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Privacy, Education and Human Dignity

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Abstract

Access to knowledge for everyone in the increasingly-interconnected society has been a tool for democracy. We discuss here the dangers of a world online and the growing concerns about state surveillance, security, privacy and exploitation. We discuss our right to protect our individual freedom. We conclude that privacy is a fundamental Human Rights in order to guarantee human dignity and freedom.

Keywords: privacy, individual freedom, security, information, memory, human dignity

In this interconnected information society, access to knowledge is a tool for democracy. Open source, Creative Commons, Open Knowledge Foundation, edX, Coursera, Khan Academy are only few off many examples of free and online accessible sources of knowledge. Major universities such as MIT, Stanford or Cambridge University have been sharing high value educational materials online. Social media, in another way have contributed in giving a voice to minorities, sometimes enabling the coordination of contests around the world. The Arab Spring could not have existed without social media. Free speech has prospered with the protection offered by online anonymity. Human crisis has received generous contributions by online solidarity and crisis management, would it be during the Haiti earth quake or Fukushima nuclear catastrophe. Social media have contributed to the search for victims or tools to mark individuals safe. Increasingly, information is generated through social media sources such as Twitter or Facebook. Citizen journalism at low cost with a smartphone reporting spreads the news at the fastest speed. With the internet, all scales are exponentially expanded. The scale of the spread, the speed and the depth of the reach of the information at no cost.

As nothing comes without cost, fake news find their way of blurring the reality. Anonymity opens the road to cyber stalking, cyber bullying, sexting and name it. How to take the best of the internet is a challenge for regulators, confronted to the fast pace of the technological evolution. Therefore, education finds its place. Just like driving an automobile requires training and awareness, surfing the net requires continuous awareness to balance the enrichment with its dangers.

A major particularity of the internet, digital data remains indelible

According to the theory of conservation of energy, electronic data does have a deceptively long lifespan. Nothing gets deleted. In “*Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*” (Mayer-Schonberger, 2011), Viktor Mayer-Schonberger from the Berkman Klein Centre of Internet and Society, exposes the permanent shadow that follows us online forever. The issues of privacy and freedom that result and his suggested solution: auto-delete files or information expiry date. Changing back the default setting from remembering to forgetting. The crumbs of information left behind, get aggregated and build a picture, sometimes distorted. As Viktor Mayer-Schonberger points out, the German Stasi genocide project would have taken a whole different apocalyptic dimension had Google storage and data indexing existed at the time. He mentions the case of the Dutch Citizens register put in place in the 1930s. To ensure the administration of social securities, it included religious beliefs and ethnicity. Once the Nazis had occupied the Netherlands, they exploited the register to identify Jews to be deported and sent to concentration camps.

Another major Privacy scholar, Professor Daniel Solove, has been actively raising awareness on privacy and the future of reputation online. His paper, “*I’ve Got Nothing to Hide and Other Misunderstandings of Privacy*” (Solove, 2007), explains why privacy matters. He later expanded his ideas in the essay into a book: “*Nothing to Hide: The False Tradeoff Between Privacy and Security*” (Solove, 2013). If you think the only people who should worry are those who are doing something immoral or illegal, you should read his essays and books. With the mass of omniveillance data, the situation is not just Orwellian, but Kafkaesque. In a series of YouTube videos and conferences, Daniel Solove brings public attention to cases of online harassment.

The Dog Poop girl (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_poop_girl) is the story of an unlucky girl. She is with her dog in a suburban tube of South Korea. The dog poops on the train, she is on a hurry, she leaves the train refusing to clean up behind. In the old days, that would have been the end of it. Today, when face-to-face persuasion fails, there’s a fall back plan: anonymous internet humiliation. A witness who recorded her with his smartphone, posted the shaming video online. Within days, her identity and her past were revealed. The video got viral all around the world. Posters and all kinds of jokes were made. Media wrote

about her. Even the US Washington Post wrote about her story. She eventually reached a fame she wished she had never achieved. Forever, the image will follow her. This girl will be called the ‘Dog Poop Girl’.

Another illustration, the sad story of the Star Wars Kid (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars_Kid). A young chubby boy in Canada. He posted a video of himself online in his rather unsuccessful attempt to imitate George Lucas, the famous movie star. His video was watched by tens of millions of net surfers who commented, and widely mocked his gesture. He was teased by the whole world. A childhood incident that will follow him forever.

