

As usual, the consequences of environmental controls for freedom could go either way. Improved surveillance techniques would mean less crime, or, at any rate, less than there would be without such techniques. Less crime means more freedom and privacy, at least for the law abider. But the same techniques could be used against the law abider if his Government wanted to make, say, a routine security check in the interests of social stability.

When the application of computers requires that people change their behavior toward something familiar, they may well interpret this as an imposition on their freedom. This interpretation is in keeping with the belief long held by many that the machine is the chief threat to the spontaneity (freedom) of man. The recent furor over all-digit dialing demonstrates how seriously this threat is taken.⁵ In the abstract, at least, one's freedom to dial long-distance numbers direct may be increased by this new system, and certainly it is not lessened compared to what it was when one used a mixture of letters and numbers. But obviously many people feel their freedom has been abridged because for them it seems easier to remember combinations of letters and numbers, and because this change symbolizes more mechanization and, thereby, a challenge to the freeman. Undoubtedly, there will be further "invasions" of this sort.

An important variant of this state of mind is found in responses to the nationwide computerized system which makes it possible for a cashier to determine quickly whether an unfamiliar person seeking to cash a check has a criminal record. Through this system (cashier to computer to police) a number of criminals have been apprehended while they waited for their check to be cashed. Abhorrence of the system and sympathy for the bum-check passer is a common—although, of course, not unanimous—response to descriptions of this system in action.

Apparently, in many minds there is combined a sense of "There but for the grace of God * * *" and a realization that the inclination to violence and law-breaking which most of us harbor) will be throttled more and more even in fantasy. For what is mere man against the implacable, all-seeing machine? The godlike omniscience of the computer essentially destroys his hope, and hence his freedom to fantasy, that he can get even unfairly with a society which he thinks has been unfair to him. If the computerized world of tomorrow produces the kinds of rationalized standards which increase one's frustration and inhibition, then certainly this invasion of one's right to hope (i.e., to fantasy antisocial success) will be interpreted as some kind of invasion of his personal freedom. If so, there most certainly will be an acceleration of a trend already underway: "Frustrate" the machines. In a spirit of desperation and vengeance people are bending punchcards, filling prepunched holes, and punching out additional ones. (Injunctions have already made it clear that this destruction of private property will not be tolerated, regardless of its contribution to the preservation of psychic property; the machine wins.) They are also overpaying, by one cent, computer-calculated and computer-processed bills and refusing to use postal ZIP codes.

Now, it may well be that existing law or future decisions and actions of courts and legislatures will enforce and elaborate present legal powers in order to conquer the threats to freedom and privacy on which we have speculated. But seldom is a law promulgated in anticipation of problems, especially when there are powerful interests which benefit from freedom to exploit. Moreover, as we have seen, in most cases there may be a potential or actual gain for freedom or privacy along with the loss. And as we well know, even existing laws protecting privacy and freedom are often difficult to apply ubiquitously and effectively. In the hothouse world of Washington, D.C., it is commonly believed that anyone who is anyone at all has had or is having his phone tapped by Government agents. Whether or not this is true, what is important is that people believe it is true, and they accept this situation feeling either that the Government has a right to such spying or that, even if it hasn't, they can do nothing about it. We are all well aware of the increasing pressures to enlarge the search and arrest powers of the police in the face of expanding urban crime. We know, too, that in some places some of these powers have been granted or their unsanctioned use tolerated. And what shall we conclude about such modifications of the law as that represented by an executive order which gave the House Committee on Un-American Activities for the period of the 88th Congress

⁵ See, e.g., *Time*, July 13, 1962, p. 53; *Washington Evening Star*, Jan. 31, 1964, p. A12, col. 2.