)

**game files will be available to download on your own computer (Mac/PC)

Session 2 (11/4)

Lisa Parks, "Searching: Screening Practices as US Airport Security Checkpoints," *Rethinking Media Coverage* (2018), 64-100.

Optional

Toby Beauchamp, "Flying under the Radar," *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices* (2019), 50-78.

Simone Browne, "'What Did TSA Find in Solange's Fro?': Security Theater at the Airport," *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), 131-160.

Saher Selod, "Flying While Muslim: State Surveillance of Muslim Americans in U.S Airport" in *Forever Suspect: Racialized Surveillance of Muslim Americans in the War on Terror* (2018), 49-74. **available to read online through the library

Week 7: Drones – Evidence, Violence, Testimony

Session 1 (11/9)

Daniel Grinberg, "Tracking movements: Black activism, aerial surveillance, and transparency optics," *Media, Culture & Society* 41.3 (2019): 294–316.

Witness Media Lab, "EYES IN THE SKY: Drones at Standing Rock and the Next Frontier of Human Rights Video," <https://lab.witness.org/projects/drones-standing-rock>

Optional

Lisa Parks, "Targeting: Mediating US Drone Wars," *Rethinking Media Coverage* (2018), 143-189.

Ronak Kapadia, Ch1 "Up in the Air: US Aerial Power and the Visual Life of Empire in the Drone Age," *Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of the Forever War* (2019), 44-75.

Screening

Drone Strike Investigation Cases, no. 1-4 (Forensic Architecture, 2013-14, 28 min)

5000 Feet is the Best (Omer Fast, 2011, 30min)

Home Movies Gaza (Basma Alsharif, 2013, 24min)

Session 2 (11/11)

Eyal Weizman, "Violence at the Threshold of Detectability," *e-flux* 64 (2015): 1-14.

International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford Law School) & Global Justice Clinic (NYU School of Law), Chapter 3 "Living Under Drones – Voices from Below: Accounts of Three Drone Strikes," *Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan* (2012), 55-73.

Optional

Brandon Bryant, "Letter from a Sensor Operator," *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare* (2017), 315-323.

**** Abstract for final project DUE at end of the week ****

UNIT 3 | RESISTANCE

Week 8: Politics + Art

Section 1 (11/16)

Steve Mann, "Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments," in *Surveillance Studies: A Reader* (2002/2018), 347-350.

bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), 115-131.

Shaka McGlotten, "Black Data," in *No Tea, No Shade: New Writing in Black Queer Studies* (2016), 262-286.

Optional

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Introduction: The Right to Look," *Critical Inquiry* (2011), 473-496.

Joshua Reeves, "Looking the Other Way," *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America's Surveillance Society* (2017), 169-180.

Screening

Artist films:

Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Suite* (video communiqué, 2011-14, 8min)

Heather Dewey-Hagborg, *Stranger Visions; DNA Spoofing; Invisible* (2013-14, 10min)

Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013, 16min)

Artist interviews/talks/studio visits:

Trevor Paglen, Limit Telephotography series (c. 2010-12) and Undersea Cable series (c. 2015-16) (The Creators Project profiles, 23 min)

Hasan Elahi, *Tracking Transience* (2002-ongoing) (TEDx talk, 9min)

Miriam Ghani and Chitra Ganesh, *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-ongoing) and *The Guantanamo Effect* (Democracy Now interview, 20min)

Section 2 (11/18)

Torin Monahan, "The Right to Hide? Anti-Surveillance Camouflage and the Aestheticization of Resistance," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12.2 (2015): 159-178.

Optional

Claudio Celis, "Critical Surveillance Art in the Age of Machine Vision and Algorithmic Governmentality: Three Case Studies," *Surveillance & Society* 18.3 (2020): 295-311.

micha cárdenas. "Dark Shimmers: The Rhythm of Necropolitical Affect in Digital Media," in *Trap Door: trans cultural production and the politics of visibility* (2017), 161-181.

Week 9: Thanksgiving Break

Week 10: Grassroots Organizing, Action Networks, and Protest

Session 1 (11/30)

Thenmozhi Soundaranajan, "A More Visionary Movement" in *The End of Trust* (2018), 276-283.

Assignment: Identity one grassroots collective or action network (locally or nationally) that is organizing against any of the surveillance systems covered in this class. Research their activities, demonstrations, and programs. Be prepared to discuss in class. Complete this assignment in place of this week's critical reading response.

Screening

Mijente's #TakeBackTech Workshop & Speculative Design Lab

Session 2 (12/2)

Conclusion

In-class presentations of (in-progress) final projects

**** Final project DUE at end of Week 11 ****