

Deus Ex Machina

(God from a Machine)

Throughout the past several years, there has been a question I have wanted to answer. That question is why do people have such a negative view of technology? There are a lot of negative emotions associated with technology such as hatred, fear and uncertainty. They are all common emotions among people who don't really have a good grasp on what's happening in our rapidly changing world.

Answering why people are afraid of technology isn't easy, but I have several ideas as to why people would react that way. People might be afraid of what they don't know. They might be afraid of breaking the technology. They might just be bitter over not having flying cars yet. They could just be afraid of the robot hordes that have come to eat them for fuel. These are all good explanations, but I hope to find out the truth behind it.

As I began to research this paper, I came upon a very startling fact: Almost all the information out there on this topic is biased toward the side of technology. It appears that most people who actually write about this sort of thing have lost touch with the common person. Luckily, I stumbled across a survey (done by NPR none the less) that really gets down to what the common person thinks. I found the results to be very interesting. According to the survey, roughly 90% of the people under the age of 60 say that

computers have made life better for Americans, and then over 70% said that the Internet has made life better (Rosenbaum 1999).

What I found interesting about this was that later on in the survey, over half the people, roughly 58% said that computers have led people to spend less time with family and friends, and then 46% said that computers have given people less free time (Rosenbaum 1999). What's so interesting about this? Well, to me it seems that some people are contradicting themselves. They say that it has made life better for Americans, but then they turn around and say that the same technology has made people spend less time with friends and family and it also eats up their free time, which makes their lives worse. I really don't agree with this, though. Several years ago, and even today, so called "experts" said that television did the same thing to American families. I think that T.V has a more adverse effect on families than computers, simply because with computers, it is much easier to communicate with other people. I've used e-mail and messaging services to stay in contact with both my friends who have moved away and my parents.

Another concern of people who are using technology is of their privacy. It seems that quite a few people are afraid of the threat of losing their privacy. This is another reason that people could be afraid of technology. Apparently, almost 60% of people are scared of someone gaining access to personal data and the like, with 21% of those people saying that they are "very worried" (Rosenbaum 1999). Yet once again, in a later question, roughly 79% of people say the government should get involved in the regulation of the Internet (Rosenbaum 1999). It seems that once again people are easily

duped into contradicting themselves. Perhaps it roughly the same bunch, who knows? Anyway, you can't have the government interfere without having them invade your privacy. That's the way things work on the Internet.

When it comes to Americans over the age of sixty, things change. Only about 27% have computers in their home (Rosenbaum 1999). Yet, while roughly 73% of Americans over sixty are being left behind technology-wise, only 11% say that that's a problem (Rosenbaum 1999). The most common reason given for not having a computer at home was that they did not need one (Rosenbaum 1999). Yet, 69% of them still say that computers and technology are making life better for Americans.

In a different survey done by NPR, one segment was on the importance of computers and technology. There were 185 people surveyed over the age of eighteen. According to the survey 62 people out of 185 thought that the computer was the most significant technology created in the 20th century. 34 thought it was the automobile and 21 thought it was the T.V (NPR 1999). Later in the survey, NPR asked if science and technology made our way of life change too fast. 21% of the people strongly agreed, and 36% agreed to some extent. That means that roughly 57% of people surveyed thought that technology made our way of life change too fast (NPR 1999).

People we also asked how they felt about technology. 49% said they were keeping up with it, 49% said they were being left behind, and 2% didn't know (NPR 1999). It seems like it might be hard not to know if you're keeping up with technology or not. Of

the people who answered that they were left behind, 22% said they were falling behind because of not having enough time, 23% said because of not having enough knowledge, and 36% said because they weren't interested (NPR 1999).

There's a reason I chose this topic. My degree is in Computer Network Support Technology. While I hope to get the \$100,000 a year job, I know that I will have to work hard to get to that job. One of the best ways to help your career in the technology field, is being kind and helpful to people having trouble with said technology. Knowing why people are afraid to use technology, gives a kind of edge that is very rare in the technology field. Because you understand why people are afraid, you can help people to learn and use technology better, and not to be afraid of it, at least until the Sentient Computers built by the Networking Elite Illuminati produce human powered robots and unleash Massive Doom upon us all!

Perhaps now you begin to question my credentials. Like I mentioned before, I have an Associate's degree in Computer Network Support Technology. What essentially is that? Well, the best way to describe it is "Anti-Hacker". I run networks and provide support to those who need it within my company. Now, in terms of experience, I've been at this for 5 years. That's a pretty long time. Most people I know haven't played a sport for that long. Don't let my demeanor fool you though. It took a lot of hard work and studying to get to where I am today. I've read more books on computers and technology than you'd care to imagine (they're like rice-cakes in book form), but that's not the point. The point is that I've had lots of experience. Another aspect of this profession is that I am

in charge of the security of the network. I've been trained to try and prevent and defend hacking in the networks that I am administering. Why do I know and worry so much about hackers? The answer is this: I was one a long time ago. After starting to study computers and technology five years ago, I decided to use my powers for good, instead of evil!

Hackers have become a big problem with networks recently. In the network I administer, within the past 5 months, my network has been attacked over 30 times. Don't worry though; they weren't able to get past the security I had set up (And if they did, they'd be in for a BIG surprise). If you've ever been in any sort of chat room, you probably seen some one who t4lls lll3 tl-lis (it says: talks like this). That is called "Leet", and most would-be hackers (roughly 90%) talk like this. Leet (or l33t to some) says to people "I am elite", hence the leet.

