

# Mind e-Readers

## The law must be updated for a future in which machines can read our thoughts

First they came for your jobs. Then they came for your data. Now they are coming for your thoughts. Today we report on a paper by scientists from the University of Basel in Switzerland that recommends the creation of new privacy laws to ready the international human rights regime for the advent of sophisticated mind-reading technology. Researchers are right to raise the issue. What was the stuff of science fiction has quickly become reality.

Brain imaging brings enormous opportunities. Those suffering from locked-in syndrome, which renders them petrified but conscious and aware of

their surroundings, have used it to communicate with their loved ones. As the gadgets become more advanced, they will offer an unprecedented means of understanding the brain and neurological disease. Some scientists predict that one day we will interact with computers not via a keyboard or a touchscreen, but by dint of thought alone.

With that comes risks. Already the pace of digital innovation has allowed technology into nearly every realm of human life with barely a thought of the consequences. The internet digitised professional life, then social media digitised social life. There have been attempts, too,

to extend machines' reach to simple activities like walking down the street — Google Glass, a pair of smart spectacles, superimposed a digital display on the wearer's field of vision.

Internal thoughts are the final frontier, and it will not hold for long. Where citizens may not previously have needed legal protections against incursions into their minds by private companies, and perhaps even governments, one day they will. The profusion of data generated by the rise of social media has already given internet companies extraordinary power. The ability to read minds would give them even more. Legislators, beware.

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