

Time Has Come Today

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More than less here would agree that cyberpunk has "moved on" from being only a literary phenomenon. "Cyberpunk" was how some SF stories were characterized. The authors of those stories were called "cyberpunks". Since they had an agenda, they were collectively referred to as the "cyberpunk movement". This movement occurred within the ideological reality of the science fiction industry.

"Cyberpunk" is a descriptor -- It describes something. It is this that has "moved on". Whatever is described as "cyberpunk" has to be consistent with what is cyberpunk about the stories, authors, and their agenda. Otherwise, it would just be the appropriation of the word "cyberpunk" for other uses.

"Punk" had no positive referent. It was another word for "whore", for recipients of 'prison sex' (as in "punk ass"), for petty criminals.

That began changing after WWII, although it was still negative. "Juvenile delinquents" were punks. Rebellious teens were punks. Rock 'n Roll was punk. Brando's character in the Wild One was a punk. "Punk" began to be assigned a positive value in the emerging Youth(tm) subculture or counterculture. But the term remained ambiguous, resonant with moods of danger, crime, social rebellion and dark sexuality.

In a classic reversal or re-appropriation, a group of artists, in rock bands mostly, in the 1970's had an agenda and created a movement they called "punk". They reversed through post WWII history picking up the negative denotations of "punk" and incorporating them into their agenda.

Mostly (quoting alias here) they just wanted to be paid. They wanted to earn a living practicing their art. They were faced with a concentrated, centralized music industry that had no room for them. And that was pretty much the agenda of the cyberpunks in the cyberpunk movement, too, to earn a living practicing their art. In other way, to do what they want to do and "survive".

In order to do that, each movement had to transform their industry enough so that they could succeed. They each began to DIY, garage bands and indie labels; fan mags and samizdat.

Both movements had good social engineers, attracting media buzz and a fan movement, which they could leverage into contracts in their industries. With momentum building they attracted more players (but some "punked out" -- Shiner). Both movements had latched onto memetic arrays that found receptors in the media, academia, and, of course, Youth(tm).

The 70's punk movement failed, mainly I think, because of a Luddite strain in their ideology, which looked like DIY, but was, I think a distaste for the slick commodified look and feel of digital. By the 1980's the new technologies were transforming society. It is at this point that the cyberpunk movement emerges, cognizant of the 70's punk movement and influenced by it (in Shirely's case, both movements are indistinguishable).

The "cyber" in cyberpunk refers to the then obscure (from the perspective of the science fiction establishment) technology of computer networks and virtual reality, which, the cyberpunk movement writers recognized as the future (the world stage of the SF genre) impacting the present : the point at which mainstream literature and the

SF genre converge, where the real world and fiction meet.

So, how do we get to how we use "cyberpunk" in this group ?

I think it is related to the agendas of the punk movement and the cyberpunk movement. For myself, cyberpunk is a set of strategies and tactics for living the life I want to live, in recognition that the concentrated and centralized power of the State, although it is not personally directed at me, is of such nature as to be able to seriously fuck with me for no particular reason, simply because our agendas encounter each other by happenstance.

I have no particular energy against the "establishment". My goal is to be invisible to it. There's nothing I can do about being, say, "profiled", but I can hope to encourage that profile is inaccurate in my favor. This does not mean cracking government computers and changing the data about me or even erasing it, which is, if you think about it, pretty stupid because it is futile. No one can possibly find all the data points and all the backups. And it doesn't change their ability to gather you up again beginning immediately.

What you need to know and manipulate is what they gather, how they gather it, where and when. And especially the hermeneutics they are tied to, what their classifying and interpretive schemes are. A simple example : everyone here knows how to defeat usenet email address harvesters.

Cyberpunk concerns the recognition of the existence of technological viruses (I don't mean computer viruses), which, like the 'observer' modifying observation, affect the behavior of people using technology in ways that result in system crashes, lockups, and code modifications, both to the people and to the systems employed.

A good example of a technological virus is seen in what is happening to the US stock market, and probably other such markets. The age old techniques, strategies, tactics and systems for investing are no longer working as they used to before computerization and internet trading.

The problem appears to be that they are now so widely known and used that they've become ineffective. The stock markets are becoming the content of a larger system. It is being contextualized and made irrelevant.

Whatever increases the ratio of noise to signal in technological systems to which people are hooked into that also increases the N/S ratio in the minds and behaviors of people using them (there is a positive feedback between system and users) is what I mean by a technological virus.

The noise in the programs used to trade stocks is reflected in the growing failure of those programs to accurately model the current market. The more users using those programs, the more noise in the system. The fact that so many users employing the same strategies on the same data tend to create unexpected patterns, or the cancelling out of expected patterns tends to lockup the users (they stop trading or trade poorly) and will eventually crash the market.

Cyberpunk involves an awareness and tactics to use or deflect, the force multiplier effect of social viruses with technological vectors, that otherwise seem "chaotic" or "random", if we are aware of them at all, and if we are not, we put down to luck, good or bad, or the will of God (or the Loa).

The hackers-on-the-internet (to distinguish them from the hacker culture before the net and the free software hackers) may have a hacker movement based on cyberpunk. I just see it as futile. Even the best hackers cannot hope to keep up with the developments behind the State's ice. Whole nations do not have the resources to bring to bear against US ice. I think the hacker movement is very 80's, still studying the vanishing technologies their skills can cope with.

In fact, it is probably useful to untangle yourself from the standard cyberpunk technologies, cell phones, computer networks etc. They're all vectors of technological viruses. Use them sparingly and with effective safeguards. Careful how you dress and what you do, security cameras, random camcorders surround you. Sensors count your cash, measure your stress, note your card data; auto-id tags are already in beta testing in select markets, identifying your purchases, monitoring their use, noting their disposal. You're a walking signal beacon, with your cellphone and wearable 'puter, your wallet chock full of cash or cards.

It's past time to put aside antique technologies and skills. We are at an historical tipping-point right now. No time to plan for "the future". No more mercy. No more slack cut.

Time has come today.