Daniel Solove questions the future of reputation in the digital age and how data can track you back. He wrote: *“If the Empire in Star Wars Had Big Data, the Empire would have won. A search of records would have revealed where Luke Skywalker was living on Tatooine. A more efficient collection and aggregation of Jawa records would have located the droids immediately. Simple data analysis would have revealed that Ben Kenobi was really Obi Wan Kenobi. A search of birth records would have revealed that Princess Leia was Luke’s sister. Had the Empire had anything like the NSA, it would have had all the data it needed, and it could have swept up the droids and everyone else, and that would have been that”*.

Is more available information necessarily better?

What is an information taken out of context? Which freedom and autonomy when we can’t escape from our past? During an interview with the Wall Street Journal in 2010, Google’s then CEO, Eric Schmidt, suggested that young people should be entitled to change their identity once achieved 21 years of age to escape their youth mistakes. He adds: *“I don’t believe society understands what happens when everything is available, knowable and recorded by everyone all the time”* (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704901104575423294099527212>).

So, is taking a new identity a realistic option?

Facebook is a platform where users are encouraged to share their day to day stories, their feelings and their beliefs. Cambridge Analytica exploited 87 millions users’ profiles to manipulate electoral votes (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook%E2%80%93Cambridge_Analytica_data_scandal). Rather worrying, Facebook does not either respect the multitude of layers of our personality by storing all in one place. No more free speech nor modular language between levels of relationships. In the past, people would write diaries. Today, it’s been replaced by online blogs or social media platforms where people reveal most intimate details of their life. And incidentally the lives of their family, friends, co-workers, everyone, posted online for the eternity. 50% of blogs are from chil-

dren under the age of 18. The generation Google, as Daniel Solove calls it, has its memories engaged forever. A childhood that will follow them forever, for the leisure of Google to bring back every piece of memories.

Forgetting is not forgiving. It is a salutatory purge of our brain. It is mostly random purge

Maybe have you heard of Neuralink (<https://www.neuralink.com/>), a revolutionary project funded by Elon Musk. Elon Musk is the American multibillionaire CEO of Tesla electric cars, the inventor of the fabulous solar roof tiles. He even projects to colonize Planet Mars. One of the richest man in the world according to Forbes magazine (<https://www.forbes.com/profile/elon-musk/#4711a5227999>). His Neuralink project aims to reduce social inequalities by boosting cognitive capacities. A project to implant Computer interfaces in the brain of disadvantage populations, as he believes they suffer from a lack of intelligence. A theory supported by Dr Laurent Alexandre believing high IQ is key to success. A whole utopia of transhumanism (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transhumanism>). Give them extra brain processing and you'll resolve the issues of poverty!

Adding memory: Now, let's look at a little story told by Jean-Gabriel Ganascia (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4slqr2pTTc>). A little girl, Adele, asks her grandmother Juliette: '*Grandma, what does it mean a 'recitation'?*' The grandma vaguely remembers that in early Twenty-One century, people had to read and read again to memorize poetry or other texts. Adele lives in 2075. She has no idea of that. Neuralink has resolved the memory issue. In fact, Elon Musk, has borrowed his idea from NEURALIFE in "*Tomorrow and Beyond*", a science fiction book by Ian Summers (1978). The little girl is curious to know if this learning by heart process was any painful. The grandma says: '*no, we just had to read and read again to memorise, not to forget.*' The little girl has no idea what forget means.

Jean-Gabriel Ganascia (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Gabriel_Ganascia), who tells this science fiction story, is a professor of Computer Science and a French Philosopher. He is the President of the Ethics committee at the French Research Center, CNRS. His research is particularly focused on Ethics and Artificial Intelligence. In France, patients are already treated by deep electronic simulations of the brain to treat the symptoms of Parkinson disease. Now, imagine having an astonishing memory to record and remember everything, including every dream, every single detail of your life. Well, near 80 people around the world today have naturally this biological capability.

Actually, they suffer from hypermnesia disorder (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperthymesia>). They permanently keep a perfect memory of their life. They virtually remember every minor event most people would forget within days. The memory for them is so vivid, they can feel the pain for ever once rec-

orded. Every painful image they see remains engraved in their brain. Imagine the nightmare they live.

