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# Cyberpunk and Technology

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The main characteristic of cyberpunk is that it escapes definition. This is not only due to the wide range of choices in the ideas of its supporters, it is also a direct effect of the possibilities offered by the new methods of information technology. Nothing in this field can be neatly separated from the rest. In many narrative texts the style of the story reflects the means that make it into a transmittable object, and this same story then has consequences on the elaboration of future technology.

The mechanism undoubtedly allows for an autonomy of individual consciousness and sophistication in decision-making capacity, if nothing else as far as timing is concerned. It is impossible to predict the amount of intellectual capacity, the rational element that supports all the weight of the rigid pigeonholing of procedures. Here all mandatory remarks seem almost an attempt to exorcise an uncertainty one cannot help perceiving.

The individual who accepts this relationship with information technology soon moves towards a generic refusal of centralised authority, a path in the forest that could lead them to conclusions that would be very important from a liberatory point of view were it not that they immediately come up against the obstacle of the instrument itself. The actor-instrument interaction does not have any real outlet other than constituting an atmosphere of tolerance, when not exactly indifference, concerning all aspects that in any case are threatened by a rampant spreading of the means of information technology around the somewhat obscure operative field.

It should be said that all manifestations of cyberpunk almost unwittingly end up producing a hedonistic view of life. Scepticism is accepted as a value, an intelligent way of thinking which every level of specialist is pushed towards, and the computer itself ends up becoming a specialisation with its own language and mentality. A symbiosis between those who start a dialogue with the machine and the machine itself is thus inevitable. But this is occult, so much so as to be systematically denied, negation becoming a further element of concealment. And the specialist mentality is always a step ahead. The more it advances in the field of manageable objectivity, the more it cradles itself in the sense of security that comes from feeling at ease in the ambit of procedures that know each other, interact, increasingly delimit the confines of a world deprived of procedure that is just waiting to be regulated, so taken back to the sphere of the measurable. The specialist is distinguishable precisely because of his certainty of values that tend to flow outwards in the direction of a knowledge of which he as a specialist knows nothing, or almost nothing, about. But this ignorance no longer seems to him to be a negative element to be remedied but simply a remote, desolate place to be colonised, wild chaos that needs to be put in order and understood.

All this must not take a rigid view of reality. Not measure and technocrats. That would have been inevitable in other times, far from the computer era of to-

difference corresponds in a way that is suspect to what power expects of us, i.e. a falsely active response to its solicitations, a competition to realise the pace of homologised initiatives of global consensus. The figure of the present day spectator drinking his beer in front of the TV watching his favourite football team, could in the not too far off future be replaced by a spectator (the same one) playing his own game on TV or another telematic instrument; while elsewhere the *included* are deciding his fate as passive subject who is suddenly deceiving himself that he possesses fantastic strength capable of upturning the world.

But the world is elsewhere, and this "else" would be far from our reach.



day. The elaboration of new procedures shows a considerable level of creativity, allowing ironic reflections on the organisational aspects of society. The paradoxical and the contradictory therefore have access to reasoning techniques. That allows for an explosion of practices in the visionary and perhaps surreal direction, if one could only agree on the term. But that matters little. What does matter is the parallel mechanism of acceptance of all the techniques that make the visionary rupture of reality possible. In a way the journey is realised at the cost of the dream mechanism, a neurological level that we are unable to control, safeguarding it from unconscious ordinative implications.

There thus emerges an implicit realism that constructs itself independently of the decisions and desires of the participants in the cyberpunk experience. The processes of the electronic organisation of data build this reality within which all experience, even the violently visual kind, ends up being codified in numbers in the same digital communication. The virtual adventure which is at the centre, at least for the moment, of cyberpunk culture, could run the risk of disseminating intentions precisely in that territory of codification where each game could be read in a key that confirms power. The implicit ideology of tolerance towards hacking, no matter how extreme, is born and nourishes itself in the idea, for the time being undeclared but underground, that power is capable of recuperating and managing any behaviour whatsoever in the information technology sector. Over the next few years, the conditions of this relationship could change, both a realisation of the dreams of the cyberpunks (in the sector things go ahead by leaps and bounds), and an acutening of the preoccupations of social control.

It is true that there are also attempts to demystify, and that the action of recuperation and subtraction indirectly serve to study the behaviour of power as it manages and controls data. But all that soon comes back under the cover of the technology itself, interfering with the intentions, putting it beyond one's own project unbrakably. The invention of new procedures is certainly an abstraction that uses cabled means because they present themselves; but it itself ends up being the opportunity of an intermediate part of the means itself, starting from the uncontrolled threshold of the whole system of technological interaction. It should be noted that all this happens at two levels: at the specific level, in that no creation can subtract itself from its interactivity within the system. At the technological level in general, in that a wider interaction would end up playing on the development of all the technological sectors that in a way are completely beyond control. There is nothing in the world, either cyberpunk or the system of control, that is capable of controlling this second level of technological interaction.

