

# Owning Identity

## One or many: Do we have a choice?

*Marcus Wigan*  
*Oxford Systematics*

Professor Emeritus Napier  University Edinburgh  
Professorial Fellow: University of Melbourne Australia  
Visiting Professor: Imperial College London

# Roadmap

---

- **Critical aspects of linkage: direct and indirect**
- **Identity and Absolute Identity differ**
- **Quarantining different identities**
- **Pressures for uniqueness of 'identity'**
- **Trust broking and denial of access**
- **Token bundles and digital identity**
- **Contextual Sufficiency as a principle**
- **Loss of social space, and ownership of identity**

# What are we talking about?

---

## Full Oxford Dictionary definition

- **The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration: absolute or essential sameness; oneness**
- **The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.**

This definition demonstrates the ambiguity of the word. A clear distinction is drawn in the dictionary between the various definitions and usages of the term 'identity' and the quite separate term 'absolute identity'

## Critical aspects of linkage: direct and indirect

---

- Is one identity verification the same as any other?
- Identification is a verb, not a noun
- Direct linkage
  - by abuse of special purpose Id Tokens (ie. passport)
- Indirect linkage
  - by assumptions of uniqueness of “identity”

## Identity and Absolute Identity differ

---

- The ability to achieve an accepted ‘identity’ as oneself by the use of tokens or other forms of associated factors
- The level to which a restriction to a single token-certified ‘identity’ can or should be used for all purposes
- Tokens as temporary anonymous Id (movie tickets)
- Nom de plumes, assumption of spouses name
- Supplied ‘new’ identity for protection (ie to ensure lack of possible linkages and tracing ...)
- Assumed names for personal occupational protection

## Quarantining different identities

---

- Tax Offices quarantined information on illegal professions as long as tax was paid
- Dismantling the Chinese walls between identities has a real quantifiable cost

## Pressures for uniqueness of 'identity'

---

- **Data matching agency activities**
- **New Acts such as AUSTRAC for secret informing**
- **Limited or non existant accountability in enforcement agency powers**
- **Politicians exemption from privacy laws**
- **Verification of identity for government payments**
- **Problems of contamination of assumed high quality ID tokens by those most likely to need them**
- **Public health pressures for large scale tracing (research and epidemiological prevention)**

## Trust broking and denial of access

---

“The movement to a post modernist culture of corrections is one of normalising social control over all aspects of life - fit the power inequity aspects of privacy measured by others”

“A society in a culture of surveillance, a society of judges exercising the power to punish everywhere, a society increasingly lacking in personal privacy and individual trust and a viable public life that supports and maintains democratic values and principles”

**pp 128-9 Staples 1997 (4 years pre 9/11)**

# Token based Id who wins? Loses?

---

- Government operates increasingly on a basis of lack of trust
- Withholding if not deemed to be proved eligible
- Abandons the culture of rights
- So if a party cannot prove his/her **eligibility** by token [identity linked to data records of the government body]
  - Government saves money and the **weakest** lose
- If there is poor validation of vulnerable parties, this affects everyone negatively due to false positives
  - Government saves money and **all of us** lose
- Token based ‘absolute identity’ appears to be asymmetric in its effects - against the people concerned.

## Token bundles and digital identity

---

- If one form of Id is good surely more must be better?
- Assemblies of entity tokens (biometrics) leave a **permanent** trail for good or ill
- These are transformed by third parties into digital tokens for the identification (and the inevitable recording) process
- These bundles of tokens may be owned by third parties
- The individual may have no right of access to, or use of, them
- Loss of ownership of the tokens now defined as ‘identity’ can be equated to the loss of ones own identity in transactions
- An extreme case is the exploitation of this identity bundle
- Iceland DNA anyone?

## Contextual Sufficiency as a principle

---

- To stem the tide of assumptions of absolute identity we propose a principle of:

### Contextual Sufficiency

1. This recognises the variations in transaction identification and attribution schemes in differing circumstances, and
2. Provides a practical and workable basis for rationalising the steady flow of ‘absolute identity’ token production and use

## Loss of social space, and ownership of identity

---

- **The effects of collapsing multiple identities constrains the social space**
- **Already people simply choose to avoid flights that require a stop in the United States.**
- **Commercialisation of identity tokens and their linkage is now leading to filtering of access to services by call centres by drawing on cumulative cross linked data**
- **We argue that Contextual Sufficiency is an essential complement to privacy principles to retain the rights of anonymous and differentiated identities for ourselves**

# Just one birdseye view....

