

The right to have an identity An alternative consideration



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Corresponding to the presentation of Paul McCarthy:

Identity between biology and society

The goal of this presentation is to propose an alternative way of approaching problems having to do with identity and connected with it as it was made in the presentation of Paul McCarthy. This approach is not necessarily far away from the presented by him. And I hope it will create a good basis for discussion.



I would propose that we define man's Identity as consisting of following elements:

1. Biological body with its physical, biological and chemical properties;
2. Brain or soul (depending on approach);
3. Context of man's origin: parents, family, place and time of birth;
4. The deeds of the man, creating his life history, I will also include here the opinions (thoughts), that a person is disclosing to other people;
5. His private thoughts and goals, which are not disclosed to anybody;



Items, described in point 4 (deeds) and partially 3 (context of birth) are creating **the social context of man's identity**.

This social context creates records in some log files (for example credit card transactions), but also in minds of other people, caused by the activity of an individual. In most cases many such "groups of activity records" will exist. A person can use many credit cards, and can have many "lives": for example "family life", "workplace life", "club activities"... with different people involved and different activities performed.

The social identity exists mainly in minds of other people and in other kind of storage facilities (hard disks for example).

I assume, that for many people this **"external identity"** is the most important thing. They are concerned about thoughts that other people can have about them.

Many people also care about records existing in governmental agencies, private companies, etc.

We can call this kind of identity

“Official identity”

This includes birth certificates, ID cards, passports, log files, etc.



Biometric technologies, especially performed by machines are creating de facto **the description of man's body.**

They are describing so called biometric features, such as finger prints, face, eyes structure, etc.

Medical technologies are even today able to describe almost the whole body structure, using different tomographic techniques, DNA analysis, etc.

We can imagine a machine that can be created probably in not a very far future, which will be able to unify biometric and medical techniques and create the "complete description of the man's body".



Having such description and assuming, that there is no way to transfer mind (or soul) from one body to the other we can agree with Irma van der Ploeg, that:

"Biometrics constitutes the identity"

(with other words: it gives us the possibility to describe the body and thus the man completely – as physical entity)

But this identity has only to do with point 1 (body) and 2 (soul) described at the beginning of this presentation.

Biometric technology is even (if sufficiently good working) able to tell us, if the man it describes is living and has "normal functions". Many examples of such approaches, aiming the detection of individuals under drug influence, tired people – and even - as we have heard yesterday of persons having malicious goals are existing. It can be assumed, that many of such techniques will be implemented in the future.



We can even imagine, that our hypothetical machine will allow us to create an algorithm allowing us to assign an individual number to every human being – to catalogize him. This number can be even a very good scientifically based item.

A good example of such approach can be the work done by Optel (company, that we are representing): we have shown, that it is possible to make a mathematical description of fingerprint, that uses only few bytes to create the whole fingerprint.

It can be assumed, that only about 12 bytes can be enough to catalogize all human beings – the number is large enough:

79228162514264337593543950336



Now I will consider problems having to do with “social identity and privacy”.

We can assume, that in the beginning of the mankind and even much later people have lived mostly in small communities, where “everybody knows very well what other people are doing, what is their origin, etc.”.

In a small community of people living close to each other, even today it can be difficult to maintain privacy (defined as something, that nobody else can share). Only “intime thoughts” (point 5) can allow to have it. It is also difficult to create many different “external identities”. We can assume, that

“The right to have an identity”

is illusory in such community. We have the same situation with the right to have privacy. Everybody has an identity, but only one and disclosed and only private thoughts. The idea of right do not make sense.



In a larger community, as typical today, the possibility to act in a hidden way is much more realistic. A man can use anonymous services and have many “social identities” (lives) and many records concerning himself (medical, social and other information). It is realistic to maintain something, that we can call “privacy” and “hidden identity”. In reality such identity can be only hidden in the way, that people are able to have many “external identities” and not disclose them to everybody.

The right to have an identity means in such a case, that everybody can try to separate the social context of each of his “external identity”. Everybody can try to prohibit the disclosure of his external records to somebody.

If this records are not easy available, it can be expected, that the right to have privacy and identity can be maintained and understood as the right to have many separated “external identities” and records available only to chosen people.

It is even possible to hide the identity described in point 1 – body. At least so long as biometric technologies are not used.



In the world, that we are now approaching (not only from my point of view), significant changes are expected:

- Working biometric technologies are able to describe the body – nobody can claim another body identity;
- Many activities are recorded in a potentially easy available way – in computer mass storage;
- Communication technologies allows to exchange such stored information between people around the world in a very quick and easy way.

Good example of such situation is the possibility given today by search machines: I assume, that almost everybody present today at this meeting has already created a record of his activities that is freely available in Google and other such machines.

We (the mankind) can try to react to this situation in at least two ways:

I. Restrictive

II. Open



Restrictive way has been extensively discussed during this meeting

It leads to creation of complicated legal structures, organizations that should prevent that external records are not freely available, etc. I suppose, that everybody will agree with me, that going this way creates a very complicated situation, that is not easy to maintain and there is probably no real chance to prevent, that external records will be not available to people having sufficient means and willing to reach them.

It is already very good visible today, that it is sufficient, if somebody gets access to such records and makes them freely available – they are in a very short time “immortal” - freely available forever. I can even imagine that in such a restrictive world many people and organized groups will try to act in such a way – it is already the reality today.



We can imagine that the mankind can choose another way – back to the “small (but global) village”, where everybody can know everything about anybody else.

But this time in a bit different way as in ancient societies:

- Working biometrics allows to identify a body in a perfect way;
- All external records are freely available.

I can imagine that such vision is a horror for many people today.

But I think, that after spending some time with considering this possibility you will find that:

- Such world may be not better and not worse as the world of a small community of people living close together;
- It can be a very secure world, because everybody can have only one true identity and everybody can evaluate his deeds;
- It may be an inevitable world due the progress of technologies.

In such a world everybody will have an identity, **but only one**.
The idea of “right to have an identity” do not make sense in this world.

Everybody can have many external identities, because he can have contacts with many groups of people, but cannot assume that these identities can be hidden.

The identity of everybody will be recognized automatically by the machines. This can allow to create a very convenient situation, but also allow to recognize and prevent dangerous situations.

If the mankind will choose this way, the people studying our discussion about identity in the future can wonder, what we are doing, because they will not understand what is

“the right to have an identity”

And they will also not understand, that there can be another privacy as the internal (intime) thoughts and goals.

And may be they will wonder, why we have tried to construct our world in such a complicated way?!



For those who may be not understand, that such a world without secrets, but also without privacy and anonymity can have advantages I will try to present some of them:

- All useful or necessary information is quickly available in all emergency cases.
- “Bad guys” and “bad governments” have difficulties to hide their deeds, intentions and preparations.
- It is easy to find people with similar interests, intentions. Matching people searching partners for any purpose can be very easy.
- People offering something (products, services, etc.) can easily find matching customers.
- The world will be in many cases much more convenient, because people are now spending large amount of time searching information, that is existing, but not available.

There are many other advantages, that can be found in such a world. I think, that it is worth to think about, what is the value of privacy in comparison to this advantages.

Thank you for your attention

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