

## Script

*[slide 1 – thirty years]*

Thanks indeed having me here today.

It may be known to some of you here today but let me say that I am not a descendant of the first peoples of this land. I am not a member of a minority group. I'm not a woman and I'm not a new voice – far from it! I'm not sure that it makes any sense that I need to apologise for that, as it's simply what I am. I can appreciate that you may be tired of hearing the same old stuff from me and folk just like me. If you want to hop away from the keyboard to get a flattie or a cup of tea, then now's a good time to do so. I promise I won't be offended in the slightest. I can't even tell who else shares this grey zoomvoid with me. I'll be done in about 15 minutes or so.

I should also say that I'm here as an individual and nothing more. I'm not pretending to speak on behalf of my employer in any way. This is my voice.

I was briefed that "I think the most useful thing would be to hear your thoughts on what are the big issues at the moment. Where you see things heading. It would mean that you'd be speaking on your areas of interest from your perspective, not necessarily trying to channel some sort of universal internet zeitgeist."

Ok. You asked for this. Because where I see things heading is to the bad place. The very bad place.

*[slide 2 – Over those years]*

I spent some time thinking about the burning issues with the Internet both in Australia and more generally, how we got here and what we might want to think about to try and improve the situation.

*[slide 3 - Why]*

Compared to our somewhat naive expectations about the role of computers and networking in the 1980's we've come a long way down a dark path. We've ended up in rigged elections, fake news, the wholesale destruction of livelihoods and the creation of a new economy based solely on surveillance capitalism. What went wrong? Well I'm sure exploring that subject would make a great talk, but there are two problems with it. Firstly I've only got a few minutes of your time today and secondly I don't know why it went so wrong anyway.

*[slide 4 - Revolution]*

So without truly knowing how it happened we find ourselves trapped in another massive revolution.

What should I say? "Don't trust that Robespierre guy – He's going to kill us all!" Or "Napoleon is a genocidal maniac!"

*[slide 5 – Great Threat]*

Nah – warnings about threats are water off a duck's back – no one listens

*[slide 6 – Broken]*

What should I say?

Sorry.

Seriously, I want to apologise for my small part in this mess we find ourselves in.

Because it's all turned out so horrendously badly, and I think we should've been more aware of the risks, even if at the time they may have sounded totally far-fetched. We said: "this is so good everyone should be able to play." We said: "The Internet is for everyone." But we never really thought about what we were saying when we proclaimed the universality of the Internet. "Everyone should be able to do this?" has turned into "what the hell have we done to ourselves?"

*[slide 7 – Darker side]*

I'm a shocking programmer. And I know I'm not the only one. I'm probably average. We are all shocking programmers.

We're building these massive edifices of mind boggling complexity and then replicate all this crappy software in billions of devices. Your car has at least 300 processors. God alone know what's in the Max 8. Boeing don't. Or in your fancy digital front door bell.

The KPIs in our industry are best described by the currently oh so fashionable Agile process: Let's write even crappier code even faster and let's make more of it!

Noone knows how these systems work any more. Noone truly understands the dependences any more (if they ever did) and the continual stream of upgrades should give you ample evidence that we are only just bailing as fast as we can to stop the entire ship from sinking!

We spend hundreds of millions of dollars on staffing shiny cyber defence bodies to try and show what a great job we are doing to defend ourselves when in fact the problem is not the folk who are driving the hostile trucks through the open doors.

*[slide 8 - worse]*

The real problem is that it's the people just like me who produced the insanely shitty code in the first place that left all these gaping holes behind them. Because we are all just not up to the task. And I don't know about everybody else, but I am still on the keyboard. Still writing code. Collectively we've done an amazing job. The internet is now busted! And it's not clear that we can fix that. We can't make it better. Sorry.

*[slide 9 - bbc]*

We have no desire to build truly secure systems. In the rush to digitise our world of services we are taking extraordinary risks. The term "web security" is the punchline to some demented sick joke because the online world is held together by a level of naive trust that makes all other forms of human credulity look restrained and cautious! Even when we thought about what better security might look like, the response was that we have neither the time nor the money to do a better job. We believe that the consumer is so impatient that milliseconds matter far more than security. We continue to cut corners and build fast shitty code. Maybe we should've said 'no' and walked away from the keyboard. But we didn't. Sorry

We thought we were helping people to communicate - as after all communications is what drives the human experience. We knew that if you change how we communicate you change the nature of human societies. We knew that. But we didn't take that message to heart. None of us envisioned the perversion of that nobly motivated ambition into the sewerage of twitter and the incessant deluge of waste products from the facebook factory. We only appreciate the role of content mediators when we eliminated them from the planet. It's not pretty. We choose to only listen to what we agree with. The Internet has become a vanity-reinforcing gigantic distorted tiktok selfie. I'm sorry.

*[10 - Futures]*

We built this new world so quickly that we outpaced everything else. There are no controls, no regulation, no competition. In the rush to be the first to unleash the ruthless forms of surveillance capitalism on an unsuspecting populace we've bypassed all the conventional forms of care and restraint. Just seven digital digital giants dominate our world. Their unstinting efforts to lobby politicians has turn the political process into a fatally corrupted empty shell. We moved too quickly and no-one else kept up.

We wrote our own rules and rule number 1 was "Just do it.". From Uber to Google the word was disruption. But the wholesale destruction of the old-world business environment wasn't the worst thing we've done. Destruction of retail shopping wasn't the worst thing we've done. Far worse is that we privatised the public communications space. We turned our culture and our public discourse into private property. We've privatised our intellectual achievements. Who owns antibiotics? Who owns my genome? Who owns my personal profile? We turned everything into a transaction. We destroyed our libraries and replaced them with Search. We replaced journalism with twitter. Our world is no longer a collection of public spaces, but a collection of private enclosures. I helped to build that. I'm sorry.

*[11 - Sleep]*

I suppose an opening talk, assuming that anyone remembers this talk, which is dubious, is supposed to provide some helpful suggestions, offer some motivation, or provide the comfort that our voices matter, and we can change our world for the better. But I feel that I've already betrayed you thirty years ago. The glittering prizes that this new

technology was going to offer us were tawdry, corrupted and debased. And I didn't appreciate that. I thought that technology would be a compelling force for good. I was wrong. I'm truly sorry.

I think I've given up the right to offer suggestions, and they're probably wrong anyway. I have nothing to sell and not much to motivate you or me. But If you'll indulge me, I do have one closing observation.

*[12 – Silicon heaven]*

The task before us right now is not to make it better. That's way too ambitious. We just can't make it better. There is no way of backing out now. Having unleashed these digital monstrosities, we can't just tie them up again and put all this back into a box. Can't do that. The best we can do is to simply to come to terms with the terrible situation and the betrayal of trust that got us here.

Sorry.

And for those you who stepped out for a hot beverage of your choice – welcome back, and have a great workshop over the next two days!