Background & Context

Set in the near future, the film '*the Intersection*' journeys from a violent present to a cooperative future through the lens of four protagonists. They gather with others from across the country in a circle of dialogue and active hope, foregrounding the changed role of ambient technology in facilitating positive action over fragmentation and extraction. This film was made in a time and space shaped by the COVID19 pandemic and the grief it caused, alongside the convergence of cataclysmic dispatches from around the world: the devastating wildfires in Australia, California, and the Pacific NorthWest, the unjust murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the ensuing light cast on every crevice of an expired system.

The aim of both the film and this companion guide is to engage us all in contributing to an imaginative future where, irrespective of our identities and experiences, we can successfully recognize shared challenges and work jointly to imagine responses that benefit everyone. Such a process is fraught with difficulties but also imbued with great potential for active hope. A prerequisite of this potential transformation is the ability to acknowledge and recognize how increasingly pervasive technologies shape our interactions with others and ourselves. At the same time, engaging in critical sensemaking to understand the wider political, social, ecological and cultural forces at play is important at this moment. Our moment of *the Intersection*. Together, in solidarity to collective reimagine, regenerate and redesign alternate, hopeful futures.

Key Themes For Film Viewing

While viewing *the Intersection*, there are
several themes which we wish your attention
to be drawn:

Key Themes & Phrases

Notes / Context

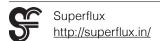| Key Themes & Phrases	Notes / Context
Ambient technology	Ambient technology refers to the extension of technology into the fabric of everyday life — and its disappearance as an identifiably separate and discrete factor. It builds on the term 'ambient intelligence', an emerging field adjacent to the 'Internet of Things' that aims to bring technological 'intelligence' to our everyday environments, and make those environments sensitive to human presence, behaviour and interactions. This coming seamlessness of technology's embeddedness in our lives raises critical questions of consent, agency, governance, power and surveillance. No one is exempt from the coercive influence of ambient tech.
Appropriate tech	Appropriate technology is the development of locally relevant, often small-scale and sustainable technological solutions based on the ambition to have technologies meet the needs of and to support the community and individuals for which the technology is created. Tech doesn't have to be a cause of division; thoughtfully done and decoupled from the profit motive and capitalist forces, it can become an enabler for plural use.
Attention economy	The attention economy is the commodification of people's time and headspace in a manner that ensures they remain focused on consuming more content and information. In this economy, value is measured by the amount of time spent or the amount of measurable engagement given to a piece of content or information.

Key Themes & Phrases	Notes / Context
Context collapse	Context collapse is when personal identity is condensed, or collapsed, to navigate an imagined audience in digital spaces. Not only do we try to squash our complex selves into categories with clearly signified social, cultural and political ideologies, we also fail to acknowledge the diversity and amorphous natures of different people and individuals over time.
'Culture wars'	Culture wars are when people are marshaled to support a cause, typically related to their values, politics, practices, and/or beliefs, that they wish to make the dominant, most recognized, and/or accepted within societies. Frequently, culture wars are waged on topics that tend to be polarizing or where vast differences in perspectives exist. Technology can and often does act as an amplifier for other problems, political, social, economic and environmental, cultural. And in many ways it can help network, connect and amplify those problems as a whole, with effects felt and seen across social divides.
Digital colonialism	Digital colonialism is rooted in the design of the technology ecosystems for the purposes of profit and plunder. Digital infrastructure takes on the role of data extraction where data is gleaned from the streams of information given up as residents of all countries go online, and connect with one another through applications whose terms of service demand they give up their personal and private information. Big Tech corporations use proprietary software, corporate clouds, and centralized Internet services to spy on users, process their data, and spit back manufactured services.

Key Themes & Phrases

Notes / Context

Intersection

For us *the Intersection* is the deeply interconnected nature of the challenges we face today – we want to associate this with the fictional Movement that emerges in the film, as well as the Moment we are in today. Who we are, how we act, what we gather around, our collective agency, our hopeful futures; they are all deeply entangled with messy histories of extractive capitalism, exacerbating tragedies of colonialism, racial injustice, social inequality and climate apathy. Present-day ambient technologies: Ingestibles, wearables, embeddables; smart homes and peer-to-peer surveillance; the Internet of Things (IoT) and Industrial IoT; 5G; smart cities; facial recognition, temperature checking pandemic drones, and satellite imagery, are built on such exploitative histories, further amplifying inequality and injustice. The encompassing and interconnected nature of such ever-present, always-on technology - means that we are barreling towards a society in which every single interaction with the physical and digital world is fair game for extraction and exploitation. If we want to help build better, regenerative, democratic futures, this must change.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality describes how individual characteristics such as gender, race, class, among others, intersect with each other and influence the experiences that people have when engaging with the world, including technologies. These inextricable identities are lived in social, societal, and related systems that invariably subject individuals to different levels of oppression, domination, discrimination, or privilege.

Metaverse

"The word "metaverse" is a portmanteau of the prefix "meta" (meaning beyond) and "universe"; the term is typically used to describe the concept of a future iteration of the internet, made up of persistent, shared, 3D virtual spaces linked into a perceived virtual universe." (Forbes, 2020).

