Politics in technology: call to action

Langdon Winner

“Do Artifacts have Politics?” In The Whale and the Reactor 1988

“In that sense technological innovations are similar to legislative acts of political foundings that establish a framework for public order that will endure over many generations. … The issues that divide or unite people in society are settled not only in the institutions and practices of politics proper, but also, and less obviously, in tangible arrangements of steel and concrete, wires and semiconductors, nuts and bolts.” (p.29)

[… and we may add, “lines of code.”]
(others) Technical things embody moral and political values

“Democratic & authoritarian technics”
Lewis Mumford, 1964
“The medium is the message”
Marshall McLuhan, 1964
“Invisible values embedded in computer programs,”
James Moor, 1985
“The missing masses”
Bruno Latour, 1992
“STS … the political philosophy of our time”
Brian Pfaffenberger, 1992
“Code as law”
Lawrence Lessig, 1999
Not (only) implications after the fact
From analysis to practice

The practical turn:
taking values into consideration in the practice of design and development

VID in FIA
How?
Value sensitive design
Values @ Play
[Howe, Flanagan, Nissenbaum]

DISCOVER
What values? Sources?
Define in operational terms

IMPLEMENT
Translate values into features and architecture
Resolve conflicts: dissolve, compromise, tradeoff

VERIFY
Action/outcome, understanding, affect/attitude
Prototype, user studies, reflection
Values @ Play

DISCOVERY I: What values? Sources?

Functional description: Secure transmission
Collateral: toaster, email, web-cookies
Key Actors: designers, builders, funders, users
Societal context: culture, tech standards, board ratings ..
Technical/material constraints: screen size
DISCOVERY II: Define abstract concepts operationally

Social justice: gender equity, equal access to good jobs
Openness: decentralized access, free-for-all, protocol, free of charge
Loyalty: favoritism, affirmative action for friends and family
Bias: systematic unfairness

Privacy: control, secrecy, contextual integrity, multi-dimensional analytic
IMPLEMENTATION = Translate values

Architecture, mechanism, protocol, algorithms, rules

In order to
  Force, constrain, prevent, impede, instruct,
  “Nudge,” afford, allow
  Configure, cost, convention, know-how

Resolve conflicts
  Dissolve
  Compromise
  Tradeoff
Values @ Play

**VERIFY**
- Action/outcome, understanding, affect/attitude
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**IMPLEMENT**
- Translate values to features and architectures
- Resolve conflicts, dissolve, compromise, tradeoff

**DISCOVER**
- What values? Sources?
- Define in operational terms
“at play”
A Theory of Privacy as Contextual Integrity

1. Privacy means appropriate information flow (Not control, secrecy, or dichotomy)

2. Appropriateness means compliance with social expectations of privacy

3. Expectations of privacy are modeled by context-specific informational norms

4. Ideal informational norms are those that promote ethical and political principles and contextual ends, purposes, and values
Underlying Assumptions of Privacy as CI

Contexts
Structured social spheres defined by activities, practices, roles, ... e.g. healthcare, education, social & home-life, professional & work-life, commercial marketplace

Informational Norms
Context specific rules, customs, conventions, expectations, laws, defining appropriate flows of personal information

Purposes and values
Ends, purposes, values in a context, both specific and general
Informational norms model expectations

In a job interview, the interviewer asks about a candidate’s past work experience but not about religious observance.

A priest never shares congregants’ confessions with others.

A citizen of the U.S. reveals gross income to the IRS, under strict conditions of confidentiality except as required by law.

You do not share a friend’s secrets with others, except, perhaps, with your spouse, unless your friend expressly requests otherwise.

Parents closely monitor their children’s academic performance.
Theory of Contextual Integrity → Structure of Informational norms → Capturing the value of privacy
Informational norms: Structure

**Actors**
- Physician, merchant, bank, friend
- Merchant, police, ad network
- Patient, shopper, investor, reader

**Information types**
- Demographic, biographical
- Transactional, communications
- Medical status, financial

**Transmission Principles**
- Consent, coerce, steal, buy, sell
- Confidentially, stewardship
- With a warrant, surreptitiously
- [An indefinitely large domain]
Daisy Smith applies for a loan from Wells Fargo Bank. She authorizes Wells Fargo to obtain a credit report from Equifax. Equifax provides Daisy White’s credit report to Wells Fargo Bank with authorization from Daisy White.

Flow analysis MUST specify ALL parameters: Sender, Subject, Recipient; Information types; Transmission principles.
Informational Norms Embedded in Law: Example (GLB Act)

Sender role

Financial institutions must notify consumers if they share their non-public personal information with non-affiliated companies, but the notification may occur either before or after the information sharing occurs.

Transmission principle

In our formal computer language,

\[ \forall p_1, p_2, q : P. \forall m : M. \forall t : T. \]

\[ \text{incontext}(p_1, c) \land \text{send}(p_1, p_2, m) \land \text{contains}(m, q, t) \rightarrow \]

\[ \text{inrole}(p_1, \text{institution}) \land \text{inrole}(p_2, \text{non-affiliate}) \land \text{inrole}(q, \text{consumer}) \land (t \in npi) \rightarrow \]

\[ \text{send}(p_1, q, \text{privacy-notice}) \lor \text{send}(p_1, q, \text{privacy-notice}) \]
Kirsten Martin, “An empirical study of factors driving privacy expectations online.” (PLSC 2013)

50% of respondents believed targeting vignettes did not conform to the privacy notice
70% of respondents believed tracking vignettes did not conform to the privacy notice to some degree.

... when they did!

Those who said vignettes conformed to privacy notice were only somewhat certain

In our case studies: Policy vs. normative expectations
+ Tessla Tussle
+ Warning of the presences of licence plate readers
PbD Takeaways

Establish context
Map flow to/from
   ALL actors
Information types
Transmission principles

All the parameters matter!!
Omission invites ambiguity
PbD Takeaways

• Design principles (per Rubinstein)
• Data minimization
• Enforce flow patterns
• Implement constraints (e.g. crypto)
• Authorization and authentication

But: What makes this about PRIVACY? Not, e.g. security, or DRM, ...?
Capturing the Value of Privacy with CI, or why we should care about informational norms

- Interests
- General moral, social, and political values
- Internal context-specific ends, purposes and values
What counts in the privacy calculus?

Interests – often conflicted
  Informational harms, benefits, risks
  Boundary control (Altman)
General moral, social, and political rights & values
  Unfair discrimination ...
  Liberty, autonomy ...
What counts in the CI calculus

Context specific purposes and values

- healthcare: cure disease; alleviate suffering, equity ...
- political: democracy; freedom from exploitation ...
- home and social: trust, autonomy, stability ...
- education: knowledge, intellect, fair distribution
PbD Takeaways

The harm calculus
About individuals data subjects and
Social integrity

Contextual ends, purposes, & values