Why am I telling you this? Well, because I think one of the factors of people's fears of technology is what people on the Internet can do to them. I am going to give you a couple of tips, as well as dispel a couple of myths:

- First, Hackers cannot access you computer if you computer is off. It's just not possible.
- Second, Hackers cannot access you computer if you aren't connected to the Internet. That means you must have the Internet active for people to get in.
- You also need to have the phone cord connected into the computer. If there's no line to your computer, no one can get in. You shouldn't worry

about it though; Hackers probably have bigger things to go after than someone using a 56K modem.

- If you're still scared or worried about hackers, download a free firewall at <http://www.zonelabs.com>. A firewall can block both incoming and outgoing traffic, allowing you to say what programs can get access to the Internet. It doesn't stop vicious codes, (virii) so you still need to get an Anti-virus program or at least keep the one you've got updated. Every day, new virii are being created, and people like me try to stop 'em.

There has been a lot of really interesting technological advancements recently, heck it seems like every day that they've got something new to show. One of the biggest things to me though, is that new robot, the Asimo. This interesting piece of information about this technology is that it is a robot that can climb stairs. That's a pretty big step towards our robot butlers and flying cars. One man, who I cared to discuss the impact of this new robot with, was a robot theorist by the name of David Schmidt. He is also known for his specialties in the realms of the supernatural, but he has delved into many other interesting topics, including robots. I took the time to ask him about his ideas on robots.

First, I asked where he saw robots heading in the few years here is what he said: "I see Robots heading for complete human domination in a few years. First they will conquer earth; but they will soon have the moon and the lost underwater kingdoms of my ancestors, located in Lake Lowell" (Schmidt 2002). I was a bit taken back with his

response, but nonetheless I was in search of knowledge (as well as sources), and I continued asking him my questions.

The next question was: what does he think of artificial intelligence, and if it will be dangerous to mimic the irrational thoughts of humans. To this he responded:

“It has already become dangerous my friend...it already has.” He then proceeded to divert my attention, and consume my doughnut. Well, now I was going to make him work off that doughnut, so I asked him a few more questions, which led me to ask about these “Robot Hordes” he constantly referred to. Apparently, he believes that robots already exist in massive numbers, and they will soon take over our civilization, as previously indicated by the first question. He determined that what he fears the most from the “robot hordes” was them getting over their fear of heights. “I theorize that once they do this, they will want to learn to fly. Flying robots are our biggest threat, because we ourselves cannot fly. The flying robot crowd includes hovering robots, robots that jump long distances, and robots falling off tall buildings.”(Schmidt 2002) he continued: “I also fear what robots will do for entertainment. They will undoubtedly enjoy things like Chess, massacring humans, and hopscotch”

I finally asked him if he had anything else to add. He had this to say:

“I am now going to let you in on a little secret: I have come from the future! It is a bleak, war-torn, apocalyptic future, controlled by none other, than the Robot Brain! I have come to change the path of history. I have come to prevent the killing of your unborn son, John Connor! Yes Sara, you will have a son!”

I stopped and reminded him that he was not actually from the future, but merely hallucinating that he was in the movie, The Terminator. To which he quickly retorted, “No! You Fool! That’s what the Robot Brain wants you to think! That movie is actually a documentary from the future, on the future!”

I quickly pointed out to him that my name is not Sara. He then quickly called my attention to something behind me, and proceeded to run away (Schmidt 2002).

Now, I’ve managed to waste roughly one page with the theories of a lunatic, but what does this have to do with people being afraid of technology? Well, think about it. If you had to constantly live in fear of Robot hordes knocking down your door and consuming you for fuel or killing you for the fun of it, wouldn’t you be afraid of technology? Yeah I thought so. Just to show that David is not a complete psycho; a very well respected person also believes that Technology could gain a mind of it own and wreak havoc among the human population. That person is none other than Stephen Hawking, renowned Astrophysicist and cosmologist. He says that quote "In contrast with our intellect, computers double their performance every 18 months," says Hawking. "So the danger is real that they could develop intelligence and take over the world"(McAuliffe 2002). This is Dr. Hawking, the man who proved that there was a singularity at the beginning of the universe. He says that A.I. is an actual threat. He continues to say: "we should follow this road [of genetic engineering] if we want biological systems to remain superior to electronic ones." This was in response to the

talks of genetic improvements to human DNA to create super humans, but that's something else entirely, although it would make for an interesting paper...

So, now after doing much research, I wished I could have a tighter understanding of why people hate technology. Unfortunately, my technological background keeps me from really understanding why people are so scared of technology. I guess the best thing to do, is to urge people who are afraid of technology to just roll up their sleeves, sit down, and learn how to use it. If you don't, in a few years, you'll probably be so far behind the times, that things will be tough. Don't worry though, because when those darn Robot hordes get here, you can just point your finger and laugh at me, because your hunch about staying away from technology paid off. Not like it will matter in the end, because we will all be eaten by robots, or something like that anyway.

END

Works Cited

McAuliffe, Wendy Hawking on A.I. Retrieved October 15, 2002
<<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~trienzo/bus270/Supplemental/hawking.html>>

NPR. "NPR/KAISER/KENNEDY SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY SURVEY."
Retrieved October 11, 2002
<[Http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/technology/technology.adults.html](http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/technology/technology.adults.html)>

Rosenbaum, Marcus D. "Survey shows widespread Enthusiasm for High
Technology." Retrieved October 11, 2002
<<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/technology/>

Schmidt, David. Personal Interview. October 13, 2002