Key Themes & Phrases	Notes / Context
Recycling/Repurposing existing tech	Recycling/repurposing technology is the usage of old technology by transforming it into a new technological product, often with a new purpose that is an improvement on the original technology.
Shared ownership	Shared ownership in this context highlights the move away from consumerist societies towards ones where people work with the land, acknowledge the finite resources on this planet, and embody this knowledge of limitation in our consumption and communities.
Sense-making	The process of sensemaking enables one to surface unexpected connections and interdependencies, question earlier biases and assumptions and navigate complexity. The film could be viewed as a tool for sensemaking around ambient tech and its role in our current situation as well as its potential future role/s.
Systems change	"'Systems change' focuses on a way to think and act on broad societal challenges across sectors and policy domains. For technologically-driven systems change, key-enabling technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and other smart technologies, will dramatically and unevenly change society. They simultaneously pose positive and negative prospects. Positive prospects include efficiency and improvements in production and provision of services leading to increased wellbeing; negatives contain, for instance, manipulation of public opinion and job losses. The challenge is to understand how these technologies converge into complex system webs, and how they can be steered towards positive outcomes" (Saïd Business School, n.d.).The problems we are facing might get worse but that they also hold within them the drivers for deep and meaningful change.

Ambient Technology

Our analog and digital lives are merging together in accelerated ways. Whether it's socially connecting on Houseparty; playdates, singalongs, religious services and Friday night discos on Zoom; by communities of strangers meeting to take care of each other on WhatsApp; by the shared endorphin rush of hundreds of thousands of children leaping around to Joe Wicks on YouTube; the fundraisers running on Facebook and GoFundMe; and the last goodbyes said via FaceTime. Many of our strongest social bonds are currently being formed and deepened digitally.

The overall framework of technology driven capitalism is to sink below the level of cognition. It is to be everywhere, pervasive, and perceived uncritically as part of the ambient environment. They are manifestations of a political philosophy, and if we just accept them as is, we are accepting certain market ideologies in lieu of any other. The necessity, the inevitability and the ambience of these technologies is a marketing message. They do provide lots of value to humanity but there is a deeper centrality of self-preservation of powerful interests. They will never achieve their fullest potential as long as we are considered customers and not owners. And when that shift occurs, amazing things can happen. These ambient technologies are tools of human development and humans develop their own capabilities to use them; we redesign them.

Extractive Capitalism

Unofficially, retailers, goods and service providers and advertisers monitor our preferences, behaviors and habits, for commercial gain— drawing on data provided by us, sometimes voluntarily, but often unwittingly. Masses of "anonymous" data about population movements, financial transactions and leisure activities are mined, from surveillance cameras, travel cards, smartphones and tablets, wearable devices, internet searches, online orders, credit card use and social media. These data are analyzed, compared, integrated and traded without our explicit consent.

For example, Google siphons user data from a variety of sources — Google Search, Maps, Ads, Android location services, Gmail — to provide them with one of the richest collections of information on the planet. Through the Open Handset Alliance and proprietary control of their "killer apps", they ensure the world's data flows into their corporate cloud. They then process the data for consumer and business services.

Other examples of extractive capitalism include economic surveillance systems such as those used by Google, Amazon or Facebook to target ads and product recommendations for consumers to more sovereign surveillance systems such as Palantir, China's social credit system, facial recognition cameras, Clearview, or other more sophisticated systems. The effectiveness of these and other private or public surveillance and control systems depends upon the pieces of ourselves that we give up — or that are secretly stolen from us. It is being used to judge whether we are good citizens, and imposing penalties based on random criteria of that judgement. We give up our rights to our global privacy when these systems become cross-border. Our privacy has become public goods, sold as behavior predictions that are about us, but not for us. In 2016, the Google-incubated augmented reality game, Pokémon Go, tested economies of action on the streets. Game players did not know that they were pawns in the real game of behavior modification for profit, as the rewards and punishments of hunting imaginary creatures were used to herd people to the McDonald's, Starbucks and local pizza joints that were paying the company for "footfall," in exactly the same way that online advertisers pay for "click through" to their websites.

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was first conceived of by legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 when she sought to describe how individual characteristics such as gender, race, class, among others, intersect with each other and influence the experiences that people have when engaging with the world. These inextricable identities are lived in social, societal, and related systems that invariably subject individuals to different levels of oppression, domination, discrimination, or privilege. Though current national discourse has focused solely on the racial component of intersectionality as the basis of an imagined "new world order" with devastatingly divisive effect, Crenshaw's concept has always acknowledged that overarching systems of power and structural inequalities are the true sources of division, regardless of the individual characteristics under consideration.

At the heart of intersectionality is empathy and the ambition to actively advocate to make the world a more egalitarian place to co-exist. In order to achieve this, working together is a prerequisite to leveling the playing field and eliminating the oppressive and discriminatory systems and structures that currently shape life in the United States. Leveraging intersectionality, identified potential solutions to social, political, technological, economic, environmental, and philosophical problems can be better informed by a multiplicity of lived experiences and perspectives. When actioned through the lens of intersectionality, problem-solving is made a holistic exercise since problems can be identified more accurately – and can even surface the realization that the problems are shared.

