

Social identity, trust and consent in the surveillance society

Nathalie Grandjean & Benjamin Six

IFIP Summer School 2007

Introduction

- An analysis of the impacts of a new surveillance technology (CCTVs) on the social identity by the way of a bipartite reflection on the trust on one hand, and on the consent on a second hand
- As a starting reflection on a democratical governance problem

Introduction

- The context : the surveillance society - the collection and processing of personal data
- The new technology: CCTVs (Closed-Circuit Televisions) for surveillance purpose in public and semi-public spaces
- The usual justification argument: security measures

Introduction

- The main argument against: privacy respect
- Our presentation will present two main ideas
 1. The impact on the systemic trust
 2. A deficiency in the consent
- Our general critical argument: the surveillance implies a decreasing of the social normativity

Introduction

- Social normativity is the capacity for a person or a group to choose not only the way to act among a predetermined frame of legal norms but also to determine from the beginning and along an ongoing process what those norms should be

Which means the way by which a society regulates itself with legitimated norms and acts on itself to this aim

Introduction

- This is essentially a theoretical contribution
- More a broad than a detailed description
- Should be really interesting to realize case studies

Trust & identity

- Trust is a blending process between feelings and reason under contextual influence
- Not entirely rational
- The concept of systemic trust refers to its natural, routine and institutional forms [G. Möllering]
- The function of trust is to reduce ambient uncertainty [N. Luhmann]

Trust & identity

- The first relevant hypothesis:
Systemic trust represents an important indicator of the legitimacy of the systems (legal, economical, technological)
Hence a lack of systemic trust represents a shift between the experts judgments and the social opinion [S. Haber]

Trust & identity

- Social identity refers to the « objective » side of the identity
- Its characteristics are assigned by the others

Its theory is ruled by the principles of

1. categorization
2. identification
3. comparison

[H. Tajfel & J. C. Turner]

Trust & identity

- The second relevant hypothesis:
The categorization of a person into one group is not neutral for the construction and the evolution of the individual's personal identification
Hence there's a strong interaction between the social and the personal identity

Trust & identity

- Our binding argument
- First occurrence:

The elaboration of social identity is depending on the systemic trust

What we're considering as taken-for-granted and as a habit, shows our social identity, our membership to a specific group

Trust & identity

- Second occurrence:

To reach a high level of systemic trust requires a wide comprehension of the plurality of identities

There is an increasing need of adequately questioning at the social and political level the relation between the singular positioning and the different level of membership of an individual in order to increase trust [R. Gély]

Hence, the spreading through a population of the feeling to be quickly and automatically identified and categorized within one or an other specific group (ethnic, religious, but also in function of physical, mental or financial capabilities), and to have absolutely no capacities to counter that fact, risks to diminish the trust that those individuals have towards the regulatory institutions in place

The institutional selection of one identification paradigm, which defines the “normal” way to be and to behave, will necessarily exacerbate some feelings of constant categorization within groups in which the individual may have absolutely nothing to do with

Interlude

In the US during the 80's, a new social community of aids sufferers emerges from critical reactions against the paternalistic position maintained by the doctors about experimental treatments

Medical experts refuse at first on the base of deontological reasons to practise experimental operations on those patients, who, through a same claim, discover themselves sharing a same social identity
[A. Feenberg]

Consent & identity

- Consent generally depends, firstly, on an informational step, and secondly, on an acceptability step
- In the surveillance case, people are only informed

Hence for those who disagree with it, consent isn't reached at all

Consent & identity

- Social identity and its construction also depend on the notion of human autonomy
- Autonomy is the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed decision - the self-governing of a people

It is used as the basis for determining moral and legal responsibility for one's actions

Consent & identity

- Our binding argument

The fact that there is a deficiency in terms of consent's reaching represents a shortcoming of the human autonomy, and hence of the elaboration process of the social identity

The setting up of CCTVs in public space hasn't yet made the object of a real, substantial and influential debate among the civil society, the industrial and business world and the governments

Those technical devices have been legitimated by only one paternalistic and technocratic argument of security measures

We think instead that this justification is not enough to reach a minimal social acceptability level and that the fact of only informing the public without seeking the discussion constitutes a failure in the accession to people's consent, and then a shortcoming to the respect of the identity

Conclusion

- This new technology becomes more and more implemented, and there's an urgent need to publicly debate its social consequences
- Actual CCTVs usages are perfect examples of a technocratic development in which only a few experts have had the chance to debate the social impacts of the new technique

Conclusion

- This is because of the modern interrelation between the social and the technical domains, leading to the fact that the technical evolution has strong impacts on our way of living and modifies our references to the world, that we cannot jeopardize their balance by leaving the technical evolution out of the subject/object sight, as an automatic and autonomous power which they simply cannot control