Without forgetting, we are haunted by the past without the ability to forgive or decide in present.

If Neuralink project was to go ahead, it needed a delete button. And here is the big question: who can decide to select and delete one's memories? Before Neuralink, we are the first generations to have major parts of our lives permanently, digitally recorded. Google aggregates and brings up in a click all crumbs of information to re-compose the puzzle of our life.

What the “Right to be Forgotten” can do?

The so called “Right to be Forgotten (https://www.inforights.im/media/1186/cl_eu_commission_factsheet_right_to_be-forgotten.pdf)” created by the European Court of Justice is not deleting the information but only de-linking the content by the search engine Google. Under specific circumstances a right to delete has been introduced by the recent European Regulation for the protection of personal data. But that is for a very small parcel of our sparse available information. Since its creation 20 years ago, Google has been collecting a mass of data. Google knows more about each of us than we know ourselves.

The new global Panopticon society of invisible surveillance is a threat to human freedom and dignity.

As Viktor Mayer-Schonberger points out, remembering has long been humans' dream. However, forgetting is a biological capacity. Today there is a shift. From biological forgetting we have moved to digital remembering. Naturally, memory is the exception, forgetting is the default. Digitally, remembering has become the default, forgetting has become the exception. Human health and wellness are based on the balance between memory and forgetfulness. We need to forget to better remember.

In online publishing, awareness gives the ability to balance the pros and cons. To be aware is not being scared. Is it worth the risk to post it online for the eternity? How best to protect our privacy? How to bring transparency and control for better privacy? These are the options of our future, the future of our children. Which kind of society we want for them? To protect against unforeseen future, it's better to store less than more.

Shoshanna Zuboff (2019), from Harvard University, has recently published the results of few years of research in her last book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. The author has surveyed many of our daily electronic digital crumbs. She considers rendition has become a surveillance capitalist project. She wrote: “Google rendered the earth, its streets, and dwelling places in the world, bypassing our consent. Facebook rendered the Social Network and its limitless details for the sake

of the companies' behavioral further markets". Commercial imperative takes over individuals' autonomy.

Our homes are being filled with Internet connected devices reporting our most intimate data. The smart meter reports when we wake up, when we eat, when we sleep, when we are away, when we are alone or with others. The mobile phone tracks every move and geo-location. CCTV security camera broadcasts online. What is sent on the internet for convenience of watching your home while away, allows hackers to access your images. Geotagging reveals political or religious beliefs. Web browsers, and cookies report on web surfing. We purchase books, music, clothing, medicines, all kinds of everyday necessities online through big corporations such as Amazon that reveal our intimate persona, our mood and our health. Selling health insurance was the most convenient move for Amazon. Alexa, the clever companion that obeys to users' voice, just like its Google counterpart, stores and analysis users' voice. Roomba vacuum cleaner cleverly vacuums our homes while out. For a higher performance, as explains its engineers, Roomba draws and records your floor plan. As any and every data has a value in the Data Broker market, the floor plans are sold to third parties (<https://nypost.com/2017/07/25/roomba-maker-wants-to-sell-your-homes-floor-plan/>). DNA genetic tests share data with the FBI (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-01/major-dna-testing-company-is-sharing-genetic-data-with-the-fbi>) and probably others (<https://www.axios.com/dna-test-results-privacy-genetic-data-sharing-4687b1a0-f527-425c-ac51-b5288b0c0293.html>) that have not yet been revealed. Artificial Intelligence is thirsty of data. IBM 'borrowed' online available pictures from social media and Flickr to feed its Facial Recognition software (<https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/12/18262646/ibm-didnt-inform-people-when-it-used-their-flickr-photos-for-facial-recognition-training>). China has social scoring based on facial recognition to ban from travel citizens with debt (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2019/01/21/chinese-social-credit-score-utopian-big-data-bliss-or-black-mirror-on-steroids/#f21e55248b83>). Good security measures you think? Think twice. Think stereotyping of the algorithm, think of the over reliance on technology. The digital society has surpassed George Orwell's 1984 nightmare. Privacy is a fundamental Human Rights to guarantee human dignity and freedom. Can we still remember to forget?

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