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"Know Your Personae"

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The evolution of computer file systems into databases and, more recently, data warehouses, has created new opportunities for both the public and private sectors to intrude on the privacy of individuals. Recently proposed banking regulations, dubbed "Know Your Customer," would have required a financial institution to "determine the identity of its customer, to determine normal and expected transactions for its customers, to determine its customers' sources of funds, to identify transactions that are not normal or expected transactions for the customer, and to report suspicious transactions…"[1] The federal government hoped to take advantage of the repository of data that banks gather in the course of normal business to identify money launderers. But in the process, financial institutions would have had to serve in a quasi-and even supra-law enforcement capacity to spy on all of their customers. To the utter amazement of the bureaucrats to whom it seemed so logical and right, the proposal was killed during the

[1] Federal Register: December 7, 1998 (Volume 63, Number 234), Proposed Rules, Page 67536-67542

comment period by bankers and the public for, among other things, representing an unwarranted (and expensive) invasion of privacy.

Privacy is often theorized in terms of freedom from certain intrusions (Rachels, 1997, p. 69). Hence the language, "invasion" of privacy, as if we occupy a kind of bounded space within which we can expect to control access to ourselves. The problem in the so-called Information Age, of course, is that such boundaries as walls, clothing or even skin have been rendered all but meaningless markers of privacy, much less protectors. We seem to lead increasingly transparent lives to just about anyone who cares to look: there are fewer and fewer borders within which to simply be ourselves, unmolested and unobserved.

The value of privacy is that it permits autonomy, or the governance of one's own self. Autonomy stands against heteronomy, which has to do with being ruled by other beings or powers, or the subjection to external law (OED). Heteronomy limits or constrains moral freedom. This is not to say that the autonomous self is necessarily un-ruly: s/he gives her assent to be governed by the laws of a just society, by religious doctrine, and so forth. But s/he also faces sources of heteronomy that are unseen and to which s/he does not explicitly assent. Michel Foucault (1972) has written of the power of discursive fields to

situate and regulate its subjects. Simply by working for a university or other organization in a certain field, we submit to an entire system of terminologies, rules and other prescriptions that come to define a large part of our lives. Other sources of heteronomy are more insidious, such as discursive practices that marginalize and silence minorities. True autonomy, even for the most empowered among us, is impossible: what is left to the self is to negotiate a course between autonomy and heteronomy (Schrag, 1997, p. 59).

The self is, therefore, always already a contested place. Indeed, even without the challenges of information technology, it is impossible to conceptualize a fixed "self" to which an unproblematic notion of privacy might pertain. The bank customer is son or daughter, husband, wife, significant other, father, mother, friend, worker, employer, neighbor, soldier, citizen and so forth. Each of these entails a different constitution of autonomy and each has its own sources of heteronomy, as well as different standards of privacy.

Calvin O. Schrag (1997) has suggested that one way to theorize the self is around its situatedness, especially in its daily and "lived-through communicative practices of speaking, listening, narrating, acting, working, and, playing" (p. 4). The situated self is embodied.

Many philosophers, including Schrag, prefer to speak of the lived body, referring to the inseparability of consciousness and body in lived experience. The American philosopher William James once wrote, "The world experienced (otherwise called the 'field of consciousness') comes at all time with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest" (cited in Schrag, 1997, p. 49). The lived body is always temporal (Heidegger, 1927/1996; Schrag, 1997) and it is always in place (Casey, 1993).

It thus makes a great deal of sense that questions of privacy should also center so often on the body itself, as well as on the embodied discourse and action of the situated person. But one of the outcomes of the so-called Information Age is that even the notion of body has become problematized. Vivian Sobchack (1992) writes, "Television, video tape recorder/players, videogames, and personal computers all form an encompassing electronic system whose various forms 'interface' to constitute an alternative and virtual world that uniquely incorporates the spectator/user in a spatially decentered, weakly temporalized, and quasi-disembodied state" (p. 300). According to this way of understanding the impact of technology on the situated person, loss of privacy is not so much a matter of overly disseminated

information as it is the dissipation of our existential bodies across the electronic ethers of cyberspace, and their constant reconstitution as visible, active, embodied personae. It is not that the walls have come down; rather, it is that we are simply no longer contained by them.

