



# Is Singapore writing the future of surveillance and transparency?

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Derrick de Kerckhove (dekerckh@gmail.com)

# Abstract

- It is clear that Seoul and Singapore have taken the international lead in turning genuinely smart. This entails knowing everything possible about not just the city but also its inhabitants. The effect is to make people transparent and to hold them accountable for eventual misdeed or misbehavior. I intend to show how this is done in Singapore. To be fair, the city administration is also keen to be transparent. The people seem to be happy in general with this situation. So the question is: forced by rising worldwide insecurity, will cities such as Paris or Rome, or any other human agglomeration not feel obliged to follow Singapore's example simply to protect its citizens? What would be the consequences on social behavior and the people's welfare? I do not pretend to answer this question myself but to invite a debate either then and there with the audience, or invite the conference planners to set one up.

# The argument

- Singapore yesterday and today
- Singapore smart city
- Urban (dis)content?
- Electricity's revenge on the printing press
- The forces that converge on the future of cities
- From “democrature” to “Datacracy”

# The river, 1975



# The river, 2004

*The Singapore River: Bearing vivid images  
of our precious past while  
reflecting our progress as a nation.*



# The river today

Photo by Edward Tian



# What happened?



# Lee Kuan Yew



# Democrature



- <http://aseanup.com/anticipating-singapores-future-to-foster-innovation/>
- **It is illegal to urinate in elevators**
- Obviously everyone hates an elevator that smells like urine, but Singapore officials *really* hate it. Some elevators are equipped with [Urine Detection Devices](#). These UDDs can actually detect urine odor in elevators, which set off an alarm. Once this alarm goes off, the doors of the elevator close until the police arrive and arrest the perpetrator.
- **Selling chewing gum is forbidden**
- The Asian country takes cleanliness seriously, and apparently gum causes too much of a mess to be sold in the country. This doesn't mean that you can't bring a little with you — just make sure you don't spit it on the floor, otherwise you can face a hefty fine.
- But [after strong petitioning by Wrigley](#), if you get a note from a doctor you can chew certain medicinal gums.
- **No pornography of any kind is allowed**
- There is a lot of censorship in Singapore, and this includes the ban on pornography in all forms, from pictures to DVDs. Magazines that discuss sex, like Cosmopolitan, are allowed, [but require special "parental warnings" on their covers.](#)

= clearly defined rules  
(albeit draconian)...



### **Gay sex is illegal and comes with a two-year jail term**

Sexual relationships between two members of the same gender are forbidden in Singapore, although the law is not nearly as strictly enforced as some of the other laws on this list. Formerly, oral sex was also illegal until the ban was lifted in 2007.

### **You can get fined for not flushing public toilets**

There is clearly a trend in Singapore about keeping things clean, and this extends to the bathroom as well. If you're caught failing to flush a public toilet after using it, you can expect a [fine of around \\$150](#). There do not appear to be detectors like there are for elevator urination, but apparently police officials have been known to check.

### **It is illegal to walk around your house naked**

Singapore culture is intent on prohibiting many personal rights, the government reason for which is that it creates harmony in a conservative and culturally diverse country.

Thus, you can't walk around your house naked, according to Singapore law, because it is considered a form of pornography, but it is unclear how a law like this is enforced.

# ...that the majority agrees with



- **Do not spit anywhere**
- Along with throwing cigarette butts on the street, spitting is banned in Singapore. As with similar prohibitions, these laws are in place to maintain Singapore's reputation for cleanliness.
- Both infractions come with significant fines and are routinely enforced.
- **You can be arrested for taking drugs before entering the country**
- Singapore officials have the power to submit anyone to a drug test, whether they are residents of the country or tourists.
- What is really shocking about this law is that officials do not disseminate between drugs taken before or after you come into the country. This is really frightening, considering that there are mandatory death sentences for certain drug offenses.
- **If you graffiti, you will get caned**
- Respect for public property is taken seriously in Singapore, so it should be no surprise that vandalism is really despised — so much so that if you are caught vandalizing, you will receive a mandatory caning.
- Singapore's justice system is different from the US's, as certain laws can have mandatory sentences. Furthermore, Singapore courts do not have juries, only judges.

# Enlightened Despotism

## Lee Hsien Loong

- The Wall Street Journal has reported that as part of its Smart Nation Platform (SNP) launched by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, new sensors and cameras deployed across Singapore will scoop up data and information, allowing the government to monitor all facets of the city spanning everything from cleanliness of public spaces, smoking rates, to density of crowds and the precise movements of all locally registered vehicles.



# "Government by algorithm" or "Datacracy"

- The Big Data are in social media, but also in sensors and cameras everywhere
- Permanent surveillance even in residence
- Instant verdict and execution of punishment
- BUT
- Order, cleanliness,
- Health and well-being guaranteed
- Social harmony



# Smart Nation Better Living

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFNWAficGW4>

- In 2025, we envision a Singapore transformed for the better by infocomm media. It will be a nation where people live meaningful and fulfilled lives enabled by technology, and where there are exciting opportunities for all. It will be a place where infocomm media enables a better quality of life for our people through world-class connectivity, compelling local content, and technologies to make everyday lives smoother and more convenient.

