

# EPHEMERAL INVENTORY

## Cyana Madsen

In the pockets (fig. 1) of that wool blazer with the elbows worn thin you had:

1 corner of a green and white card boarding pass for a flight to New York, torn off in haste as you boarded late because you'd lost track of time at the terminal bar.

1 book of matches, just two are left in the soft fringe of raw cardboard where you peeled the others off and burnt them to your fingertips trying to read a map on a strange city street at night.

1 half of a dry cleaning ticket for trousers, worn to a long forgotten party full of names you had to repeat to yourself silently so you wouldn't forget.

1 folded paper napkin from a cafe with a phone number that doesn't exist anymore, creased and coffee stained, with 'Collect your shirt!' scribbled in your leaning inky black script.

2 dog eared tickets to the Royal Opera performance of La Traviata, for seats that didn't have a clear view of the stage.

1 Polaroid photo of you, your eyes were mostly closed but your hair looked perfect, your fingerprint smeared the date written in pen on the back.

I check my own pockets:  
I have my phone.



# DARK WEBS

Christopher Sleboda  
Kathleen Sleboda

The ever-living source of evil on Third Earth in the 1985 animated television series *Thundercats* is a villain named Mumm-Ra. His powers included sorcery and an unlimited lifespan, and he continually sought to increase his power and spread his dark influence (fig. 2).

The internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that rely on the Internet protocol suite—specific communication protocols—to link devices worldwide. Or is it some kind of sorcery? Do Mumm-Ra and the internet have more in common than one might think?

Quantum Computer Services was founded the same year that Lion-O, the hero of the *Thundercats*, used the Sword of Omens (a magical weapon that could fire bolts of energy and give its owner “Sight Beyond Sight,” or the power to see across vast distances). In 1989, Quantum changed its name to America Online (AOL). The company intended to become the service for people unfamiliar with computers. Soon the internet age dawned—and AOL carpet-bombed the masses with 3.5-inch floppy discs and CD-ROMs that proclaimed “Try America Online FREE!”

Fig. 2 — John F. Malta



The strategy was successful. When AOL went public in 1992, they had less than 200,000 subscribers (fig. 3). A decade later their subscriber number had ballooned into the 25 million range. Mumm-Ra would have been pleased with that expansion of power.

The original AOL logo referenced the all-seeing eye (also known as the Eye of Providence), housed in a pyramid form. The symbol represents the eye (fig. 4) of God watching over humanity. Mumm-Ra lived in a black pyramid amid the ruins of an ancient Egyptian civilization. But the fortress, where he retired to replenish his power, ultimately becomes a prison in various episodes of the show. In much the same way, the CD-ROMs and floppies that once heralded the power of AOL became the branded detritus of an ambitious internet pioneer. It seems that all universes eventually confine unchecked power and ambition.



Fig. 3 — Keira Alexandra

# CYBERPUNK

In 1995, several films were released about the internet, hackers, and cyber-spaces, including *The Net*, *Hackers*, and cult anime *Ghost in the Shell*. The latter's story follows a public-security agent in Japan who hunts a mysterious hacker known as the "Puppet Master." In this post-cyberpunk version of Earth (fig. 28) in the quite near future, there is a cyber brain that allows direct access to the internet and other networks. In one scene, the character Batou says, "That's all it is: information. Even a simulated experience (fig. 29) or a dream; simultaneous reality and fantasy. Any way you look at it, all the information that a person accumulates in a lifetime is just a drop in the bucket."

