

Enslavedⁱ

By Katina Michael

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

The Spinning Jenny

The telegraph

The photograph

The phonograph

And of course,

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 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 are 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 love you"
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 the “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-wwwee....

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-

Oh, 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

Spychips

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,
Which are probably tracking me
For the gift of metadata and for data retention regimes
For the electronic gulags we are building
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?

To embrace

To look up

To be human, once again.

ⁱ This performance art piece was delivered by Katina Michael at the Intelligence Squared (IQ2) debate at the City Recital Hall, Sydney, Australia. The topic of the debate was "Are we becoming enslaved by our technology?" Joining Katina on the affirmative side was Crikey's correspondent for politics, media and economics Mr 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, Mr Antony Loewenstein, and Ms Asher Wolf, a self-described 'information activist'. The debate was moderated by Dr Simon Longstaff of the St James Ethics Centre and broadcast on *ABC Radio National* and *ABC Big Ideas* television program. The debate is available for viewing in full here: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2014/09/04/4081183.htm> The results of the online vote can be found here <http://www.iq2oz.com/debates/we-are-becoming-enslaved-by-our-technology/> As of October 10, 2014, 766 online votes had been received from the general public. 53% of online votes indicate we are becoming enslaved by technology.