Identity, contestability and ethics of unified virtualisation of society

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What will we talk about?

• As society virtualises (bits not bodies)
  - identity becomes more important
  - changes in forms of evidence and enforcement
  - rising inability to context these shifts in power

• This raises a moral imperative for bodies representing the less empowered in society

• The faith based organisations have a real role here in rebalancing the evident ethical and power imbalances
The Thesis

- Asymmetric power relationships are being created by recent developments in identity management and convergence, and explicitly by new censorship powers.

- These neglect many in the community with less power and access to the tools to engage with these government administrative pressures.

- Faith based organisations have an important role in this area in negotiating and enunciating the issues as they affect the less empowered.

- Such moral enunciations have been muted since the Enlightenment: perhaps it is time again?
Exactly which issues are driving this?

Lack of ownership of one’s own identity

Pressures to remove the right to maintain context dependent multiple identities

- Transformation of the presumption of innocence to a presumption of possible harm

- Growth of intelligence techniques enabling mass population surveillance (via the case of Location Based Services)

- Progressive criminalisation of intellectual property violations with State support for commercial interests.

- Asymmetries of information leading to a greater need for contestability
And exactly **what** did Bentham say ...

“Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so”

Foucault indentifies this as an exertion of [structural] power.

**We now have this in both real and virtual space**
Example: side effects of convergent identities

• Government entities tend to behave as if the use of more than one identity is both suspicious and unlawful

• Fordist views of efficiency set aside the arguments that exact various prices from the individuals affected

• These are all aspects of these keys to our personal identity - which we no longer own or control

• It is also the End of [lack of] History for people

• No more can there be any permanent forgiveness due to the total persistence of vision from the Panopticon
Identity by undetectable association

- Location Based Services transform one's identities from physical observations to proximities and in time a space

- To ‘you are where you have been’ [Wigan and Clarke]
  .....has now been added..

- “with whom you might unknowingly have shared time or space’

- And the steady move to a reversal in the onus of proof
Contextual identities

• The Fordist (in deed Taylorean) view of a single unique identity is not necessary

• Identity is contextually dependent and **requires** only transient and partial authentication for most purposes
And if the convergence of identity merging continues unmoderated?

- The logic of data mining moves to take over from proof, anticipation from ex post enforcement. So...

- Ethical and moral issues in the virtualisation of society create a need for contestability.

- Unless formal organisations with an ethical and moral *raison d’etre* develop clear and well articulated polices embodying ethical values, then the current momentum of administrative convenience, efficiency and anti terrorism will continue to frame the social and policy agenda, largely unchallenged.

- It is not only the law that needs to catch up with the virtualisation of society – so too does the articulation of social, ethical and moral values by the full range of organisations and people with both the capacity and will to do so.
Conclusions 1

Churches and other faith based organisations can indeed articulate fair and morally balanced exercises of civil power, albeit different to secular equivalents.

- NGOs and individuals do not need to share the same faiths and belief structures as churches, but there is still substantial common ground in their joint concerns.

- The established trend to legislate for secrecy and asymmetry creates real or potential power imbalances that disempower the weaker groups and people in society.

- These demand a higher level of broader engagement by the large faith based organisations, and their values.
Conclusions 2

• Enhanced levels of engagement will bring with it a disproportionate number of the less powerful in society

• Technologists legislators and administrators would in many cases find such a more assertive role a very constructive development in negotiating balanced and workable solutions in these difficult and increasingly contentious areas

• The pervasiveness and extent of the information technology instruments now make it critical that the debates expand beyond a technical and political level, and engage the moral and ethical as well.
Thank you

Whilst I could not address you directly, I am happy to engage in discussion on these or related issues.

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As this was produced at 1am and I have never done this before I fervently hope that it has worked reasonably well...

Kind Regards

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