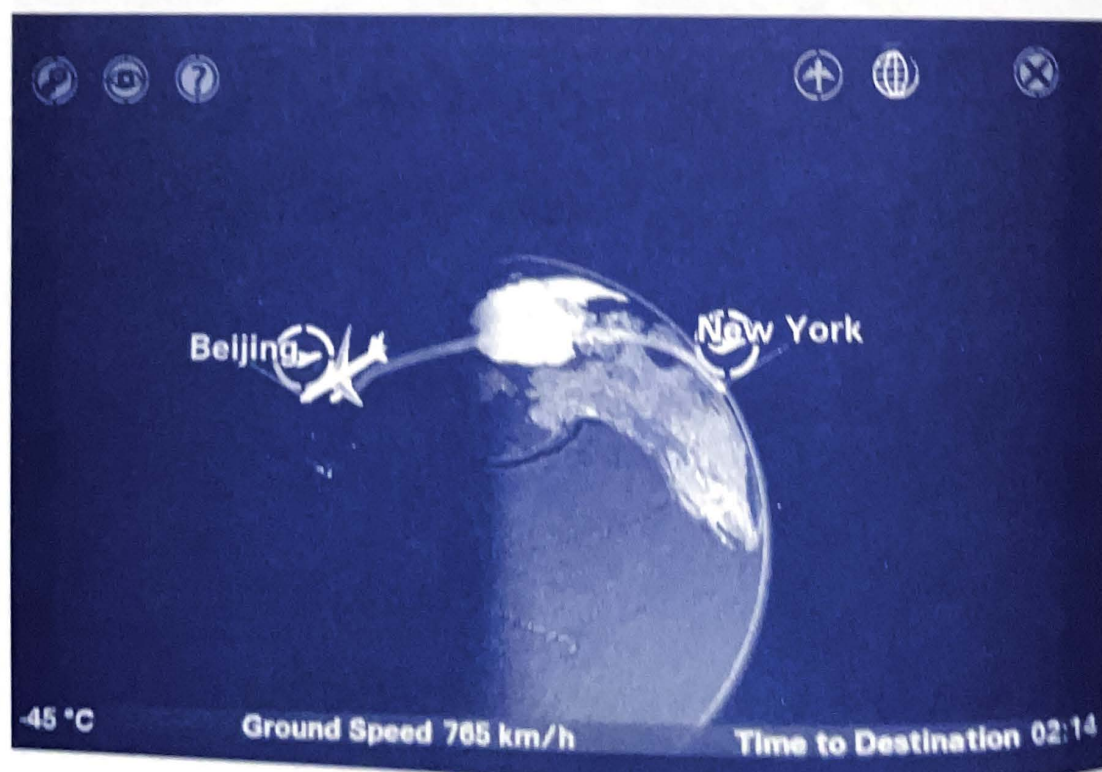


Fig. 28 — Seokhoon Choi



Meanwhile, in *The Net*, an American cyber mystery thriller film, Sandra Bullock is a systems analyst who telecommutes to Cathedral Software in San Francisco. Most of her communications are done online and on the phone; she has few face-to-face interactions (fig. 30). There's no cyber brain, but our heroine can order her pizza online from a site called Pizza.Net. She prefers a large with a regular crust. One day a co-worker sends her a floppy disk with a backdoor to the Gatekeeper security system. Then on a trip to Cozumel, real-world action kicks in: someone gets mugged, someone else dies, and a small boat crashes into rocks. Things are dangerous when you go offline. Bullock ends up unconscious (fig. 31) for three days, and when she awakes, all records of her life have been deleted. In response to being erased, Bullock says, "Everyone is stored in there. It's like this little electronic shadow on each and every one of us, just, just begging for someone to screw with, and you know what? They've done it to me, and you know what? They're gonna do it to you."

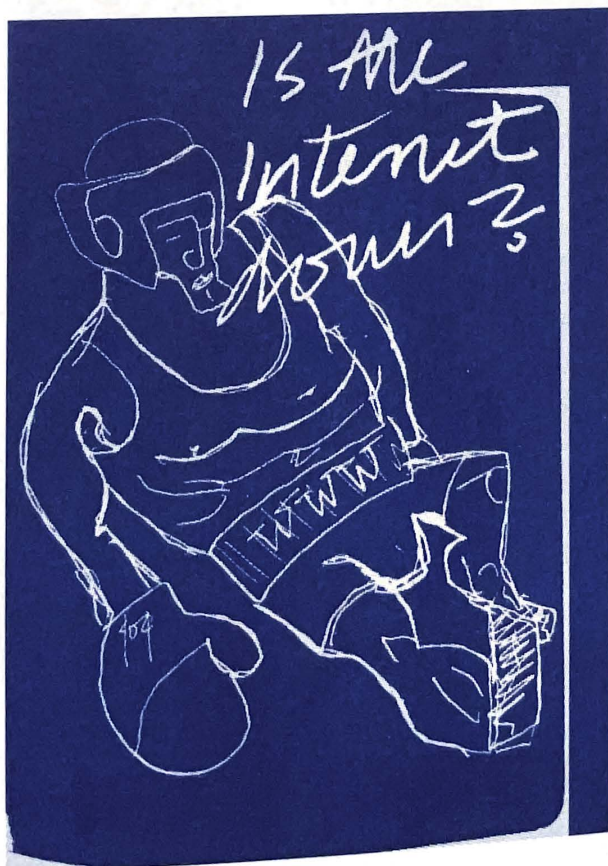


Fig. 31 — Cem Eskinazi



The film *Hackers* was also released in 1995 and starred Jonny Lee Miller and a short-haired Angelina Jolie as the cyber-punk "Acid Burn." It tells the story of Dade "Zero Cool" Murphy who is arrested and charged with crashing 1,500 computer systems in one afternoon. Oh, and he's just eleven years old. So the authorities (fig. 32) ban him from using computers and touch-tone telephones until 1995 when he turns eighteen; it's the year he changes his name to "Crash Override." One of the movie's locations is a hacker nightclub called Cyberdelia. There's also an evil plot (fig. 33) to unleash something called the Da Vinci virus. The other hackers bear

## White House Asks to Reauthorize Surveillance of Americans' Phone Data

By CHARLIE SAVAGE  
WASHINGTON — Spreading a wide net about a surveillance program that the Federal Security Agency is running, the White House is asking Congress to reauthorize the program. The program, which has been in place since 1995, allows the agency to collect and analyze phone records of Americans who are suspected of being involved in terrorism. The program is authorized for the next two years, but the White House is asking Congress to extend it to 2015.