Approaching the loss of privacy through the changes imposed on the lived body and the lived world by technology can help provide insight into what is felt by some to be the most vexing problem of the new millennium. What is missed in conventional views that treat the threat to privacy as a matter of inappropriately disclosed or misused information about embodied selves, is that the information is itself embodied. Indeed, it not so much that we are disembodied in cyberspace as that we are re-embodied. In the case of "Know Your Customer" and other data-mining applications, those new bodies permit us to be reconstituted in ways that are not under our control. To the extent that they serve as our surrogates, we may find ourselves quite literally in places we did not intend to go, doing things we did not intend to do, being represented in ways that we have not authorized.

The purpose of my research is to investigate information technology as a de-idealized body of information, even a lived body with its own logics of time and space. It is my working contention that most

of our laws, including the Constitution, were fashioned around the lived body as we have conventionally understood it, according to rather simple notions of the temporality and spatiality of communicative praxis, and based on what may be increasingly outdated assumptions about autonomy. Information technology will not be well-served by public policy and legislation until it is understood to be as situated and embodied as we are ourselves. Thus what is of interest to me is what it means to be a situated cyber-persona—what the lifeworld of that persona is like compared to the existential lifeworld, as well as how our various lived "bodies" co-exist and co-relate.

The presentation today includes some of the ways that the lived bodies and lifeworld of our cyberspace persona differ from our own lived bodies and lifeworld. It is intended to re-orient the discussion of privacy away from idealized information and toward the praxial aspects of lived experience, especially with respect to autonomy and heteronomy.

In the pages that follow, Susan signifies the bank customer who arrives in person to transact her business. Susan **is the machine-embodied Susan who inhabits the bank's databases and is constituted by its software. The following posters identify some of the existential**

differences between Susan and Susan. They are intended to stimulate discussion—so, please feel free to ask for clarification or defense of a term!

Susan

Everything possible unless ruled out

Susan

Nothing possible unless ruled in

Susan

Vocal

Susan

Mute

Susan

Analog: viscous, isomorphic, rigid

Susan

Digital: pulverized, polymorphic, malleable

Susan

Incredible

Susan

Scientifically credible

Susan

History fades

Susan

History intensified

Susan

Capricious, unpredictable

Susan

Docile, compliant, predictable

Susan

Narrative rationality, dramatistic

Susan

Scientific/scientistic rationality

Susan

Symbol using

Susan

Symbolic

Susan

Irreversible temporality

Susan

Reversible temporality

Susan

Dwells in dynamic place

Susan

Dwells in static place

Susan

Mortally fragile

Susan

Recoverable

Susan

Chooses her own company

Susan

Assigned to the company

of others

IDIS260

CERIAS funded IDIS260, Computing and Ethics, for the Spring, 2000 semester. The course has been co-taught by Professor Paul B. Thompson and graduate student Patricia L. Corey.

We are very pleased that the class is at enrollment capacity. Thirty-two students are completing the course, most of whom are juniors and seniors majoring in Computer Science. It has been an active, engaged group and both instructors have enjoyed the challenges of developing in these future professionals an awareness of the ethical issues they will face on many levels.

Though listed as a 200-level course, IDIS260 course materials are actually both more difficult and more dense than the number suggests. Students have read extensively from primary sources, including contemporary philosophers of

technology, one of whom, Albert Borgmann, they will have an opportunity to meet on the last day of class. They have been exposed to a number of philosophical traditions in lectures and have had the opportunity to explore for themselves some of the many promises and pitfalls of computer-mediated communication.

We feel IDIS260 has been an important and productive experience for the students (and hope they agree!), as it certainly has been for us.

You are encouraged to attend Professor Borgmann's lecture on April 27 from 2:30 to 4:15, WTHR 320. His visit to Purdue is sponsored by a CERIAS grant to Purdue's Science and Culture program.

References used in text

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