

Comprehension Exercise

Social Surveillance

Passage 1 Thomas Hayden writes about SOCIAL SURVEILLANCE.

1. We all know the type: the goody-two-shoes, chasing a litterbug for a block to 'return' an errant chip bag; the teacher's pet, smugly ratting out note-passers in class; the self-appointed etiquette cop, quick with a rebuke for line jumpers, crying children, and public cellphone talkers everywhere. Uptight? Quite possibly. Annoying? Almost certainly. But the urge to call attention to others' infractions is more common than we might like to admit. And, researchers are finding, the moralists among us might just be an essential ingredient in the glue that holds human societies together.

2. Social scientists call the behaviour 'altruistic punishment': the willingness to step in and enforce societal norms even if doing so carries little chance of reward and significant personal cost. Psychological theories and economic models suggest that people should make decisions about how to behave in groups based on their best interests rather than the good of the group. In other words, taking an inconsiderate clod to task for butting into line in front of you makes perfect sense, but how to explain the person who bawls out a stranger for butting into line behind him? And yet the altruistic punishment impulse comes up time and again in daily life and psychology experiments.

3. The impulse to punish cheating and other selfish behaviour appears to be deep-seated. When a group of Swiss researchers used brain scans during trust games, they found that the decision to punish cheaters stimulated the dorsal striatum, a brain region associated with processing rewards. In other words, people choose to punish inconsiderate behaviour not for personal gain but because it feels good.

4. In trust games where honest players are allowed to punish cheaters with a fine, most will jump at the chance — even if doing so costs a significant portion of their profits. This tendency to punish free riders is very confusing because if there are only a few punishers, the cost is very high. This begs the question: How does the behaviour arise in the first place? In a computer simulation published recently in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, James Fowler, a political scientist at the University of California-Davis, shows that the key is to allow people to opt out of the exercise completely— forgoing both contributions and benefits. If even one or two punishers tip the balance toward mutually beneficial behaviour, more people will decide to join the group, sharing costs and benefits — perhaps even becoming punishers themselves to protect their investment.

5. This may help to explain one of the most mystifying aspects of human behaviour: cooperation. Social animals like honeybees cooperate extensively, but they're all genetic relatives — making personal sacrifice a good strategy to ensure that common genes are passed on. Humans, on the other hand, regularly co-operate with complete strangers, even when there's no reasonable expectation of a personal reward, genetic or otherwise. Increasingly, researchers say, it's looking as if our tendency to sanction breaches of social norms is the key to human cooperation.

6. That's not to say that fear of punishment is the only thing standing between civilisation and chaos. Most people in most situations will do the right thing simply because it is the right thing. But there is also always some abuse of co-operation, says Ernst Fehr, an economist at the University of Zurich. 'I am convinced that altruistic punishment is a key element in social order and co-operation. You could call it the cement of society.'

Passage 2 The Economist writes about TECHNOLOGICAL SURVEILLANCE.

1. Big Brother, they have long warned, is watching. Closed-circuit television cameras, which are proliferating around the world, often track your moves; your mobile phone reveals your location; your transit pass and credit cards leave digital trails. 'Light is going to shine into nearly every corner of our lives,' wrote David Brin in his 1998 book *The Transparent Society*. The issue, he argued, is no longer how to prevent the spread of surveillance technology, but how to live in a world in which there is always the possibility that citizens are being watched.
2. But the spread of surveillance technology also has its benefits. In particular, it can enhance transparency and accountability. More and more video cameras can be found in schools, for example. Web-based services such as ParentWatch.com and KinderCam.com link to cameras in hundreds of American child-care centres, so that parents can see what their offspring (and those looking after them) are up to. Schools are also putting webcams in their classrooms: one American school district has plans to install 15,000 such devices for use by security personnel (and, perhaps one day, parents). And tech firms such as Google have put webcams in their staff restaurants, so that employees can delay going to lunch if they see a long queue.
3. Steve Mann, a professor at the University of Toronto, calls the spread of citizen surveillance 'sousveillance' — because most cameras no longer watch from above, but from eye level. Instead of being on top of buildings and attached to room ceilings, cameras are now carried by ordinary people. The video images of Rodney King being assaulted by police officers and the horrific pictures of prisoner abuse from the Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq are the best known examples.
4. Camera-phones could have a profound effect on the news media. Technologies such as newsgroups, weblogs and 'wikis' (in essence, web pages which anybody can edit) let people distribute images themselves, bypassing the traditional media, notes Dan Gilimor, a journalist, in his recent book, *We the Media*. Camera-phones make everyone a potential news photographer. Unsurprisingly, old media is starting to embrace the trend. The San Diego Union Tribune recently launched a website to gather camera-phone images of news events taken by their readers, and the BBC also encourages users of its website to send in pictures of news events.
5. Companies and governments will have to assume that there could be a camera or a microphone everywhere, all the time, argues Paul Saffo of the Institute for the Future. Unsafe conditions in a factory or pollution at a chemical plant are harder to deny if they are not just described, but shown in photos and videos. Animal rights activists, for instance, operate online multimedia archives where people can store and view graphic images from chicken farms, slaughterhouses and fur factories. Such material can cause outrage among consumers, as was the case with videos of dolphins caught in tuna nets.
6. In November 1996, Senegal's interior minister was caught out when he admitted that there had been fraud in a local election, but failed to notice that a bystander was holding a mobile phone with an open line. The election was annulled. In the same country's presidential election in 2000, radio stations sent reporters to polling stations and equipped them with mobile phones. The reporters called in the results as they were announced in each district, and they were immediately broadcast on air. This reduced the scope for electoral fraud and led to a smooth transfer of power, as the outgoing president quickly conceded defeat.
7. The social consequences of the spread of surveillance technology remain unclear. Mr Brin suggests that it could turn out to be self-regulating: after all, Peeping Toms are not very popular. In a restaurant it is generally more embarrassing to be caught staring than to be observed with crumbs in your beard. A photographically "armed" society could turn out to be more polite,' he suggests, referring to an American aphorism that holds an armed society is a polite society'. Alternatively, the omnipresence of cameras and other surveillance technologies might end up making individuals more conformist, says Mr Brin, as they suppress their individuality to avoid drawing too much attention to themselves.
8. The surveillance society is on its way, just as privacy advocates have long warned. But it has not taken quite the form they imagined. Increasingly, it is not just Big Brother who is watching — but many little brothers too.