<https://www.ida.gov.sg/About-Us/Corporate-Publications/Infocomm-Media-2025>



- The report detailed in The Wall Street Journal says Singapore's federal government will also harness private companies to place sensors in senior homes to monitor residents' activity levels including bathroom use. Families can access the data to know the actions of the subject in real time.
- A research team from the [Singapore Management University](#) is conducting a pilot project aimed at enhancing elderly monitoring systems with the use of data analytics. By monitoring behavioral patterns over time, the system can better identify any signs of potential health or social issues, and provide timely alerts to caregivers.
- <https://www.facebook.com/SmartNationSG/>

# Brave New World or Big Brother?



<https://www.theurbandevolver.com/smart-singapore-becomes-big-brother/>





# Transparency

- According to the WSJ: “The move will likely affect the lives of every single resident in the country, in ways that are still somewhat unclear, as some applications may not be registered until the system has been implemented”.
- <https://www.theurbandeveloper.com/smart-singapore-becomes-big-brother/>



# What critics say

- The Internet is not safe
- Bloggers are prosecuted: Amos Yee (16 years old) is in jail since May 2015 for having made offensive remarks on his blog
- NGO and Alternate Press are discouraged
- Newspeak in the media (but racism continues in hiring practices)
- No sense of place (pretense only to value story areas)
- Edited past in schoolbooks
- Restricted access to public government archives
- No access to one's own files (should be the first citizen right)

# The justice System of Singapore means business



- “President Tan should grant clemency to Kho Jabing in recognition of sentencing reforms under Singapore law. The death penalty is always cruel, and a man’s life should not hinge on a legal technicality.”  
**Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director**
- Death penalty temporarily suspended and then executed – defense lawyers harassed  
<http://deathpenaltynews.blogspot.it/2016/05/singapore-grant-clemency-to-death-row.html>

# Does transparency go both ways ?

- It doesn't anymore (access to civil servants files once open has been shut in April)
- People tend to self-censor and keep their mouths shut
- But the question may be irrelevant
- What is happening is not merely a change of social or political policy
- It's a radical change of ground, comparable only to what happened during the European Renaissance
- But this time, it is global



# Council of Trent

1545-1563

**Council of Trent  
and Vatican II,  
même combat**

- Neither council had a clue about the change of ground that changed the rules
- Literacy introduced the primacy of the individual
- Electricity is giving it back to community



# Technical effects of electricity

- Everything transparent
- Everything instant
- Everything connected
- Everything “public”

# Social effects

- Externalization of human psychology and personality
- All barriers, all walls are crossed including those of the body and the mind
- Retribalizing people but on different grounds and distributed not congregated
- Individuality is sacrificed to the community
- “The more they know about you, the less you exist” **Marshall McLuhan**

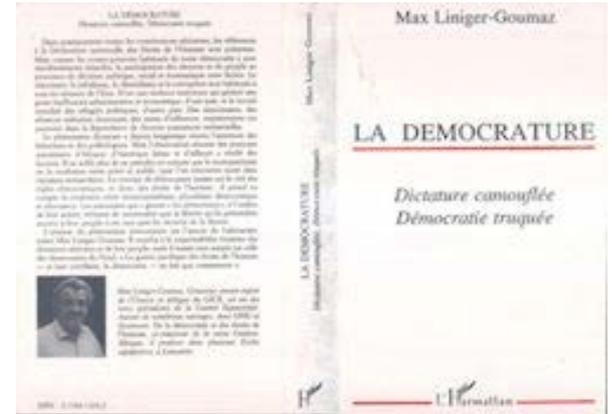


Electrical information devices for universal, tyrannical womb-to-tomb surveillance are causing a very serious dilemma between our claim to privacy and the community's need to know. The older, traditional ideas of private, isolated thoughts and actions - the patterns of mechanistic technologies - are very seriously threatened by new methods of instantaneous electric information retrieval, by the electronically computerized dossier bank - that one big gossip column and from which there is no redemption, no erasure of early "mistakes". We have already reached a point where remedial control, born out of knowledge of media and their total effects on all of us, must be exerted.

How shall the new environment be programmed now that we have become so involved with each other, now that *all of us* have become the unwitting workforce for social change?

