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Technologies of Surveillance

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Keywords information society, policing, security, surveillance, techno-nationalism

Information Society as Surveillance Society

It is often said that current advanced societies are 'information societies' because a variety of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are introduced in our everyday life (Castells, 1997). The image of the information society is often very positively and optimistically described so that new ICTs are believed to solve the socio-political problems of our era.

However, the reality of the present information society is far from the dream-like image of the future that has fascinated the proponents of the information society for almost 30 years. Certainly, on the one hand, the advance of ICTs has made our life more efficient and convenient, but on the other hand it has caused several socio-political problems rather than solving them. One of the most prominent side-effects of the information society is the rise of surveillance and the invasion of privacy.

Critics have made it clear that new ICTs can be used as very effective tools for surveying and policing society and people (Lyon, 2001). For example, if 'every breath and step we take' are easily traceable via ICTs (mobile phone, personal computer and car navigation system using GPS), those who try to survey the people for the purpose of policing and control are happy because they can gather a huge amount of information about potential suspects. Thanks to digital technologies and electronic networks, the reality of our society is not so far from that sci-fi-like scenario. In that sense the information society is at the same time the surveillance society (Lyon, 2001).

However, the shape of society is never determined solely by technological developments. The mode of surveillance differs in different social contexts. To understand the conditions of the present surveillance society, we have to pay close attention to the specific political-historical contexts in which ICTs are introduced and domesticated. In this article I shall try to make it clear which social contexts of postwar Japan have shaped the seemingly excessive surveillance in present-day Japan.

Techno-nationalism

Just after defeat in the Second World War, the Japanese government declared its policy of fostering science and technology in order to rebuild the devastated land of Japan (Abe, 2001). In the postwar context of Japan, the development of technology had specific significance. On the one hand, the image of technology was synonymous with that of the US, as it was naively believed that the advance of technology could realize the wealth of the American way of life. On the other hand, the advance of technology had unique political meaning for Japanese people in the postwar era. Under the occupation policy of the US, Japan was forbidden to foster apparently national sentiments. In that political condition, the government policy of enhancing technology could have a supplementary function in satisfying the nation's pride. In other words, the development of technology was not only government policy but was also the national project of recovering the identity and pride that were lost by the defeat in the Second World War. In those socio-historical contexts, taking pride in 'Made In Japan' was nothing but expressing the techno-nationalism of Japan (Abe, 2004a).

The Information Society as Dream-like Future

It is well known that the term 'information society' (*Jo-hô-ka Shyakai*) was coined by the Japanese scholar Masuda (1981). The futuristic project of the information society was enthusiastically accepted not only by the government but also by the public in general. The reason is that the positive image of the information society as a 'wealthy and brighter future to come' was compatible with the techno-nationalistic sentiments of postwar Japan. Based on those nationalistic relationships between technology and society, the government implemented several policies that tried to introduce the new ICTs into people's everyday life during the 1980s (New Media Community, Teletopia and Intelligent City are the names of some of those policies). In the 1990s, 'Multi-Media' and 'IT (information technology)' have appeared as the new catchwords for celebrating the coming information society and new ICTs. In such social contexts in which technological development has been affirmatively accepted and welcomed as it satisfies the national pride, the policy of realizing the information society has been smoothly implemented without questioning or criticism.

Aum Shinrikyo and Policing

Although it has been invisible to the public, the information society also has been a surveillance society in postwar Japan. Several criminal incidents caused by Aum Shinrikyo, a religious cult group, made it clear that ICTs can be utilized as effective policing tools (Abe, 2004b). In the investigation of the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995, the police were able to follow the escape route taken by the Aum Shinrikyo suspects and eventually arrest them. In this investigation, the police fully utilized the N-system, whose original purpose was to monitor car traffic. Using the N-system, the police could easily detect where the suspects were heading. Before the arrest of the Aum members, the N-system was naively believed to be a tool for searching for stolen cars. But it became clear that the N-system could be and actually is used as a policing system that checks every car passing in front of the monitoring cameras.

However, the public's acceptance of the fact that ICTs (in this case the combination of monitoring cameras and electronic networks) are nothing but surveillance tools is more positive than critical. This is because Aum Shinrikyo was regarded as a very dangerous criminal group and the police's tight surveillance of them was considered indispensable, even if such policing might violate the civil liberty of criminal suspects. In other words, in the context of fear and anxiety for Aum Shinrikyo, utilizing ICTs as surveillance technologies was legitimized without discussion about the potential danger of rising surveillance in our everyday life.

Surveillance in the Name of Security

Considering the above-mentioned socio-historical contexts of postwar Japan, it could be said that Japanese society has long been a surveillance society where ICTs function as policing tools.

The shocking terrorist attacks on 9/11 functioned as the facilitating moment for enhancing the surveillance of society and people in Japan. As in other countries, the Japanese government tried to implement several new policies that aim to tighten the surveillance of the everyday life of the ordinary people in the name of 'public security' (Lyon, 2003). Backed by the people's fear of the threat of terrorism, apparently excessive surveillance is being introduced and institutionalized after 9/11. In a social context that gives paramount priority to security, civil rights (the individual's liberty, privacy, freedom of speech) seem to be

easily violated without much public concern and dissent. In that sense the current information/surveillance society in Japan contains profound dangers for the basic values of modern civil society. Certainly the threat of terrorism might be troublesome for our daily life. However, the rising surveillance fostered by the government and public opinion from within seems to be no less harmful and violent than terrorists' attacks from outside.

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Pleasures of Technology

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Keywords automation, parergon, pleasure, technology

In Akihabara, Tokyo's Electric Town, one finds a seemingly odd device – a *sushi drive*. It is a USB memory device that has a plastic shell that is a replica of a hand-made sushi. These drives, that look as sumptuous as any of the plastic food replicas that one finds in the display windows of Japanese restaurants, come in several flavours and in 32MB and 128MB. While it seems like a somewhat odd conjunction of food and computing, it also does seem logical to associate the bite-sized and highly portable sushi with a drive that was created to deliver the same in computing memory. However, it is not enough to tuck this away therefore as a logically coherent object or as a unique and culturally specific articulation of technology. The sushi drive is only a more recent example of the oft-neglected relationship between technology and pleasure.

It is useful first to theoretically articulate the secondary and supplementary place of pleasure in discourses and practices of technology. Towards this end, it is proposed that the notion of parergon as discussed by Derrida provides an interesting reference point. While Derrida's discussion was developed in response to Immanuel Kant's notion of 'aesthetic judgement' as it bears upon art objects, insofar as judgement of the technological object also enacts limits on what is proper to assessing it, the notion of parergon will be relevant here too.

Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* argues that an aesthetic judgement, just like any logical one, is usually complicated by the presence of what he calls 'judgements of sense' where one's assessment of an object of beauty is affected by questions of whether that thing is agreeable or disagreeable. Kant proposes that a genuine 'judgement of taste', however, should not be based on such issues as agreeableness since they are incidental and not fundamental to such assessments. He claims, 'a judgment of taste . . . is only pure so far as its determining ground (*Bestimmungsgrunde*) is tainted with no merely empirical delight (*Wohlgefallen*). But such a taint is always present where charm and emotion have a share in the judgement by which something is to be described as beautiful.' According to him, qualities such as colour and tonalities are elements that are *added* (*hinzukommen*) to the object of beauty but the design and composition of these qualities are what constitute 'the proper object of the pure