

Crossing the Digital Divide Volume 32

“Little Things”

by Joseph Feigon
for the Observer

Are you amongst the very few who missed the debate Monday night? Whichever candidate you support, there was something remarkably different this time: the debate was broadcast EVERYWHERE, without commercial interruption. Unlike the primaries, the networks do not take turns running the general election debates. Instead, the non-partisan, non-profit [Commission on Presidential Debates](#) runs the show and hands out sets of keys to whomever wants them. That means in addition to every major network, other platforms like Facebook ([FB](#)), Twitter ([TWTR](#)), and Yahoo ([YHOO](#)) broadcast their own streams. This is Open Source at its finest, easy access to any and all.

The public demand for transparency in government has often been a battle between the power brokers and their constituents. Secrecy for the sake of national security sounds all too much like: “because, I’m the Mommy, that’s why...” The reality is, keeping secrets is increasingly difficult. Our Internet usage is monitored (even if the data is generic), our physical movement is audited, our spending habits tracked (except for the cash), and our general health traced. No, the IRS does not share data with Blue Cross, nor does CalTrans report the passage of your vehicle to Costco; however, “Big Data” has a profile of each of us, and, as time goes on, they’ll be able to collect more and more.

IoT, Internet-of-Things, the buzz in the tech sector, the itch in our collective fear of an Orwellian State is about to get a huge kick-start. Onion Corporation, a Boston-based start-up venture, has just released a \$5.00, postage-stamp size Linux server designed for IoT applications. \$5.00 for a miniature computer, complete with wireless capabilities. The Omega2 is so small, and so cheap, adding “intelligence” to a sidewalk, retail store, health center or museum will be a matter of time. In the near term, IoT applications will begin to proliferate, the Omega2 capable of communicating with “The Cloud”, via Wifi, Cellular, Bluetooth or GPS. Not only will your car be capable of communicating your travel, it can be used to track traffic conditions. You’re at Safeway, a small display recognizes you, and speaks: “You may want to stock up on tissues, your last purchase suggests you have one box left at home.” Scary, but not science fiction any longer.

The truth, which is often obfuscated by our governmental leaders, will continue to be tested for validity. While technology can be intrusive, technology is also liberating. The more “Big Data” collects on each and every one of us, the greater the Openness of information access and distribution (e.g., the the Open Access of the debate this week), the more difficult it will be for Government to keep secrets.

It’s often said, when we, as residents/taxpayers/citizens, express frustration at backroom deals (Grist Creek pollution), preferential treatment (Rapist Brock Turner), cannabis prohibition (Schedule 1, really?), and usurious health care costs, the future promises less opportunity for the rich to rip us off – follow the money will be harder to hide in a truly transparent world. Maybe a world where the manufacture of machines to kill people will illuminate the profit motivation masked behind national security. Maybe the same transparency will illustrate how the few manipulate us all for their sole gain. Maybe, honesty

will prevail, and we might enjoy a future of elevated consciousness, and a community of fostering richness, not financial excess for the few.