

From the marginal pervert to the end of liberty: the evolution of voyeurism in the 21st century.

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Voyeurism - the desire to see what is hidden from the eyes because it is not meant for them - has always existed. During the 19th and 20th centuries, in our Western societies, the private sphere and the naked body were considered sacred. The very term "sphere" evokes something contained and protected, taking it away from the gaze and making it even more desirable. Braving the denial of access to this intimacy was and still is part of the attraction and excitement that comes with voyeurism. If we look at the 20th century, we realize that this old-fashioned analog voyeurism, "IRL" (In the Real life, as opposed to online life) was a very limited activity. Some "perverts" were engaged in it illegally and mainly in the public space. State intelligence agencies were attempting to penetrate the privacy of some highly targeted individuals. These secret services were therefore the only official services able to exercise this voyeurism, at the limits of the law and in more or less intensive and invasive ways. As for economic voyeurism, it was prohibited by law. "Analogue" voyeurism was therefore a marginal, secret, often illegal and morally reprehensible activity.

There have been paradigm shifts with the advent of digital voyeurism in the 21st century. It is becoming widespread in all spheres of society, legitimized and institutionalized.

Today, we engage in a self-confident voyeurism/narcissism on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc....). This narcissism, where the triumphant individual displays his happiness and social success in order to exist in the eyes of others, has also become the new norm.

It forms a perfectly complementary couple with digital voyeurism. It is therefore an opening of the intimate that is consented, chosen, calculated, staged for the voyeur who has become legitimate. There is therefore no more infringement, the voyeurs have the right to see, but remain excited because they can continue to chase the intimate, in the shadows if they so wish, although the social contract requires them to notify their passage by an assessment or a comment.

Social networks are companies whose economic model depends entirely on these narcissistic and scopic impulses. They collect our information and sell it to advertisers. They push and cultivate them, then scrutinize us to get to know us better. They are therefore also voyeurs but for economic purposes. The practice has spread to all companies, services and institutions on the Internet - so almost all of them. They spy on us via, among other things, the "cookies" they leave on our various devices. In the 20th century or today, would I accept entering a store or an institution and having a tracker placed on me? A tracker that would communicate all my movements and actions, from the most public, to the most intimate, even after I left the premises? Surely not you would think? Well, we do accept this practice daily in our digital life.

An economic voyeurism is therefore in place, generalized and legal for the most part.

The state is not to be outdone. Thanks to new technologies, mass surveillance (by generalizing surveillance cameras with facial recognition, digital borrowing, scanning of telephone and social networks, etc.) is reaching unsuspected heights, reducing the privacy of my actions even further.

Twenty years ago, I would never have shared my family albums, vacations, dining out, sunsets, recent purchases, engagement photos, declarations of love, intimate thoughts, political opinions and gossip, with so many "friends" that I barely know, so many co-workers, and vague relationships. Even less with complete strangers, like it happens today on "open profiles", which are increasingly common on social networks. And even fewer people would have enjoyed reading them so much. I am always amazed by the in-depth knowledge of my movements, my facts and gestures, by a very large number of individuals thanks to my Facebook timeline. Twenty years ago, the state would not have had an instant Awareness of my movements within the city, The shops I frequent, transport I use, or the institutions and public spaces I visit.

As for voyeurism linked to pornography, even if it remains confined to private space, it has become so widespread that it has lost its original taboo. Sexual voyeurism, which was at the center of the phenomenon in a puritanical 20th centuries, has become a marginal and negligible phenomenon in our society of generalized voyeurism. Peeping Tom, who was born in 2005 in response to the surge of poor quality pornography on the Internet, which was just beginning to become omnipresent, quickly became a reflection on voyeurism in the broad sense. Peeping Tom has a set of eyes replacing the pixelated pornographic set of its beginnings. From the little perverts navigating from digital voyeurism to analog - because Peeping Tom follows the visitor when he gets tired of his pornographic screens - the work has followed the evolution of voyeurism and how the voyeuristic eyes have multiplied, filling its digital space. Big Brother replaces cheap porn.

The advent of a voyeuristic society.

What is worrying is not really the generalization of voyeurism but rather its consequences on our individual freedoms: what will remain of my free will when the artificial intelligences of Google, Facebook, Amazon, Tencent or Baidu will know me so intimately that they will be able to bend my economic, political, romantic or societal choices at will?

As for generalized state voyeurism - also on the rise in almost general indifference - it is enough to take a look at China to see how dangerous it is for the preservation of our fundamental rights. What will remain of my freedom when the state will know and evaluate in a system of "social rating" each of my actions, to congratulate or sanction me in relation to my pension, allowances, medical care, travel, etc.? This system, already implemented in several provinces of China since 2014, thanks to automatized surveillance and artificial intelligence, should be extended to all of China by 2020.

In conclusion, satisfying our narcissistic and scopoc drive may well cost us much more today and tomorrow than it did yesterday. I come to regret the indecent assault of our grandparents looking under girls' skirts in the market square.