Do You Mow Your Lawn?

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INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS
COURSE PROJECT

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November 13, 2017

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1.1 Introduction[?]

As capitalism or some form of capitalism has become prevalent & an accepted form of economy where the participants of the economy(the labour force) see it as a natural consequence of liberalization, globalization and privatization; the Marxist view of surveillance which according to it is a "fundamental aspect of a capitalist economy", becomes a subject of importance. "The work of directing, superintending and adjusting becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under capital's control becomes co-operative. As a specific function of capital, the directing function acquires its own specific characteristics". [?]

Michel Foucault was one who in the book Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison, has made surveillance as the most effective form of corrective punishment. His line of thinking confers to the following school of thoughts.

- Each individual has an inner conscience through which the person knows if the actions he/she is thinking of doing or has already done are wrong or right.

- The conscience in the individual is self-corrective in nature, id est, a person can change his/her behaviour by this inner self-corrective conscience.

- This conscience, if not naturally, can be invoked externally through different methods.

This invocation of conscience and altering the definition of right and wrong inside the public was first done by making punishment a public spectacle before the 18th century. The said method was a gruesome practice which was a show of power by the rulers of the state and the law. This made the people grow tolerance towards killing. The judges and the executioners started to become these monsters who were placed below the criminal himself. Punishment as a public spectacle stopped being the conscience invoking external force, rather it became a source of entertainment for the viewers. One can clearly notice, that this way of punishment only makes impact on the public, if any and not on the criminal himself as the punishments involved unhealable physical actions on the body leading to a slow and certain death.

There were various stages in which the states around the world realized that this form of punishment doesn't help the cause, rather, defeats the whole purpose of punishment. Newer form of punishments were formulated in stages. First, pillory was abolished. France tied every prisoner in chain-gangs and dragged them across France on foot. Prisoners were used as labour forces for jobs such as drainage cleaning and repairing highways. This was still a spectacle but it also helped in getting some work done, practically for free. A snowballing effect came into play where different states progressively started taking steps towards abolishing punishment as a public spectacle.

Punishments were designed which struck the soul and not the body. There was a shift of punishments from unbearable sensations given to the body to and economy of suspended rights of the person's conscience. It was the concrete idea of punishment which resisted the mind from making any wrong decisions.

The idea of surveillance was established which invoked this inner corrective-conscience without the use of physical force. It was with constant surveillance and a feedback(negative or positive), that the very structure of the mind of the criminal was altered from the very core. He would stop thinking of wrong acts altogether rather than just behaving himself in front of the authorities.

After the popularization of the participatory internet, the complete scheme and semantics of surveillance has changed. The original scope of surveillance has increased from Foucault defined schools, hospitals, prisons and industries to the inside of the person. From specific areas where surveillance was required and implemented, the whole life of the person has started to become visible and under constant corrective scrutiny. When on December 3, 2009, the then CEO of Google inc. Eric Schmidt was asked if people should trust Google as their most trusted friend; the CEO replied, "If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place."[?]

As more liberal laws come into play and people start raising concerns about privacy in the context of internet surveillance, one needs to understand and define the boundaries of Surveillance and Privacy in this internet age.

1.2 Privacy & Surveillance

Ever since the internet has started taking a strong role in everyone's life, by its very nature, it has become more and more participatory at an individual level.

The expensive, age old Foucault described physical surveillance techniques requiring buildings with a certain architecture(the panopticon) and human resource to operate it has been rapidly replaced by software based techniques which uses data from different universally accepted and apparently trusted internet applications of each individual for investigatory and corrective purposes. This makes each internet capable device an imaginary cell in the panopticon.

Social Media Platforms [1] have reduced the skills needed to participate on the internet to just owning an internet capable device, knowing the language and the willingness to participate. This opens the dams to the inflow of raw emotional responses and behaviours from millions of absolute novices. Most of them are not even aware of the implications of participating on the internet on their favourite SMP.

Intensive data trails about each participant provides a basis for the exercise of power over the public. Profile data(generated as the user uses the application) can be used to generate and provide customized information to each individual, thereby exercising the power to influence the behaviour and reduce the freedom of thought and, subsequently, action.[?]

"Quality of Service" for different applications depends on the extent to which they know the individual.[?] Knowing the individual can be used for:

- Commercial purposes: Specific knowledge about the person can be used to show advertisements designed for the target clients.

- Community good: Anonymous patient data from several hospitals from around the world can be used to do useful research based on that large data.

- Surveillance: Keeping an eye on what the person does and specifically, what the person is and influence individual thoughts so desired.

While privacy in itself is a very fluid concept, governments around the world have identified the need to safeguard the Right to Privacy of its people(on paper at least). The Supreme Court of India has declared "Privacy" a fundamental right on August 24, 2017.

