

1984 – Ring Camera

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Wednesday, August 31, 2022

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Books can talk to you in different ways at different stages of your life. This is especially true of great books, such as [George Orwell](#)'s [1984](#) which I have read at least 3 times. I recently watched a [Wondrium](#) class [George Orwell: A Sage for All Seasons](#) that was utterly fascinating. I would wholeheartedly recommend this class to anyone with an interest in literature or history. Watching the class inspired me to reread both [Animal Farm](#) and *1984*.

[The Guardian](#) in 2007 proclaimed [1984 'is definitive book of the 20th century'](#). [The Atlantic](#) in 2019 declared that "*No novel of the past century has had more influence than George Orwell's 1984.*" In my world view Orwell's book would be required reading for all high school students, and most certainly for college students.

The book is generally summarized as "a dystopian social science fiction novel and cautionary tale." The book was written in 1948 and Orwell flipped the year to 1984 – probably because it was in the future, but the near future. My goal here is not to summarize or review the book (the last would be hubris), but to make a connection between the book and now. The book is set in a time when an authoritarian government has taken an iron grip on society, the origin of the phrase, Big Brother.

The plot revolves around Winston Smith who has become uncomfortable with his job of constantly revising history in the mass media of the day. He ironically works for the Ministry of Truth. Smith is also beginning to question the veracity of much of the propaganda and *double-speak* with which Big Brother is overwhelming the population. There is a branch of government known as the Thought Police, who seek to weed out all such people as Smith. Children are encouraged to rat out their parents. Marriage is tightly controlled and should be devoid of love... and on and on. One of the most effective methods of control is that there are cameras and listening devices everywhere. Citizens are not permitted to turn off their TVs which have cameras and microphones feeding back to government monitors. Citizens just assume that they are always on camera and can be overheard. In one scene lovers in the middle of the woods far from any road are worried that a listening device may be in the remote thicket of trees that they have chosen for their tryst.

Big Brother is generally thought of as "The Government". My contention for a while now, at least in the USA, has been that Big Brother is more likely the mega corporations that have in many aspects co-opted our government.

Currently we are willingly building Big Brother's network of cameras and listening devices. How many of us have installed ring cameras on our front doors? Many folks have security cameras around their houses and/or monitors (video and audio) inside their homes. The older iterations of this technology were hard-wired, but much of the new is utilizing the ubiquitous internet connection in our homes. Our new Smart thermostat is connected to the Internet. There are sensors on separate floors declaring one or both floors to be occupied or unoccupied.

I, personally, assume when I am in any sort of public building or even public space that I am on camera. The omnipresence of hoodies in Great Britain has been attributed to the number of CCTV cameras there.

I recently bought a new external camera for my computer. It came with a security flap with which I can cover the lens when I am not actively using it.

A common posting on Nextdoor is "did anyone catch... on their ring camera?"

Our cell phones are essentially tracking devices such that if someone really wants to know where we are or where we have been, they can find out. Written in 1952 [Kurt Vonnegut](#)'s first novel, [Player Piano](#), targeted advertising was the norm as citizens moved around the cityscape carrying whatever it was that Vonnegut envisioned as our cell phones. A while back *Señora* and I were having a "marital" discussion. She had a new phone that she had not yet turned off the voice activated assistant. Suddenly her phone was giving information based on something it heard in our conversation. If it had given us the number of a marriage counselor I would have not been surprised.

I could go on and on, but my point is that cameras are everywhere and we are the ones doing the installations. And yeah they are supposed to be secure, but if someone can conceive of a security measure, someone else can conceive of a way around it. While an old IT workhorse, I am not even remotely a hacker, and I was able, with a little research, to hack the password on a laptop. I cannot even imagine what folks dedicated to this "field" of information technology can do. And do you really trust Zuckerberg? Or any of these big tech companies to guard your privacy and to have your best interest at heart?

I have no answers except that we need to be thinking about what we are doing. Society seems all too willing to give up some privacy, some personal control, for the sake of convenience. While we do not yet have the Thought Police, are the marketing departments of these corporations really that much different? Police forces are all too willing to tap into the network of existing "private" cameras. I do not see any of this as having a good ending. Especially so as my once beloved country is turning hard to the right, and the Republican party is all too willing to embrace authoritarianism.

Just in case you think I am a nut case (I am), I am not the first one to make this connection. Here are some links or just type in "**1984 ring camera**" into Google...if you are not afraid of Big Brother knowing your search history.

[Amazon makes creepy '1984' admission about Ring doorbell footage](#)

Quote from above article:

“While 2,000 police departments in the US partner with Ring to request access to footage to help in crime investigation, the company claim that owners are not obliged to hand over that information.

But, reports by [The Verge](#) suggest that, in fact, Amazon and Ring themselves may hand that information over instead with the customer’s consent or a warrant.”

[Read this article about the Ring Doorbell camera and then go back and read George Orwell’s 1984](#)

[A New Amazon Camera Patent Is Straight Out of “1984”](#)

And so it should not go.

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