Losing Privacy

Chapter 2 of *Blown to Bits*, by Hal Abelson, Ken Ledeen, and Harry Lewis discusses many different instances in which ordinary citizens’ personal information is recorded by companies or government agencies without the knowledge of the citizens. Yet the most concerning aspect of the degree to which almost nothing is truly private in today’s changing technological landscape is not the actual lack of privacy, but the concern of what it might lead to. Many civil libertarians use the example of George Orwell’s *1984*, to explain how little privacy we truly have, claiming that Big Brother is no longer just a theoretical presence in a novel but a real presence today. The most horrific aspects of the world of Oceania, however, are not related to a lack of privacy exactly, but instead to a lack of basic freedom of expression. While the disappearance of privacy is a concern, the larger concern is that privacy is only the first of many freedoms to disappear with freedoms of expression and a brutal authoritarian government following close behind.

In order to at least slow the current pace at which privacy is disappearing, we must attempt to create better privacy laws that apply to the 21st century. My partner makes the point that writing and enforcing privacy laws that find the compromise of preserving personal privacy without stymieing economic growth is “impossible.” While I concede that writing and enforcing such laws is difficult, that is not a reason to give up without trying. Establishing a system of
government with separation of powers was and still is a very difficult undertaking, yet the American founders still attempted to create one. And while admittedly there have been many changes to their original framework it is unquestionably better for the United States that they tried to create something as best they could. In the same vein, we must attempt to create better laws governing privacy and do a better job enforcing them. These laws certainly won’t be perfect, but they will be far better than no laws at all.

Works Cited