

Enslaved

This performance art piece was delivered by Katina Michael at the Intelligence Squared (IQ2) debate at the City Recital Hall, Sydney, Australia, on August 12, 2014. The topic of the debate was “Are we becoming enslaved by our technology?” Joining Katina on the affirmative side was the Crikey (an Australian e-magazine) correspondent for politics, media, and economics, Bernard Keene, and Dimension Data’s general manager of security and internet safety Alastair McGibbon. On the negative side was Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, backed by journalist, filmmaker and blogger, Antony Loewenstein, and by Asher Wolf, a self-described information activist. The debate was moderated by Dr. Simon Longstaff of the St James Ethics Centre and broadcast on Australia’s ABC Radio National and ABC Big Ideas television program. The debate is available for viewing in full at: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2014/09/04/4081183.htm>. The results of the online vote can be found at <http://www.iq2oz.com/debates/we-are-becoming-enslaved-by-our-technology/>. As of October 31, 2014, 807 online votes had been received from the general public: 53% of online votes indicated we are becoming enslaved by technology.

First there was darkness
 Then came the light
 And the darkness was called *night*
 And was separated from the light
 And that was called *day*.
 First came the knife
 And then fire
 Shelter, spear and clothing
 The boat and the wheel
 And then eventually the quill.
 First came the printing press
 The steam engine



Katina Michael delivers performance of “Enslaved” at the IQ2 debate, Sydney, Aug. 2014.

The Spinning Jenny

The telegraph
 The photograph
 The phonograph
 Analytical and differential engines
 And the light bulb
 And the television.

Industrial revolution

Mass production
 Mass market
 Automobiles
 Urbanisation
 Mechanisation
 Computerisation
 Communications and electronic highways.

Mega-cities as big as countries

Mega-problems
 The solution?
 Why the census, of course-
 Sense-less surveillance
 Sensor-rich big data
 Machine learning
 An Internet of Everything

Atomised bits and pieces
 Of things and people
 De-corporealisation
 Dehumanization.

Creating because we can
 Wars and bombs
 Radical innovations
 Computational machinery
 Spy satellites
 High-speed trains
 Drones
 Brain-to-computer interfaces
 Robots
 Hubots
 Artificial intelligence
 Brain in a vat
 Let's see how far we can go.

From inventing for survival
 Then for the shareholders
 Then for convenience
 And finally for the sheer sake of inventing.

It's called need
 No, it's actually greed
 No, it's called optimisation and efficiency
 No, no, no, it's called freedom and liberation
 Smart grids,
 Smart homes
 Smart meters
 Smart cars
 Smart clothes
 Smart people-
 Yes, yes, enslavement in disguise.

This is the upgrade generation
 The throwaway generation
 Buy a new printer
 It's cheaper and faster than getting a new toner for
 your old one-
 Leave it on the scrap heap of e-waste
 It's somebody else's environmental problem.

We're the consumption generation
 Soldering whitegoods for a few dollars each
 Impoverished workers suicide
 Unable to cope with production demands
 But that's over there, and we're over here.

We're the *all you can eat* fast food and frozen pizza
 generation
 The Genetically Modified quantifiable generation
 Like the lifetime of DDT-
 Persistence
 We're the plastic generation
 We can't be bio-degradably broken down that easily.

We're the Do-It-Yourselfer generation
 Equipped with 3D printers
 And electronic checkouts,

We currently scan out our goods on our own
 While they're *all-too-busy* scanning us!
 We're the "always on" generation
 Mobiles
 Social media
 Content
 Instant gratification
 Living in the cloud.

We're the generation that witnesses cyberbullying and
 viral videos
 And as a result 13 years olds who take their own
 life.

We're the generation that hears about 3 month old
 babies dying of dehydration
 While their parents raise the perfect online child.

We're the generation where 30-somethings forget
 themselves at Internet Cafes
 And can't keep a 9 to 5 job.

We're the generation that manufactures toxic toys for
 kids under 3.

We're the generation that wirelessly broadcasts
 Music that glorifies
 Murder
 Rape
 Abuse.

We are living a locked-in syndrome
 Like the moth effect
 Positive phototaxis-
 Look for the light
 It's blue
 It's coming from over there
 Let me go to it and see what it is about
 Oh, I am alive
 Reaffirmation I'm not alone
 Well, I'm lonely, but at least I have-
 1,007 online Facebook friends following me
 And I don't know most of them,
 But who cares it gives me something to do
 Better than being bored.

