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29 September 2003

# FACE-CAM SURVEILLANCE : Bad for Business and Society

INTERACTIVE ART WORK QUESTIONS  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FACE RECOGNITION AND  
AUTOMATED SURVEILLANCE



## **FACE-CAM SURVEILLANCE : Bad for Business and Society** **Interactive art work explores face recognition surveillance systems**

**The mirror D interactive art installation, currently on exhibition at the Experimenta House of Tomorrow, explores how useful surveillance systems that claim to recognise faces or detect 'abnormal' behaviour are. Do they work or do they create an illusion that surveillance technologies are making our societies safe?**

The stock market value of face-cam manufacturers – surveillance systems that claim to identify known criminals and terrorists – skyrocketed after the 9/11 attacks in the US. These manufacturers promoted themselves as being part of the solution to creating a safer society. Politicians and law-makers sensed a quick fix to satisfy a concerned public and jumped on the technology.

But two years later, public trials of these systems have not been successful. In the United States, airports at Logan (where ten 9/11 terrorists boarded aircrafts) and Boston have found that face-cams aren't up to scratch. And authorities in Tampa, Florida are discontinuing the use of face-recognition systems because it doesn't benefit them.

“Politicians often say that if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. But this surveillance technology simply doesn't work. It's not a good investment. There's plenty of research that suggests surveillance cameras push crime to other parts of the community”, says Sam de Silva, one of media-artists behind the 'mirror D' project currently showing at Experimenta's House of Tomorrow Exhibition at the Victorian Arts Centre (until Oct 5<sup>th</sup>).

He goes on to add: “Back in early 2001, the United States Department of Defence research suggested facial recognition technology was not a reliable tool. Now, after two years of trials, face-cam technologies that were installed in airports have been declared a failure. It seems the surveillance industry has a powerful lobby force. We really need to investigate the effectiveness of the complete biometrics industry.”

The 'mirror D' interactive art installation demonstrates how problematic computer-based facial recognition can be. The lighting has to be perfect, and hats and scarves can confuse the software. The result is a distorted view of the person the system is trying to recognise.

“The results of the surveillance can be entertaining and amusing to look at but are no good when it comes to solving terrorism or criminal activity. Our government is currently spending millions of dollars developing biometric passports. We need to question if they are really going to improve security or whether they'll further discrimination and bias in our society”.

“We really need to look at the root cause of problems rather than using technology to push the problem some place else. We need to confront the real issues and these issues are very complex and take time to understand and solve.”, he concludes.

### **For further information:**

**contact Sam de Silva on 0412 238 041 or [sam@mvspinach.org](mailto:sam@mvspinach.org)**

**Visit <http://www.mvspinach.org/digitalmirror/> for evidence that questions the effectiveness of face recognition technologies.**