



Science Arts & Métiers (SAM)

is an open access repository that collects the work of Arts et Métiers Institute of Technology researchers and makes it freely available over the web where possible.

This is an author-deposited version published in: <https://sam.ensam.eu>
Handle ID: <http://hdl.handle.net/10985/9854>

To cite this version :

Colin SCHMIDT - The global shift: shadows of identifiability - Behavioral and Brain Sciences - Vol. 37, n°1, p.99-100 - 2014

Any correspondence concerning this service should be sent to the repository

Administrator : archiveouverte@ensam.eu



The global shift: Shadows of identifiability

doi:10.1017/S0140525X1300188X

Colin T. Schmidt

Head of Technology Appropriateness, ENSAM-ParisTech & Laval Technical Institute, LeMans University, 53020 Laval, France.

Colin.Schmidt@univ-lemans.fr

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Colin_Schmidt/

Abstract: The presence of overwhelming amounts of information in our big-data era society is growing. Globalisation is increasingly giving these solicitations (regarding information) a more social aspect causing

behavioural changes. While restricting my focus on this aspect of the Bentley et al article, I address related medical questions and pin-point the conceptual interest of the roadmap given therein.

Let's make the geography of the target article explicit. Bentley et al. begin to focus on geography with a schema in their section 2 entitled "The map." A schema is of interest here because, for example, people in Africa and Asia have highly collaborative ways of doing things. Europeans and Americans, however, are often independent-minded users of technology and discourse. The possibility of current language uses drifting towards collective-minded places in the world (like the southeast as suggested by Bentley et al.), is related to the digital shadows of a person. Being able to control one's *digital shadow* (meaning the implications and usage of one's profiles, avatars, memberships in social media, or general presence on the Web), with the appropriate discourse, whether digital or not, is important to inhabitants in the West. In spite of this current situation, the globalization of cultures and economies is bringing about changes to priorities with respect to language use as the West becomes exposed to the collective-minded southeastern cultures.

So what does this mean for the western populations? The ambient perseverance on the Internet of an increasing number of identities of a person (memberships, enrollments, sign-ups, connections) will enable chronic forms of fatality about the (possible) uses of one's identity to set in with respect to the information they provide in order to connect to services (some may totally give up controlling their virtual identities). Users must provide an identity each time they sign up for access to a new website. Recording takes place in an ambient manner. Sometimes regrettable past identities linger on. Many wish to avoid leaving such shadows behind. Mathematically, one may state that the big-data business of "cleansing" the web of individuals' digital shadows will slow down, but this does not mean that the types and methods of communication in the West will be "homogenised" with the mentality of the southeast. Or does it? If this happens over a long period of time, a rather unclear self-identifiability issue on the Internet should not throw a skew to the general overall evolution of the language base, meaning that language skills will rest intact. But as the relationship between people in the northwest and the southeast quadrants of the map is certainly dialogical, as in all human relations, the southeast will gradually acquire a double role: (1) that of subduing, through a global relativity, the problematic 'onslaught' of dealing with digital-shadows in the West, and (2) that of potentiating acceleration of the same problem through collective behaviours. Proper analysis of the phenomenon is required now (but it takes time to achieve it; cf. Alleva (2006)). In certain highly mediated cases (i.e., directors and officers of corporations being arrested, etc.), multiple clouds of shadow-like identities even "spew out" over the Internet. The work of Bentley et al. in this issue obviously makes a major contribution to clarifying matters by offering us a roadmap.

This said, my geographical suggestion above falls somewhat short of a full explanation of this aspect of the text even though the authors' idea of a great shift is also argued for in a spatio-temporal manner. Equally relative to the constructive map provided by the authors, I think the shift across territories is just as important *conceptually* to specialists in cognitive technologies, philosophical questions about society and biological psychology (Pillai et al. 2013; Schmidt & Kraemer 2006; etc.). This would, in my view, explain their setting out to elaborate such an instrument of sociological and ethnographic interest. Their arguments lead them to point out the fact that the shift towards the customs and practices of the (conceptual) southeast causes "decision fatigue" to set in is very intuitive: "As the number of options grows, a natural way to try to minimize the cognitive cost of choosing among them would be to simply copy the choices of more-experienced choosers" (cf. sect. 2, para. 4).

The cognitive constraints so expressed encouraged me to reflect upon what this meant for a person's 'normal' freedom of thought (cf. Canguilhem 1966). In the West, ethics and well-being are at stake here, or to put things plainly, one may speak of the mere employability of members of society that avoid thinking for themselves. Actually abandoning one's right to choose, pick, select, discern for oneself from one's own knowledge, and so forth, in order to adopt dubious methods of controlling one's situation is to me a curious thing to do. Does expertise just not matter any more? Must our possessions and preferences lie in the hands of others? What I see in this shift is the downgrading of rational capabilities. From subjective performers, we are turning into the objects of society. But why focus so much on Bentley et al.'s thoughts about the "herd-like" *downshifting* in the functional description of human behavioural processes (cf. sects. 1, 2.3, and 4)? I think psychologists should have greater wherewithal for interpreting this tendency and offering society the means for projecting itself intelligently.

The "out-sourcing" of mental activities is necessary in order to change types of activities, but physicians have been diagnosing similar things to the "decision fatigue" (sect. 2, para. 4) mentioned by Bentley et al.: Could *myalgic encephalopathy* or *chronic fatigue syndrome* be related to *decision fatigue*? These eventually are the related physiological implications that are cropping up in respect to a new set of identity factors of the individual in the west. As a matter of fact, the British National Health Services (NHS) "Choices" web page reports 250,000 syndrome cases of this type in the United Kingdom (National Health Services 2013); and 1,115 cases were reported within a population of approximately 144,000 (Olmsted County, Minnesota) through the half-a-century Mayo Clinic *Rochester Epidemiology Project* (cf. Kremers et al. 2011).

Since complex digital-shadow handling and the surcharge of opaque information is causing decision-taking to be difficult for the rational individual, won't strong individualism from the west wreak some havoc in the east? Having noticed now how handling identity in digital-shadow-rich populations has become a "nightmare" for many, one can conceptually picture people from the east becoming overly individualistic with respect to the standing canonical norms. I do not predict the language base in either east or west will be altered immediately. As the (western substratum-based) self endures increasing identifiability problems with respect to its former methods of going about this, the mind/brain will either begin to fail pathologically or learn to appreciate its ability to employ relativism in new contexts.