I'm coming to you, oh screen, where art thou?
 Watch out—don't get too close
 Because if you get too close, then you are no
 longer
 Like the moth that is drawn to the light-
 Tzzz-
 Zap
 RIP
 Too late.

Hang on-
 All this technology
 Surely some good can come from it!
 In touch every second of every day
 Out of touch however physically-
 I text you "I luv u"

But I'm too tired and too scared to
 Kiss
 And embrace you
 And make love to you
 This technology is desensitising
 Seductive.
 "Hang on love- just another email from the boss"
 The clock is ticking but that "thing" is pinging
 A voicemail
 Another email
 Yet another status update
*[Message received - whistle sound from
 Android device.]*
 Megabytes
 Mega work
 Mega nothingness
 What a nightmare-
 The botnets are coming!
 Oh-another virus, I've accidentally executed.
 I wonder why my supervisor hasn't replied yet-
 I wonder if they got my message,
 If they'll respond,
 If they hate me,
 Oh, I get so anxious these days
 That I cannot cope with all the traffic buzzing
 in my head,
 It's terrifying really.
 Oops!- I didn't mean to press SEND.

Long hours behind the computer
 Burning back aches
 Fingers arthritic
 Red eyes from red alerts
 I've got to get home-
 Mind melt-down
 Electronic slavery
 Technological treachery
 Hang on I'll just relax a little and play some Minecraft
 or Starcraft
 Oh, I wonder what's happening on World of
 WarCraft
 WOW-wwweee....
 No one will notice if I am using the board room to
 strategise for my
 Second Life
 17 windows open all at once
 Why can't I concentrate like I used to?
 Why can't these new recruits pen something that
 makes sense?
 So many spelling errors
 No structure-
 I'll have to redo their work, but what's the time?
 – Oh she's onto me again
 I should ignore her instant message
 But I just can't say *NO*.
 Virtual hands

Virtual death
 Respawn
 Virtual lust-
 "I'd like to get it on with you"
 "How old are you?"
 "Do you use Skype?"
 "Wanna do some Google with me and let it
 Hangout?"
 Virtual sex-
 It's not real
 Don't worry, everybody does it!
 It won't lead to anything
 It doesn't mean anything
 What the missus doesn't know won't hurt her-
 She cannot give me the same fix
 The real is just so boring
 The virtual is limitless
 But why do I feel so damn guilty?
 I'm sure the police will never find out
 Just in case she's not 18.
 But anyway it's just a game
 Everything's a game these days
 Even the trolls are making light of it!
 But what if she's really a he?
 Oh, what have I got myself into!
 Augmented reality
 Digital glass
 Dark glass
 Dark matter
 Dark space.
 Oh, this is too hard to fight against
 I hate myself-
 I'm so addicted.

[Sound of child throwing tantrum over ipad.]
 Oh these kids
 I just fell asleep again after YouTubing all night-
 –"I wan iPad" can't be coming from my two year
 old, can it?
 "Get off the computer
 You've got to go to football!"
 I tell my 10 year old off.
 He responds throwing a tantrum:
 "I wan iPad!"
 "I wan iPod!"
 "I wan Google Glass."
 "I wan iPlant!"
 "What?"
 "iPlant?"
 "Is that what they're talking about now?"
 Weird!
 Sick!
 Wicked!
 Wretched!
 No, it's probably the *mark of the beast*...
 Embedded implants for single sign on log-ins

That will save so much time-
 But there's never enough time
 And there's never a winner or
 An end to those massively online multiplayer
 Role playing games.

I wonder if they'll invent more than just a *kill-switch* ...
 What embedded security hacks?
 How'd that work?
 Remote controlled?
 What control?
 What do you mean I just jack in?
 Aha- no choice to remove
 A total loss of control!
 They know who you are
 Where you are
 Where you're going
 And what condition you're in
 And they can even prove it biometrically!
 Michael had dubbed it *uberveillance* long ago.

