

To the Editor March 16, 2020

Stop being Surveilled (abused and exploited)

Surveillance [ser-vey-luh ns, -veyl-yuh ns] noun

- a watch kept over a person, group, etc., especially over a suspect, prisoner, or the like
- continuous observation of a place, person, group, or ongoing activity to gather information
- attentive observation, as to oversee and direct someone or something

Surveillance is the monitoring of behavior, activities, or information for the purpose of influencing, managing or directing. This can include observation from a distance by means of electronic equipment, such as closed-circuit television, or interception of electronically transmitted information, such as Internet traffic. It can also include simple technical methods, such as human intelligence gathering and postal interception. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surveillance>

The easiest way to Stop this from happening is to Stop using surveillance devices!

Here are a few stories for you to think about:

Google is disabling Xiaomi integrations on our devices' after a Nest Hub user picked up random pics from strangers' feeds

"Among the eight examples initially provided are a handful of disturbingly clear images showing a sleeping baby, a security camera's view of an enclosed porch, and a man seemingly asleep in a chair." A camera owner reported receiving still images from other random peoples' homes when he tried to stream content from his camera to a Google Nest Hub.

Android Police broke the story, and published some photos that are horrifying, privacy-wise, if legit. androidpolice.com (Android Police is an American technology news and a blog dedicated to everything related to Android smartphones.)

Google responded:

"We're aware of the issue and are in contact with Xiaomi to work on a fix. In the meantime, we're disabling Xiaomi integrations on our devices."

2019 was the year of voice assistant privacy dumpster fires

2019 was the "I Told You So" year for privacy advocates and voice assistants: the year in which every company that wanted you to trust them to put an always-on microphone in the most intimate places in your home. They were revealed to have allowed thousands of low-waged contractors to listen in on millions of clips, many of them accidentally recorded. First, it was Amazon, then Google, then Apple, then Microsoft.

What's more and worse, is that these arms-length contractors who were getting your stolen audio were working under terrible conditions, in sweatshops where they were worked long hours, listening to potentially traumatizing audio Voice assistants have proven to be no more secure than any of Big Tech's other products.

The true believers in voice computing started to build voice assistants in full knowledge that these will not only be perceived as creepy, but that they *will* be creepy. These companies lie to their customers, and even to Congress, about whether this is going on.

A former data analyst who worked on Apple Siri transcriptions for several years says workers swapped horror stories during smoke breaks. A current analyst, asked to recount the most outrageous clip to come through, says it was something akin to a scene from Fifty Shades of Grey.

<https://boingboing.net/2019/12/12/not-ok-google.html>

Silicon Valley Is Listening to Your Most Intimate Moments

How the world's biggest companies got millions of people to let temps analyze some very sensitive recordings.

She could not believe what she was hearing. She had been hired by a temp agency for a vague job: transcribing audio files for Amazon.com Inc. For \$12 an hour, she and her fellow contractors, or "data associates," listened to snippets of random conversations and jotted down every word on their laptops. The clips included recordings of intimate moments inside people's homes.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-12-11/silicon-valley-got-millions-to-let-siri-and-alexa-listen-in>

Amazon Workers Are Listening to What You Tell Alexa

A global team reviews audio clips in an effort to help the voice-activated assistant respond to commands. Tens of millions of people use smart speakers and their voice software to play games find music or trawl for trivia. Millions more are reluctant to invite the devices and their powerful microphones into their homes out of concern that someone might be listening.

Sometimes, someone is.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-10/is-anyone-listening-to-you-on-alexa-a-global-team-reviews-audio>

Microsoft's Cortana is sleeping with the fishes

Many people are fine with allowing a helpful wiretap into their lives. I am not one of them. None of them. So, when I heard that Cortana was being sent out to pasture by Microsoft, I was excited. The dismantling of surveillance apparatus that has slithered its way into our daily lives always leaves me feeling a little frisky.

Despite dropping the app in some regions, Cortana itself remains "an integral part" of the company's business model to incorporate "conversational computing and productivity" into its products according to the spokesperson, so Microsoft does not appear to be closing the coffin on it entirely. Last year, Microsoft's CEO admitted that the company's virtual assistant could not keep up with the likes of Alexa or Siri. <https://boingboing.net/2019/11/18/microsofts-cortana-is-sleep.html>

The Chilling Side Effects of Mass Surveillance

Nothing to Hide?

"He who does not move, does not notice his chains" – [Rosa Luxemburg](#)

The definition of “bad” may mean one thing to those who are “good”, but the people in power have the last say in what “bad” means. Bad could be anything that impedes the government’s ability to pursue its interests, or exercise its power.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO and founder of Facebook, says privacy is no longer a social norm, yet he has used his millions to create his own personal privacy by buying all the properties around his house.

Surveillance impedes creativity and freedom of expression. People alter their behaviors to conform when they know that they can be watched at any time. Just like when you were a child under your parents watchful eyes.

A panopticon is a type of architectural design devised by an 18th Century English philosopher and social theorist. The concept is to allow a single person to observe all the members of a group or class. It was devised for prisons, but is also used in computer labs in schools, school buses. Since it is physically impossible for one person to observe all subjects at once, obedience is obtained by the threat that anyone can be watched at any time. The key to the design is that one person can watch any inmate, but the inmate cannot see the person, so you never know when you might be under surveillance.

A society in which people can be monitored at all times is a society that breeds conformity, obedience and submission, which is why every tyrant likes this.

It is important however in a free and democratic society, to have the whistleblowers, journalists, and other activists who can to provide a balance to those who are in power. Mass surveillance severely curtails this ability.

The measure of how free a society is, is not how it treats its good, obedient, compliant citizens, but how it treats its whistleblowers, journalists, activists, dissidents, criminals, as well as its poor and disenfranchised.

The US and its partners, unknown to the entire world until the Snowden file leaks, has converted the Internet, once heralded as an unprecedented tool of liberation and democratization, into an unprecedented tool of mass, indiscriminate predatory corporate capitalist surveillance. The totalitarian state that George Orwell foretold of in his book 1984, and it has stripped us of our personal privacy and freedoms.

There are many issues that face our future generations, but the erosion of our personal privacy, freedoms, and liberties is a clear and present danger. 250 years ago, people fought those who opposed the ideals of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Those principles are the foundation that allowed the rise of the United States of America. Now, that very foundation is being eroded using the half-cocked excuse of keeping us safe.

Be aware that the example companies listed below have many, many, data centers like this around this country and in countries all over the world.



NSA Utah data center



Apple data center



Microsoft data center



Facebook data center



Google data center

"Arguing that you don't care about the right to privacy because you have nothing to hide is no different than saying you don't care about free speech because you have nothing to say." Ed Snowden

Also, see my Delete Facebook and Stop using Google and other essays. www.tcw.org

<https://greggborodaty.com/chilling-side-effects-mass-surveillance/>
https://www.ted.com/talks/glenn_greenwald_why_privacy_matters