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To Create a System of Power is to impose a social Dynamic

One of the Key problems the Internet of Things has faced since its inception has been the public's general fear of the invasiveness of IoT technologies and their potential for unethical exploitation as tools of surveillance and social control. The problem faced by those who wish for society to embrace IoT technologies, is how to create an ethical and socially conscious IoT that is inclusive and enabling for all users? For it is my contention that the challenge of overcoming personal security and privacy fears is fundamentally entwined in resolving the agency and inherent ethics of IoT technologies. Thus we have the problem: to create a system of power is to impose a social dynamic.

At the moment, we are failing miserably at achieving an ethical IoT and alleviating public concerns. The reason we are failing miserably is because the IoT is primarily driven by a desire for profit rather than a desire to build a better planet. Thus whenever I hear discussions of the IoT it is almost always under the rhetoric of what I'd consider a sales pitch. And it normally pays lip service to the notion of building a better planet via one or all of the following: optimisation, automation, efficiency, connectivity, speed or security. More and more of late I've got a real problem with this stuff, because I always end up thinking: Optimisation, Automation, Efficiency, Connectivity, speed and Security for who? Who does this ultimately benefit, human beings or businesses? Also, what is the social cost of focusing on all these dodgy incentives? Aren't there more pressing things we should be talking about with regards IoT?

Let's start with the first point about being human. As a human being, do I really want to live in an optimised, automated efficient ever connected secure reality? What about my human desire for:

- The thrill of inhabiting the unknown?
- The pleasures of wilful indolence?
- The excitement of taking risks?

For a human, following ones will to inhabit the unknown - at one's own pace – and take calculated risks while doing so is fundamental for personal growth. Things feel uncertain and risky because you are on the edge of your physical or mental limits: for a human being, risk is what growth feels like.

As a human being, maybe I don't want to be optimised and efficient because experience teaches me that being optimised for efficiency leads to more work not more leisure (or pleasure)? Maybe I don't want my life to be automated since I'll lose the pleasure of discovering things, through my own self-determination, at my own pace? Maybe I don't want too much connectivity because it makes me feel like I'm being monitored; and thus my sense of my own behaviour and identity is mediated by the potential presence of an unknown other? Maybe security means too much insulation from things that may provoke me to grow and develop as a human being? Maybe ultimately, I'm worried that too much IoT will make me into Nietzsche's letzte Mensch:

Behold, I show you the Last Man. "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is star? Thus asks the Last Man, and he blinks... Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same, whoever feels different goes voluntarily into the madhouse... "We have invented happiness," say the Last Men, and they blink...¹

Does one not also need Chaos in one's soul to give birth to dancing stars? - To borrow another sentiment from Nietzsche. It is interesting to note that the things we consider chaotic – the unknown, risk, pleasure – tend to be the things that belong within the realm of emotion and aesthetics rather than the realm of logic. Interestingly, it is these emotional and aesthetic experiences that we tend to find most fulfilling and seek out as human beings. Yet, these are not the things we are focusing on enhancing via the IoT. What is therefore most invasive about the IoT in terms of personal security and privacy is not its ability to rob us of our data but rather it's potential to rob us of intimacy, which is a defining factor of our embodied experience of being human.

I would therefore argue that the focus on optimisation, automation, efficiency, connectivity, speed and security is distracting. If we mean to overcome the challenges of personal security and privacy, do we not need to also focus on how IoT entities interface with those emotional and aesthetic aspects of ourselves that are most human? Do we not need to incorporate this into our design and development processes? Should we think about pleasure as much as we think about optimisation, automation, efficiency, connectivity, speed and security?

In order to achieve this there is a real pressing need to be honest with ourselves and each other with regards what we believe it means to be human. What are the things we truly desire from our lives? What are the intimate thoughts and actions we engage in that we do

¹ Frederic Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p46

not feel comfortable being accessible via an IoT infrastructure? Is it time to start public debate about ethical and moral taxonomies as part of the transition to an IoT based reality?

It is my contention that such debates are a precursor to more significant ones. Ultimately we have to get to a position where we can have explicit public discussions with regards the role IoT technologies can play in overcoming the real challenges we face as a species. By 'real challenges' I'm referring to the sustainability of our way of life on this planet. Everyone is aware that through a mixture of population growth and global warming we are facing significant resource and environmental challenges which themselves are birthing further secondary orders of social and political unrest. In short: We have a planets worth of challenges, which we should be thinking about, collectively, as a planet. If we are to really address these challenges then we don't simply need an IoT infrastructure, but a complete paradigm shift in how we think about and organise ourselves personally, socially, politically, environmentally and economically.

All the indicators suggest that we are in a time of great transition for our society, arguably for our species. Our world view of how these things can be solved reeks of a world view that has all the hang-ups of industrialised society. Building on this point, I want to finish with two quotes. The quotes in many ways speak for themselves.

The ultimate triumph of philosophy would be to cast light upon the mysterious ways in which Providence moves to achieve the designs it has for man, and then to deduce therefrom some plan of conduct which would enable that two-legged wretch, forever buffeted by the whims of the Supreme Being who is said to direct his steps no less despotically, to know how to interpret what Providence decrees for him and to select a path to follow which would forestall the bizarre caprices of the Fate to which a score of different names are given but whose nature is still uncertain.²

- The Marquis De Sade, *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, p3

Most people today think they belong to a species that can be master of its destiny. This is faith, not science.³

- John Grey, *Straw Dogs*, p3

In conclusion I would propose that the IoT is not so much giving rise to new ethical challenges regarding privacy and security. Rather, its emergence is heralding the need for an emergence of new social orders, the establishment of which will call into question the assumptions about many of the things that were established by the Industrial revolution.

² The Marquis De Sade, *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, Oxford World's Classics, 1999, p3

³ Gray, J. *Straw Dogs*, p3, 2002, Granta, UK

Human beings may well adapt, but the IoT must allow for those aspects of human nature - significantly intimacy - that lie outside the dominion of logic.