Many have pointed out the negative aspects of a collaboration of certain participants in this movement with the German government, or are sarcastic

about the restitution of money stolen via computers aimed at demonstrating the weaknesses of the counterpart.

I do not consider these to be serious arguments within the sphere of a substantial critique of the process of interaction with information technology. First of all because these are personal decisions, and second because the field of any critique must be that of the eventual use of technology in general, information technology in particular, in a way that is different to that controlled and managed by power. In other words, the only valid question to ask is whether a really individual use of computer technology is possible. The end of communication, visible in the tatters of the written word, seems to mark the beginning of the third millenium. Can virtual space constitute an effective communication space, or will it become a way of sealing the coffin of the individual? The massified management of communication is proceeding vertically, while space for relating between individuals is shrinking. When this survives, it is englobed in the unified code of the sector, i.e. they appear as transmitters of uniformity, news becomes significant precisely because it is preventively homologised in an identical container. Everything depends on seeing whether the virtual model being proposed is really capable of moving horizontally or whether this movement is no more than a passage from intention to homologation. That the other, precisely in its role as interlocutor, is finally substituted by the machine itself and its virtual potential. But all that has one conditional premise, at least for the cyberpunk: that it remains to be proven that the machine can really be put to the service of man, and that power cannot, parallely, store up all the information necessary to manage information technology and, in the present state of affairs, the totality of production and control. Hacking would therefore only be capable of demonstrating how many cracks there are in the controlled structures of the dominant information technology, and where they reside. If this aim were practicable, the opposite consideration should also be certain, that the dominant structure would not have the means to take radical measures. Now, no matter what experience there might be in other fields and other modalities of attack, the capacity to take measures always exists; and this capacity remains, let us say, only a dialogue in the case in which the attack remains in the field of symbolic procedure. Entering the sphere of real destruction the power structure modifies its behaviour and adds countermoves that are not only repressive but are also organisational.

What I am trying to say is that any demonstrative disturbance could simply convince the counterpart to include it in the variables of management, as a percentage of uncertainty. A more radical disturbance leads to measures that cannot be studied and evaluated at the technological level by those who simply chip in with the power structure, precisely because their action does not provoke them, so does not force it to come out. Remaining such an approach,



which seems fairly generalised, the for and against arguments are no more than simple petitions of principle.

To suppose that results obtainable through the use of electronic technology do not directly lead to a growth in human awareness simply because they find themselves in the hands of a minority itself devoid of social awareness, is either a tautology without hope, or an illusion grafted into the social function of technology in general and computer in particular. Can the excluded make a different use of it? Can this hypothetical different use become the objective of all those who intend to attack the management of power? The problem is the classical one of the struggle against those managing power. But now, in addition to the traditional aspects of this problem, one must also bear in mind the elements and interactions specific to electronic means.

I am not trying to say here that one should desist from demonising all aspects of electronic technology, or limit oneself to attacking the negative expressions that are closest to hand. This would prevent a direct awareness of the possible psychological effects of this technology, therefore of any attacks aimed at remedying the problem by contrasting it with relative social and political implications. It is just that it seems to me to be naive to trust the equation that puts things in a linear process of interesting oneself in these problems and making a certain theoretical effort, concluding with the possibility of understanding and deciding to put an end to the negative aspects, while conserving the positive ones.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, and consequently pointless arguments concerning the use of computers or a return to the quill pen, one should point out that there is nothing sacred about suspecting rationality in general, or against penetrating, armed with a long-term project, the strategy (moreover which is quickly replaced and constantly on the verge of being superceded) of information technology. There are two points to note on this problem: first, it does not seem to me to be indispensable to have sophisticated knowledge of it in order to realise the dangers of this technology at the level of revolutionary awareness. Second, one should not forget the specialistic effect that this work of penetration into the world of computer technology has on the individual. Someone might say that to limit this cognitive entrance into a world that is itself travelling towards global extinction is equivalent to being on a train and not being interested in where it is going. A good objection, without necessarily making one feel obliged to become train drivers in order to understand better whether the destination is the right one.

There are many ways to enjoy oneself, and virtual reality prospects new, fascinating ones. However, one cannot lightly maintain that this is equivalent to action that we could carry out (but often don't want to) in reality. There is a considerable difference between the passive fruition of telematic means such as TV, and the active one, starting from simple video games. But strangely this