

Dear Madeleine, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm honoured to be honoured by you on your 30th anniversary. Though it's somewhat depressing to know that I am almost exactly twice the age of an organization I feel has been around my whole life.

In the brief time I have allotted tonight I'd just like to make a few remarks on democracy, freedom and the information age.

Those of you old enough to remember, recall that in the 1960s Marshall McLuhan wrote about us living in the Global Village. In the Television Age, this meant events around the world such as the daily casualties in Vietnam could and would be known to all. Then, however, the Village was an incomplete metaphor. We could know what was happening elsewhere, if the editors of the networks, or the the censors in illiberal societies allowed you. Unlike a real village, you were still protected. No one could really find out anything about you.

The emergence of the internet has changed this. Today we truly live in a village. Anyone anywhere can know as much if not more about you as 100 years ago a few hundred people in the small farming knew about my grandfather in Southern Estonia. We are wide open.

That is a trivial empirical truth. But consider also that in the past 150 years hundreds of millions have fled the village, the shtetl: to cities, to other countries, to the New World. Some to escape poverty, others, if you recall the bildungsromans of the first half of the past century, to escape the small town world where everyone knew everything about you.

There no longer will be such a thing as a clean start. You will always be investigatable. Just a few key strokes and everyone will know everything they might want to know about you. And I am not talking about a government agency.

Today, we are, thanks to modern technology back in the village. Thanks to governments, Google, the apps you've downloaded in your smartphone, your creditcard swipes, you are an open book. This will have and already has had profound implications for what we consider liberal democracy and privacy, two fundamental elements of the Enlightenment era.

Most of what constitutes the basis of modern liberal democracy actually has a short history of just four centuries. Thomas Hobbes posed the problem of the anarchy of life in a state of nature and the war of all against all, John Locke provided the theoretical solution of a contract between government and the people. It has been tested and retested and refined in practice and theory: the Peter Zenger trial, Voltaire, the Federalist Papers, Thomas Paine, John Stuart Mill. With refinements by Isaiah Berlin in Two concepts of liberty and countless others.

For this night's purposes it is important to stress that while the world has gone through immense challenges – industrialization, the Space age, the advent of mass communication, radio and television – we successfully until now have squared the circle of liberal democracy and progress, especially technological progress. We will do so again, but these are difficult times.

When thinker and Grateful Dead lyricist John Perry Barlow addressed governments in 1996 in his Declaration of the Independence of the Internet, saying: "Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us," he was right. (He left out privacy, I might add). More right than we bargained for, because in this age of the internet we are back in a Hobbesian State of Nature. All too often we are in a war of all against all.

Surveillance of a kind described as strictly fictional, the two way television of 1948's 1984, is now in every computer, unless you tape your PC's camera. Mobile phones are microphones. They also inform others where you are at any time. Big Data knows and can deduce more about you than Big Brother ever did. And all this even without the State, individuals and companies can do it. Just that the State can do it even better.

As Rebecca McKinnon and Evgeny Morozov have chillingly demonstrated, authoritarian states can and do use IT every bit as well as democracies, without the restrictions of liberal democracies, to deprive their citizens of their rights.

And today we are in the midst of a massive debate on what liberal democracies can, should and

should not do with the extremely powerful technologies they possess.

Concepts such as privacy, confidentiality and freedom of speech, especially anonymous speech, must be addressed in a new way, because all of them have been redefined and indeed, through technology have redefined themselves. Where precisely the legal concepts, to use Barlow's use of the term, that underpin liberal democracy, truly no longer necessarily apply to "us", whoever that may be – to you or to the mafia or the government, or kids under the legal age of responsibility.

Do fundamental concepts such as what constitutes reasonable search and seizure apply to bits? Is a DDOS attack a legitimate form of social protest? What is identity when, to recall a famous New Yorker cartoon, "on the internet no one knows you're a dog"? Who owns the data created each time you make a credit card swipe or log your morning push-ups, or your driving route is passively recorded by your mobile telephone transmission tower? What happens when you enter a bus and someone wears Google glasses that recognize who you are? How about authoritarian societies, where none of democratic rights and freedoms apply? Where the ability to restrict and modify and distort information is being taken to new and unprecedented levels; where virtual reality has an altogether meaning?

These are all questions I won't and in most cases cannot answer. And I could go on posing them. But I mention even just these, to point out that many of the self-evident truths underlying liberal democracy must be re-interpreted in the internet age.

Today 1984 and Brave New World, the classic dystopian novels I read in high school that were so formative in our thinking about liberal democracies, strike me as technologically naïve in their assumptions. Or, I remember reading around age ten a scene in the Three Musketeers where the valiant heroes decide to disperse a burnt secret message lest "Richelieu has figured out a way to reconstitute the ashes." Well, today we cannot reconstitute ashes, but we can reconstitute the message.

We are only beginning to figure out what Freedom is online. We even have a coalition of countries defending it, though it's not at all clear everyone knows what it is. I will, the day after tomorrow in London, begin chairing a group of private and public thinkers and leaders to figure out how we should proceed when authoritarian countries want to participate in internet

governance. And we must be honest with ourselves. For in my part of the world, democratic Europe, many people feel their rights and privacy have been abused by a country they hitherto have looked to as a bulwark of defense of those very same rights.

So we live in a Hobbesian world. We need our Locke and Voltaire and Paine, our Mill and our Berlin, also for the digital age.

In Estonia, we have created our own kind of a digital Lockean contract, with the government as the guarantor of the rights and liberties of citizens, based on consent, not fear. That has been our solution to the challenges in the digital world: a transparent system where the key to everything is a government granted secure identity, the citizen owns his own data and controls who can have access to it.

If you can enforce the rule of law in the digital world, there is no end to what you can do. Besides hundreds of public and private services online; we've been able to expand our democracy through online crowdsourcing of ideas; we've created an app to facilitate pro-environment civic activism that has spread to 108 countries.

And all this is only the beginning.

Thank you.