Big dog beckons as do the microscopic drones
 A world of watchers about to explode-
 Some of the hubots will even be paid to
 watch you
 And record
 What you do as you go about your business.
 High-tech mimicry
 Manipulation of the masses
 Exploitation!-
 We believe Wikipedia
 And rely on Google search
 We want to share our GPS coordinates
 And take pictures of our food
 And our nakedness

Benchmarking
 That's what it's about
 Benchmarking how fit we are
 Or how unfit in mind and body we are.
 But wait till our every day objects come alive-
 Like the smoke detector that never lies and
 Answers all your questions from the ceiling of
 your own home.
 Just look-
 Let me demonstrate:
[Looks up to ceiling and then questions.]
 "What should I eat for breakfast?"
 "What is the fastest animal on earth?"
 "Now tell me the truth- who or what should I
 believe in?"
 It's all propaganda.
 Disinformation.
 Information annihilation
 No body knows you're a dog on the Internet
 And soon no one will know the difference
 Between virtual and physical
 Illusion and reality.

It started with the ENIAC
 And then from the ENIAC to the mainframe
 From the mainframe to the minicomputer
 From the minicomputer to the desktop
 From the desktop to the laptop
 From the laptop to the netbook
 From the netbook to the wearable
 From the wearable to the implantable!
 Can't you see the pattern my dear friends?
 Can't you see what we've become,
 And are becoming?
 Marching to the beat of the machine
 It's the elephant in the room.
 Look, can't you see it?
 It's the emperor parading naked down the street
 Look, there he goes-
 Really, there he is.
 Internet addiction is real
 Mobile addiction is real
 Gaming addiction is real
 The social implications are real
 We all know their real because
 We all know someone who is suffering!
 It's like the Elephant and the Emperor
 We all know it's around us
 Right here
 Right now-
 So when, when are we going to take responsibility?

To the question, "Are we becoming enslaved?"
 I say "no" we're not becoming enslaved,
 Because we're already deeply enslaved.
 And instead of saying "STOP"
 We keep asking for more?
 But more surveillance does not equate to
 transparency
 More information does not give us knowledge
 and wisdom.

Dear *Techno-god*

Thank you-
 For the loyalty cards
 For the barcodes
 Smart cards
 Spy chips
 ePassports
 And for the CCTV cameras in every street.
 For the 16 likes I got yesterday and 3 retweets
 For the 167 iTunes Apps I downloaded and never use
 But which are probably tracking me.
 For the gift of metadata and for data retention regimes
 For the electronic gulags we are building

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Such public debate about computing technology is encouraging and reminds us that the word itself derives from the Latin *computare* – to think and consider together – and that the great enterprise of information should be a shared

adventure in which human minds freely interact with and are not controlled by the enabling technology.

–John Holgate

Dear Editor,

Whether or not we have something to hide, and what that something is, is unfortunately not something we can control. An arbitrary changing of the rules, like a macabre game of musical chairs, can be systematically used to weed out “undesirable” persons.

The one-two punch of arbitrary rule change and surveillance has been well tested and with tragic effect. “Nothing to hide” could only work in a (non-existent) perfectly moral, free, and fair society. Invidious – I can’t believe anyone is really so naive.

–Jonathan Seville Bragdon
Berlin, Germany

EDITORIAL (continued from page 8)

Enslave us even more
So we can fulfil the algorithm.
Amen-
Oh yes, and how about that
Permanent delete feature you’ve been promising?

Ladies and gentlemen, does this make sense?
Have we forgotten what it means to be free?
I never told you to switch off your computer completely
To give away your dishwasher
Your washing machine
Your day job
Or to stop talking to your friends on the phone-
Or to stop using email altogether
I’m asking you to get real.
Go home and have a look in the mirror
Have a good look at your eyes
Are they sunken like you’ve been wearing an
Oculus Rift?
Do you get my drift?
Think for a change, just don’t *do*.
“Who am I?”
“Who have I become?”
“Who have we become?”
Switch off those devices-
Stop.
Think.
Open your eyes.
Reclaim your life-
Your kids, your spouse, your friends
Go outside and feel the chill
And see the natural sunlight

You are alive
But the technology is dead
Your heart is beating
But the batteries are forever dying.

Do we really wish to be the ones to breathe life into the machine?
What will be the consequences of this *homo electricus* we’re building?
The predators will become the prey
We will become victims of our own creations.
Yes, driverless cars,
But who is at the helm steering?
Out of control
Out of this world
Is this really what we mean by calculated progress?
Do you think we won’t be harmed?
We just can’t keep throwing technology at technological problems
Domino-effect
Parabolic trajectories-
What goes up must come down
Forget the singularity.
Where has all that precious time gone?
Sucked into vectors of nothingness.
I ask you to listen, to reflect,
To ask two questions:
“Why am I here?”
“What’s my calling?”
It’s to embrace
It’s to look up
It’s to be human, once again.