Questions on Passage 1

1. What is the general attitude conveyed by the use of the labels 'the goody-two shoes', 'the teacher's pet' and 'the self-appointed etiquette cop' (para 1)? [1]
2. (i) In your own words, explain 'altruistic punishment' (para 2). [2]
(ii) How does the example in paragraph 2 support this explanation? [1]
3. What did the Swiss researchers' findings reveal about the motivation 'to punish cheating and other selfish behaviour' (para 3)? Use your own words as far as possible. [1]
4. According to the writer, in paragraph 5, what is the difference between how social animals and human beings cooperate? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]
5. Explain, in your own words as far as possible, what the writer means when he says that 'altruistic punishment' is 'the cement of society' (para 6)? [2]

Questions on Passage 2

6. 'Light is going to shine into nearly every corner of our lives.' (para 1) In what way does this sentence show that surveillance technology is a double-edged sword? [2]
7. Give one implication of surveillance technology for each of the following contexts in paragraph 2:
(a) childcare centres and schools [1]
(b) tech firms [1]
8. Summarise what the writer thinks are or might be the effects of 'the spread of citizen surveillance' Using material from paragraphs 4-7, write your summary in no more than 150 words. [8]
9. Who are the "little brothers" referred to in paragraph 8? [1]
10. Passage 1 is about how social pressure determines social behaviour whereas Passage 2 looks at how technology keeps society in check. To what extent are the writers' views relevant in Singapore? [8]

ANSWERS for Questions from Passage 1

1. What is the general attitude conveyed by the use of the labels 'the goody-two shoes', 'the teacher's pet' and 'the self-appointed etiquette cop' (lines 1-3)? [1]

Disapproval/disdain/scorn/contempt; it is critical, not welcoming.

2. (i) In your own words, explain 'altruistic punishment' (line 8). [2]

Volunteering to interfere by making others conform to the conventions/for the moral good of the community (1) although they are unlikely to gain and it is with great expense to the self. [1]

(ii) How does the example in paragraph 2 support this explanation? [1]

The example shows that the person is not affected by the queue cutting and might even be scolded but he interferes for social justice/for the benefit of others/because queue cutting is unacceptable. [1]

3. What did the Swiss researchers' findings reveal about the motivation 'to punish cheating and other selfish behaviour' (line 16)? Use your own words as far as possible. [1]

The findings showed that the motivation is rooted/ingrained/innate/nature/inherent part of our nature and people derive satisfaction from the decision it makes them happy/it gives them a sense of achievement.

4. According to the writer, in paragraph 5, what is the difference between how social animals and human beings cooperate? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Social animals work together in many contexts with their kin/with others that are genetically related to them whereas human beings often work with people that they do not know. (1)

Social animals do that to secure the shared reproduction of their shared genes, but human beings work without any thought of individual gain. (1)

5. Explain, in your own words as far as possible, what the writer means when he says that 'altruistic punishment' is 'the cement of society' (line 42)? [2]

Something that holds /gels people firmly together (1) It is necessary/crucial/essential factor for people to live and work in harmony (1)

ANSWERS for Questions from Passage 2

6. 'Light is going to shine into nearly every corner of our lives.' (lines 3-4) In what way does this sentence show that surveillance technology is a double-edged sword? (inference question) [2]

+ve: society is transparent and/or accountable/has less or no freedom.

-ve : society loses privacy

7. Give one implication of surveillance technology for each of the following contexts in paragraph 2: (inference question) [1]
(a) childcare centres and schools

Parents have a greater peace of mind in checking the safety of their children OR Teachers feel uncomfortable.

(b) tech firms [1]

Workers enjoy the convenience of knowing when to do what/can manage their time better.

8. Summarise what the writer thinks are or might be the effects of the spread of citizen surveillance. Using material from paragraphs 4-7, write your summary in no more than 150 words. [8]

Camera phones could have a drastic/great/intense impact (1)

People circulate/share/transmit pictures by avoiding conventional outlets (1)

There is a possibility of anyone taking pictures of newsworthy events (1)

Traditional media is beginning to welcome the change (1)

Wrong doing/illegal activities are exposed – justice is carried out (1)

Lessens the likelihood of the chances of unfair practices of democratic processes (1)

The societal impact/effects is unknown and debatable (1)

Such surveillance could be controlled by individuals themselves because it is socially unacceptable.(1)

Reliance of surveillance technology could result in a greater number of considerate/courteous people (1)

Pervasive presence of surveillance technology might cause people to follow the norm to prevent attracting excessive focus from others. (1)

9. Who are the “little brothers” referred to in paragraph 8? [1]

Man on the street equipped with a cellphone or camera and watching/looking out for newsworthy events to report on.