

# Owning Identity

## One or many: Do we have a choice?

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# Roadmap

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- **Critical aspects of linkage: direct and indirect**
- **Identity and Absolute Identity differ**
- **Quarantining different identities**
- **Pressures for uniqueness of 'identity'**
- **Trust broking and denial of access**
- **Token bundles and digital identity**
- **Contextual Sufficiency as a principle**
- **Loss of social space, and ownership of identity**

# Themes

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**“There are few situations where complete and definitive verification of identity is possible, and the tendentious terms”Identity Card” simply makes the implied assumptions that the token (the card) is indeed the person”**

**“How has it been possible to have multiple identities in this way?”**

**“Simply because if people undertake their legal responsibilities with various bodies and the community this is a basic freedom - but this freedom depends on trust and genuine security .... and credible security at that”**

# What are we talking about?

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## Full Oxford Dictionary definition

- **The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration: absolute or essential sameness; oneness**
- **The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.**

This definition demonstrates the ambiguity of the word. A clear distinction is drawn in the dictionary between the various definitions and usages of the term 'identity' and the quite separate term 'absolute identity'

## Critical aspects of linkage: direct and indirect

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- Is one identity verification the same as any other?
- Identification is a verb, not a noun
- Direct linkage
  - by abuse of special purpose Id Tokens (ie. passport)
- Indirect linkage
  - by assumptions of uniqueness of “identity”

## Identity and Absolute Identity differ

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- The ability to achieve an accepted ‘identity’ as oneself by the use of tokens or other forms of associated factors
- The level to which a restriction to a single token-certified ‘identity’ can or should be used for all purposes
- Tokens as temporary anonymous Id (movie tickets)
- Nom de plumes, assumption of spouses name
- Supplied ‘new’ identity for protection (ie to ensure lack of possible linkages and tracing ...)
- Assumed names for personal occupational protection

## Quarantining different identities

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- Tax Offices quarantined information on illegal professions as long as tax was paid
- Dismantling the Chinese walls between identities has a real quantifiable cost

## Pressures for uniqueness of 'identity'

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- Data matching agency activities
- New Acts such as AUSTRAC for secret informing
- Limited or non-existent accountability in enforcement agency powers
- Politicians exemption from privacy laws
- Verification of identity for government payments
- Problems of contamination of assumed high quality ID tokens by those most likely to need them
- Public health pressures for large scale tracing (research and epidemiological prevention)



## Trust broking and denial of access

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“The movement to a post modernist culture of corrections is one of normalising social control over all aspects of life - fit the power inequity aspects of privacy measured by others”

“A society in a culture of surveillance, a society of judges exercising the power to punish everywhere, a society increasingly lacking in personal privacy and individual trust and a viable public life that supports and maintains democratic values and principles”

**pp 128-9 Staples 1997 (4 years pre 9/11)**

# Token based Id who wins? Loses?

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- Government operates increasingly on a basis of lack of trust
- Withholding if not deemed to be proved eligible
- Abandons the culture of rights
- So if a party cannot prove his/her **eligibility** by token [identity linked to data records of the government body]
  - Government saves money and the **weakest** lose
- If there is poor validation of vulnerable parties, this affects everyone negatively due to false positives
  - Government saves money and **all of us** lose
- Token based ‘absolute identity’ appears to be asymmetric in its effects - against the people concerned.

## Token bundles and digital identity

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- If one form of Id is good surely more must be better?
- Assemblies of entity tokens (biometrics) leave a **permanent** trail for good or ill
- These are transformed by third parties into digital tokens for the identification (and the inevitable recording) process
- These bundles of tokens may be owned by third parties
- The individual may have no right of access to, or use of, them
- Loss of ownership of the tokens now defined as ‘identity’ can be equated to the loss of ones own identity in transactions
- An extreme case is the exploitation of this identity bundle
- Iceland DNA anyone?

## Contextual Sufficiency as a principle

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- To stem the tide of assumptions of absolute identity we propose a principle of:

### Contextual Sufficiency

1. This recognises the variations in transaction identification and attribution schemes in differing circumstances, and
2. Provides a practical and workable basis for rationalising the steady flow of ‘absolute identity’ token production and use

## Loss of social space, and ownership of identity

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- **The effects of collapsing multiple identities constrains the social space**
- **Already people simply choose to avoid flights that require a stop in the United States.**
- **Commercialisation of identity tokens and their linkage is now leading to filtering of access to services by call centres by drawing on cumulative cross linked data**
- **We argue that Contextual Sufficiency is an essential complement to privacy principles to retain the rights of anonymous and differentiated identities for ourselves**



# Just one birdseye view....

