We are the New York City local of Tech Workers Coalition, established in October 2018.

We strive to build worker power and an inclusive & equitable tech industry through rank & file self-organization and education.

We discuss and take action on the impacts of technology on workers and communities.

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By Tech Workers Coalition NYC police technology working group
About this document

The NYPD’s surveillance system is poorly understood by the public, and the media has reported conservative estimates of the capacities of the policing systems.

We hope this document serves as an introduction to the known anatomy of the surveillance systems, and also as an explanation of our suspicions regarding policing technology which has not yet been revealed to the public.

Overview
The NYPD has been documented using these methods of surveillance. We assume this data is kept forever.

> Security cameras
These are all over NYC, both NYPD and private cameras are used. AI monitors all cameras and set off alarms for “suspicious activity”. Cops can search for clothing colors and pull up live video of everyone matching the description.  

> License plate readers
Tracks people across the country. AI tries to find patterns in how people move and who they associate with. This information can result in people being added to databases. Cops use this data to find out the best places to arrest people. 

> Social media monitoring
NYPD follows and tracks individuals on social media to determine who they associate with. This can also lead to entry into a watchlist database.

> Cell phone tracking
Cops can monitor all activity on cellphones which isn’t encrypted, and also geolocate people both in real time and in the past.

> Genetic drag nets
The NYPD collects genetic samples from people arrested or questioned but not convicted of crimes, collecting used cigarettes and cups for addition into a genetic database.

> Targeted facial recognition
Juvenile detention records have been used to perform facial recognition on people spotted on camera.

> Direct infiltration
NYPD pretends to be protestors and activists and join student, activist, and religious groups to monitor them.

> Databases
Lists of individuals under surveillance by the NYPD (such as gang databases). Being in a database can lead to more serious charges when arrested.
We suspect the NYPD is either already or will soon be doing this

> Religious and ethnic tracking
In the past the NYPD infiltrated student groups and religious groups to monitor people who are Islamic. They also collected information on highly specific ethnic groups through the now disbanded “demographics unit”.  

> Ubiquitous facial recognition
The NYPD has one of the most advanced camera surveillance systems in the world, and also have access to facial recognition software and DMV records. They have refused to prove they do not do this.  

> Targeted AI
With the gang database and the new machine learning algorithm called “patternizr”, the cops have the ability to manipulate data to identify and increase the severity of charges onto individuals. This could mean a person being charged for a crime they did not commit, and having those charges be labeled as a felony.  

> Ubiquitous cell phone monitoring
The NYPD collects cell phone data during protests and activist events. We have no reason to assume they are not investing in this technology to be run at all times.  

> Racially coded camera monitoring
Some prototypes for the NYPD surveillance systems included the ability to identify and track skin tone. Considering the endemic racism of the NYPD, we have no reason to assume they stopped doing this.  

> X-Ray surveillance
The NYPD has purchased military grade X-Ray vans which are intended to be used on cars without people in them, due to the health hazards of radiation. Because the police refuse to talk about the vans we cannot assume they are using them safely.  


What does this mean for me?

> **You should assume you are always surveilled**
When in public or when using your cellphone, you are being monitored. You also may be tracked on social media, and through your genetic material. The NYPD will continue track you even after you leave the city.

> **Surveillance is not distributed equally**
Depending on your physical, ideological, and social traits, you may be under greater scrutiny by surveillance. The people you are seen with can lead to greater surveillance and more severe repercussions if you are charged with a crime.

> **Be brave**
The NYPD has consistently used racism, xenophobia, and fear of terrorism as mechanisms to expand its surveillance capacities. To fight this, we must be courageous in the face of their racist tactics, show solidarity for each other, and wholeheartedly reject the legitimacy of their system.
**Domain Awareness System (DAS)**

> The DAS is a highly advanced computer system which links up multiple surveillance systems into an interface for cops to use. ¹

> The system links up sensors and cameras from all over the city, and also pulls in 911 calls and arrest records. ¹

> Artificial intelligence algorithms run and set off alarms if something is labeled as suspicious on camera feeds. ¹

> Cops have access to this system on their handheld devices, including the tablets inside of NYPD vehicles. ¹

> The system is based out of 55 Broadway in lower Manhattan ²

> Microsoft built the backbone of this system, and now sells it around the world. NYC gets 30% of all profits from sales. So far it has been exported to Singapore, Brazil, and DC. ²

> The DAS is being continually expanded. The newest feature released to the public was the “Patternizr” algorithm, which tries to link petty theft to strings of unsolved grand larceny cases. ¹⁰

> The system was designed by cops, and treats old police records as unbiased fact, using them as inputs for various algorithms. ¹⁰

> Features on the DAS are announced after they have been rolled out into general use - for example, patternizr was announced after it had already come into routine use by the NYPD. The public is not notified before surveillance is ratcheted up. ¹⁰
POST Act
(Public Oversight of Police Technology)

> The POST Act was proposed in 2018 with the goal of “creating comprehensive reporting and oversight of NYPD surveillance technologies”.

> The act has been supported by the NAACP, The Brennan Center for Justice, the NYC Council Black Latino and Asian Caucus, and the ACLU.

> The NYPD has described the act as “insane”, saying that it would empower terrorists, sex offenders, and intimate abusers.

Automated Decision System Taskforce (Local Law 49)

> Local Law 49 was passed in 2017, which called for the "creation of a task force that provides recommendations on how information on agency automated decision systems may be shared with the public and how agencies may address instances where people are harmed by agency automated decision systems."

> Automated decision systems includes many of the systems used by the NYPD. AI falls under the banner of ADS’s.

> Members of the task force have reported struggling to gain the necessary information required to do their work, due to pushback from government agencies. They have not yet reported back any findings to the public.
Citations

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5 - N.Y.P.D. Detectives Gave a Boy, 12, a Soda. He Landed in a DNA Database, New York Times

6 - She Was Arrested at 14. Then Her Photo Went to a Facial Recognition Database, New York Times

7 - Released NYPD emails show extensive surveillance of Black Lives Matter protesters, CNN

8 - NYPD Gang Database Can Turn Unsuspecting New Yorkers Into Instant Felons, The Intercept

9 - New York Drops Unit That Spied on Muslims, New York Times

10 - NYPD's Big Artificial-Intelligence Reveal, Governing

11 - IBM Used NYPD Surveillance Footage to Develop Technology that lets Police Search by Skin Color, The Intercept

12 - Accountability and Transparency for NYPD Surveillance Technology, NYC Council

13 - Black, Latino/a and Asian Caucus Endorses 'POST Act' NYPD Surveillance Oversight Bill, BLAC

14 - Top NYPD Official: Subjecting Our Surveillance Tools To Public Scrutiny Would Be 'Insane', Gothamist

15 - New York City's AI task force stalls, Curbed

16 - New York City's algorithm task force is fracturing, The Verge

Note: To learn more / see further citations & sources:
> brennancenter.org/analysis/independent-oversight-nypd
> Wikipedia -> Police Surveillance in New York City