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previously done. The executive branch had been pushing for an extension of the program since 2005. The program is authorized for the next two years, but the White House is asking Congress to extend it to 2015.

American Civil Liberties Union, called for Congress to extend the program. The program is authorized for the next two years, but the White House is asking Congress to extend it to 2015.

collected customer calling records from large telephone companies like AT&T and Verizon. The N.S.A. itself said it found few benefits in a data collection program.

was a top-secret surveillance court order to Verizon requiring it to give the N.S.A. a copy of all customer calling records. The program is authorized for the next two years, but the White House is asking Congress to extend it to 2015.

agency could receive full of records, as well as a copy of the records. The program is authorized for the next two years, but the White House is asking Congress to extend it to 2015.



names like The Phantom Phreak, Razor, and Blade, as well as Cereal Killer, played with zeal by Matthew Lillard in pigtails. The one thing that doesn't hold up is how the villain—Eugene “The Plague” Belford—slowly rides through the dark hallways of his offices on a skateboard. “Never fear. I is here,” he says after popping off his board. People have always been occupied with new ways to travel in the future—from the hoverboards in *Back to the Future* to skateboarding in office buildings. But those visions of the future have yet to come to fruition. The internet, however, continues to allow us to roll through space and time. And to order pizza.

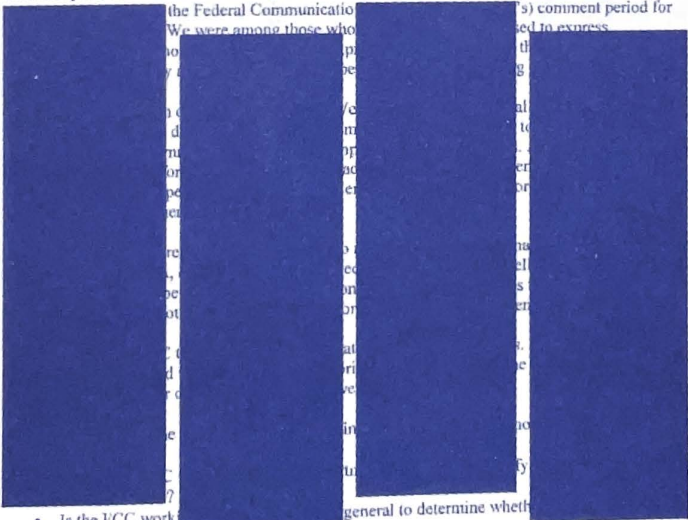
United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street Southwest  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

Late last year, the identities of as many as two million Americans were stolen and used to file (the Federal Communication Commission's) comment period for We were among those who used to express



- Is the FCC working to determine whether the identities were stolen?
- What measures is the FCC taking to ensure this does not happen in the future?
- How can the FCC track down who misused the identities of two million Americans?
- Can the FCC determine how many of the fake comments on record were submitted by bots, a software application that runs automated tasks (scripts) over the Internet?

Fig. 33 — Erika Blair

In the 2000 film *Track Down* (known as *Take Down* outside of the United States and *Cybertraque* in France), a leading computer crimes expert, Tsutomu Shimomura, rollerblades with gusto through a large server room. In the mid-to-late-1990s, rollerblading was at its peak; it was a natural progression for the hacker cinematic universe to morph hackers-on-skateboards into hackers-on-blades. Walking is slow and inefficient; skating is a hack for walking. Rollerblading was never as respectable or legitimate as skateboarding, despite the edgy 90s-style of aggressive skating. It was likely intentional that our protagonist Kevin Mitnick, played by Skeet Ulrich, would be pursued by someone who preferred blades over boards. Shimomura was simply not creative enough to gleam the cube (fig. 31). It wasn't long after the release of this film that rollerblading went into a steep decline from which it has yet to recover. In a final scene, Shimomura asks Mitnick, now imprisoned: "Why did you do it?" Mitnick replies, "The question is not why, but how...it's always how."



Our present reality differs from past visions of the future. We are less concerned with cyborgs and cyber brains than we are with online social spaces (fig. 32). These spaces capitalize on our personal communications and engineer how we hide and share information. In the present moment, we are concerned with how computers and apps track us, and with how our data is collected and used. The 2018 film *Searching* tells a compelling story entirely through smartphones, laptop screens, browser windows, and surveillance footage. The film's structure cleverly embraces the prevalence of screens in everyday life, allowing viewers to collectively search through images, videos, and text messages for clues to the primary mystery. It feels completely innate. The interfaces are all real—not the imagined 3-D animations (fig. 33) we sometimes see in cinematic computer screen spaces (fig. 34). In the final scene of *Ghost in the Shell*, Motoko Kusanagi says to herself, "And where shall I go now? (fig. 35) The net is vast and limitless (fig. 36)."