Systems Change

Technology has helped bring communities and people the world over together, at a time when we are meant to be socially distanced and isolated. Online platforms, communities and services are booming, as more and more people turn online for all dimensions of their lives. Digital innovation and connectedness have radically transformed civic participation and democratic decision-making, democratizing information access, participation and agency. COVID-19 has sparked a new wave of mass online collaboration — from global hackathons (that sparked a wave that involving over 100 000 people from New Zealand to Brazil and everything in between in 14 days) to utilizing collective intelligence to tackle the pandemic, it is an increasingly recurring phenomenon of emergent and enduring cooperative groups, whose members have developed particular patterns of relationships through technology-mediated cooperation. It has also inspired an unprecedented surge of voluntary efforts to save and protect each other. In the UK an army of more than 700,000 people responded to the government's call to help support the NHS. Red Cross volunteers globally have been on the front-line of delivering essential health services to people affected by the disease.

Systems Change Continued

More than this, people everywhere are solving their own extraordinary local risks. Where public good institutions are failing to respond to vulnerable groups that are being missed in policy design, civic-minded citizens are self-organizing and self-mobilizing to fill the gaps. The crisis has triggered a 'mass re-neighboring', allowing us to reach out and connect with people in our communities in ways that previously felt risky or uncomfortable. The burst of COVID-19 informal, hyper-local "mutual aid" groups have been cropping up globally. Often organized through Google Docs, online spreadsheets, Facebook and WhatsApp groups, these grassroots, community-run networks are providing essential services like grocery drop offs, childcare, financial assistance, health services and more. Authors have posted live-streamed readings, and musicians have performed from their balconies and rooftops. Technologists are experimenting with drones adapted to deliver supplies, disinfect common areas, check individual temperatures, and monitor high-risk areas. And, of course, many movements are moving their activities online, with digital rallies, teach-ins, and information-sharing.

Many of our strongest social bonds are currently being formed and deepened digitally. Whether it's socially connecting on Houseparty; playdates, singalongs, religious services and Friday night discos on Zoom; by communities of strangers meeting to take care of each other on WhatsApp; by the shared endorphin rush of hundreds of thousands of children leaping around to Joe Wicks on YouTube; the fundraisers running on Facebook and GoFundMe; and the last goodbyes said via FaceTime. Our analog and digital lives are merging together in accelerated ways. COVID-19 is challenging the social contract and civic fabric connecting us all.

Key Discussion Questions

Viewing *the Intersection* film will likely conjure familiarity surrounding current, recent past, and predicted near future events. Several forces including technology, climate change, belonging, migration, and social and moral responsibility all feature in the clip in intersecting ways that raise several questions for the viewer to consider. While the following list of questions is not meant to be exhaustive, it is intended to capture some of the salient points from key moments of the film to spark further reflection.

How can we generate local movements of change?

How can we enter into dialogue with those we completely disagree with?

What is active hope?

We are already seeing increased use of surveillance, major security breaches, and so on. How do we 'regulate' the current connected world?

Could we design an ambient system that helps us identify the right information, store secure data, understand our internet rights, etc.? If so, how? Could ambient technology help us better understand 'my rights', 'our rights'?

How can we reduce the barrier between us and "them"? The need for safety and security does not have to lead to increased surveillance.

How does increased privatization of public spaces affect our individual sense of right and freedom? How does it impact our sense of state and citizenship? Does this lead to a separation between those that must rely on technology to live a day to day life and those that could opt out?

How do we design tangible rights in a world where there are increasing invisible forces at play?

What does increased invisibility mean for civic responsibility and sense of participation in society?

How do we include all people in the instruments that shape the world?

Additional Resources

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy (book)

Appropriate Technology and New Approaches to Ownership

Are We in the Metaverse Yet?

Are You Really the Product?

Beyond Principles: A Process for Responsible Tech

Can govtech help promote democracy?

Citizen Lab (online community engagement platform)

Civic Tech Guide (crowdsourced collection of tech for good projects)

Clture: Own Your Data.

Design Justice (book)

Digital colonialism: The evolution of US empire

GeoMatch: Connecting people to places (digital tool)

Inequality is growing between gig workers and employees

ProudCity (platform to launch digital government operations)

Refugees help power machine learning advances at Microsoft, Facebook, and Amazon

Repurposing Technology — a powerful concept for creators

ShareTown: Digital Technology as a Tool to Envision Cooperation between Citizens and Government

Sick Of The Attention Economy? It's Time To Rebel

Ten Tips for Putting Intersectionality into Practice

The Exponential Age: How Accelerating Technology is Transforming Business, Politics and Society (book)

The Intersection: Who's in the Driver's Seat — Us or Our Technology?

The New Tech Culture Wars

The potential dangers of Ambient Intelligence

Troll farms reached 140 million Americans a month on Facebook before 2020 election, internal report shows

Your drawer full of old tech could have a new life — or start a fire. Here's how to handle it.