Some SMPs give their users a view of a tunable privacy setting where the person can choose what is to be shown to other people, but they fail to understand or do not realize that that is just a handle to interpersonal privacy[?]. What about the now surreptitious syndics and intendants from whom no one can hide once uploaded information.

Even if access control policies are correctly defined & applied, the very existence of sensitive user data on the cloud is a threat to privacy as clouds are fairly susceptible to security threats.[?]

1.3 Effective Rule

So, how do you, the prospective ruler, make the most of surveillance and establish a stable state?

One can already observe from the above text that all the effort in the above direction is done to remove the individuality out of the individual; to make thoughts of the public uniform and to taste: to "mow the lawn". With a uniform lawn of thought, the ruler can glide though governance. He no longer needs to take care of the corner-cases of the behaviours of the surveilled for he has tightened and bound the range of thoughts "legal" in the system. The desired mindset strengthens as it propagates through generations and tends towards a position where the removed/altered thought will not even exist in the

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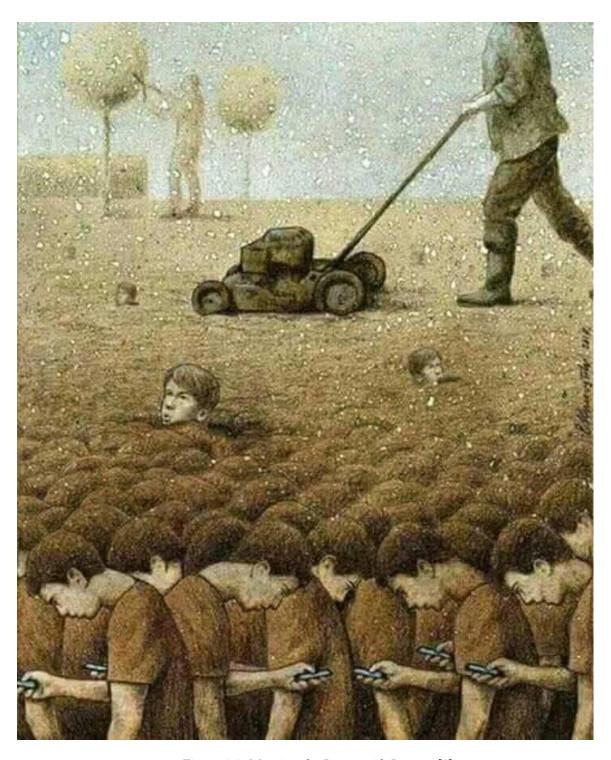[1]Henceforth, SMPs: Social Media Platforms

Figure 1.1: Mowing the Lawn with Internet[?]

minds, rather the idea will become natural and not augmented anymore.

Leaders through the generations have realized that it is not iron chains, but controlled chains of ideas in the minds of the people which secure the foundations of a stable state. When you have formed a chain of ideas in the heads of the citizens, you will then be able to guide them, being their masters. Rather than a stupid despot who constrains his slaves with iron chains, become a true politician who binds the people ever more strongly by the chains of their own ideas. On the soft fibres of the brain is found the unshakable and ever more tightening base of the soundest of Empires.

Instead of conquering the homes of the people, a successful ruler needs to conquer the minds of the people which can easily be done by speech.

1.4   Conclusion

It is interesting to observe that even with all the awareness around the surveillance techniques and its effects on the generations, very few people take the secessionist route and stop using the internet applications altogether. Most participatory internet platforms like SMPs have not evolved into data giants just by chance.
As we move forward in time, we have observed that the ways of punishment have moved from physical to mental; similarly, one can observe a shift from forceful surveillance (such as the ones described in [?] done in the time of the great plague at the end of the seventeenth century, where families were forced to stay inside their homes at all times) to apparent, completely non-coercive and voluntary surveillance.
These data-giants have realized and tapped into human beings most sensitive psychological vein, insecurity. Different people have insecurities about different aspects of their life with varying intensities. The SMPs have been successful in feeding these insecurities by an economic cycle of constant positive feedback. The following are some reasons why even conscious people find it hard to withdraw form these:

- The internet makes it very easy for participants to behave and project themselves in a manner so desired, very easily. It becomes hard to leave that fantasy world and come back crashing into reality.

- The continuous approval almost makes the participant psychologically dependant on it with withdrawal symptoms such as depression, anxiety, mood swings and a feeling of social alienation. Some of these overlap with the withdrawal symptoms of drugs like cocaine.[?]

- There is a feeling that walking out of SMPs will lead to a loss of contacts which is perceived as a potential loss.

- SMPs give some very convenient utility applications, which the person cannot think a life without.

- Many think that withdrawal from SMPs would not make a difference, now that they have given so much information to them already.

There has been a continuous never settling debate over surveillance. There is little contention on the fact that influencive surveillance is the key to a stable state, therefore, there is no running away from surveillance. One can only be careful not to get addicted to these drugs. Else you, the docile human being would become a part of the perfectly mowed lawn.