Marshall McLuhan, 1967

# The forces that converge on the future of cities



- The ground: electricity is in constant mutation since the telegraph (analog – digital - wireless)
- Relentless offering of new promises of satisfaction (hence uncritical adoption of technology)
- Global insecurity
- The need to better manage the environment
- Private interests
- Coaxed and coached civism presented as democracy
- A new ethics unfolding (Community > individual)
- A new politics: from democrature to datacracy

# Big Questions

- What benefits does datacracy bring?
- What dangers?
- Should datacracy be resisted?
- *Can* datacracy be resisted?, how?
- When and under what circumstances should it be resisted?
- Should European cities adopt datacracy?
- Under what conditions could it be acceptable?
- Can transparency go both ways?
- Whose responsibility is it to assess?
- Whose responsibility is it to implement?
- What sort of political order can be legitimized under datacracy?
- What level of responsibility should data software creators and data analytics managers recognize and keep in mind?

# Building the data fabric

- Digital signature
- Deep learning
- Mood detection (mood ring in Minneapolis)
- Data value protection
- Creating a culture of participation
- Opt in for data sharing
- Give feedback
- Moving from ownership to service

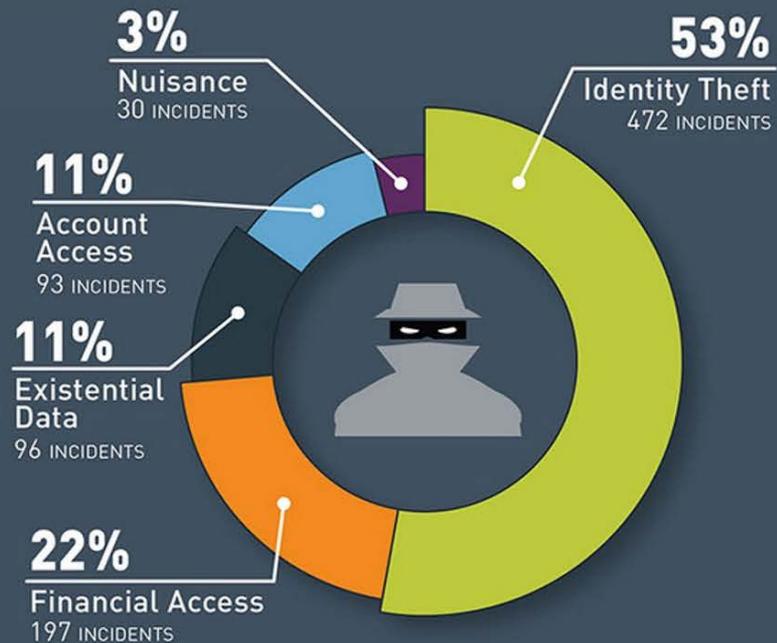
# Awareness infrastructure

- The brain censors what to intercept (you don't think about your feet until someone mentions your shoes)
- Soft awareness infrastructure (using tweets in real time)
- Perception infrastructure
- Establish communication with citizens (letting them know that while services are free, they still have a cost)
- Dissemination of city data on wall and personal screens
- Inefficiency as a resource for jobs (USSR)
- Industry 4.0

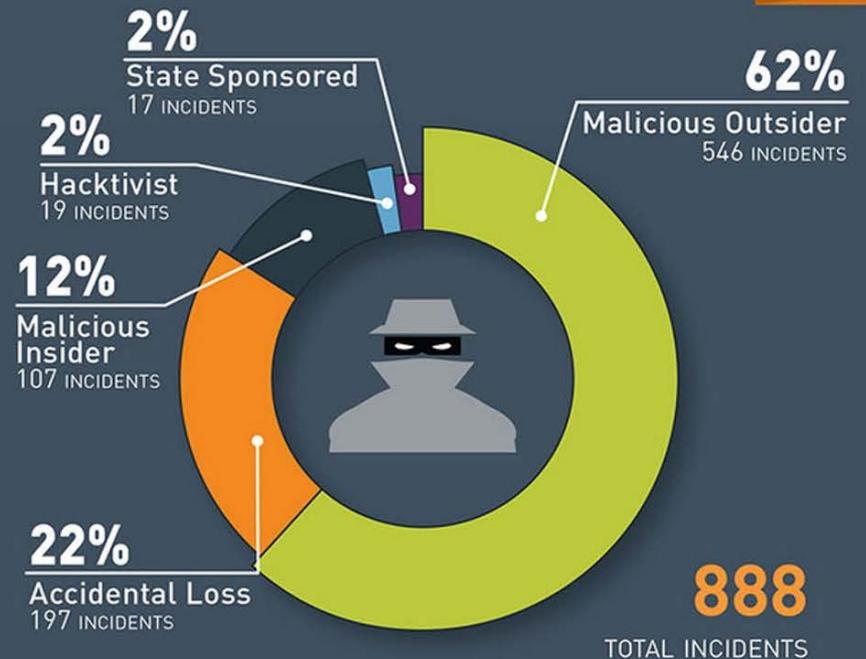
# DATA BREACHES

## DATA RECORDS LOST OR STOLEN IN FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2015

### Number of Breach Incidents by Type



### Number of Breach Incidents by Source



**888**

TOTAL INCIDENTS