

A Declaration of the Independence of Mindspace

by Guy Garcia

The minute details of our personal lives – who we know, what we think, where we go and why, have not been stolen from us; we have voluntarily offered them up to opportunistic apps promising convenience and effortless connection to anything or anyone for any reason at any time. We have become slaves, not of an oppressive master-server, but to our own unquenchable desires.

Yet more worrisome is the arrival of products and software that use electro-magnetic signals to enter – and alter – the human brain. The benefits of these mind-bending gizmos range from better sleep and relaxation to increased stamina and intensified concentration for games or work. The consumer market for such devices is just getting started, but the science behind them isn't new. The history of brain-hacking experiments dates to Nicola Tesla, and research into microwave neural enhancement is currently being pursued for both military and commercial applications. Like the Internet itself, new technologies hatched in labs and bunkers have a habit of eventually reaching our offices and bedrooms, and as we all know, once permission and access are granted, it's hard to get them back. As a society, we haven't even begun to address the moral and social implications of tech-boosted brain implants, but in our brazen age of politically-motivated cyber-attacks and Fake News samizdat, the mind, well, reels at what could happen if such technology got into the wrong hands.

The vital necessity of the sovereignty of mind in any functional democracy is foreshadowed in the first essay of The Federalist Papers, in which Alexander Hamilton laid out the “important question” that was about to be decided, namely “whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force.” The very definition of democracy, Hamilton knew, was based on the assumption of human reason, the God-given ability to think freely that was the essential requirement for civil reflection and choice. It follows that without the emancipation of mind, without the public recognition and protection of unfettered thought, there can be no liberty or democracy, only the tyranny of accident and force. I therefor propose the introduction of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, with the goal of protecting the sovereignty and independence of the human mind from any interference or control by wireless, electronic or other experimental devices.

The resulting "Declaration of the Independence of Mindspace" could read something like this:

"All inhabitants of the United States, regardless of whether they were born in this country or not, regardless of age or economic status, in times of war or peace, are guaranteed the right for their minds to be free of interference, or coercion, or control by natural or artificial means, whether by radio waves, sounds, images, chemicals or any other device created to alter the thoughts of any person, without their knowledge or consent. This right is irrevocable and shall be protected and enforced as long as this nation is governed by the regulations and principles contained in the Constitution of the United States of America."

In 1996, my friend John Perry Barlow, a co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, published an influential manifesto called "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace." In it he declared: "I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather."

It was a clarion call for collective action to defend our right to explore and settle a vast digital terra incognita without subterfuge or interference from any entity or force that might seek to limit or hobble our innate independence and liberty. We need to stand up for our future again. Except this time, the home of Mind that Barlow invoked, and the next frontier that needs defending, is in our heads.

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