

net info

von Peter Sabaini

Cyberpunk

Und hier für die Freunde des Cyberpunk ein kleiner Onlineroman aus der illustren Feder von R.U.Sirius und stjude, mehr davon auf gopher://gopher.well.sf.ca.us:70/11/cyberpunk/mutate...

„PLOT“

IN THE 1990S A MAJOR SPLIT IN THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IS BECOMING OBVIOUS: THERE IS THE NUMERICALLY LARGE MINORITY OF HIP MEDIA FANS THAT KEEPS MONDO VANILLI THE MOST POPULAR SHOW ON TV — AND THERE IS THE STRANGE BEDFELLOWSHIP OF CONSERVATIVES AND THE POLITICALLY CORRECT. LONG WORKING OUT THEIR INCOMPATIBILITY PROBLEMS, THEY ARE NOW A POWERFUL ALLIANCE TO NARROW WHAT'S CALLED PERSONAL LIFESTYLE CHOICES — AMONG THEM THE CHOICE TO ENGAGE WITH THE INCREASINGLY RAW AND BIZARRE EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA THAT MV LEADS. THE MOST ACTIVE GROUP IN THE NEW CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT IS THE HUMAN ANTI-DEGRADATION LEAGUE, WHOSE ANNOUNCED GOAL IS IMPOSING ON ALL MEDIA ITS ANTI-DEGRADATIO STANDARDS — „THIS DEGRADES WOMEN, THIS IS DEGRADING TO CHILDREN. AND THIS IS DEGRADING TO...“ HADL'S TAKEOVER OF THE INTERNET, „THE MARCH ON THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY“ LEADS TO THE FORMATION OF AN AMERICAN UNDERGROUND, WHICH BECOMES INTERNATIONAL, JOINED BY A VARIETY OF UNDERGROUND NETS OF HACKERS [dedicated technos who play with given tech in novel ways], PHREAKERS [HARDWARE AND PHONE HACKERS], CRYPTOANARCHISTS [A HUMOROUS TERM FOR ANARCHISTS WHO WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD WITH CRYPTOGRAPHY], AND PEOPLE JUST PLAIN PISSED OFF AT SEEING THE PLANET-WIDE DISCOURSE CENSORED. THE UNDERGROUND CREATES ITSELF WITH MANY FACTIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS.

1994

April 30, 1994: The first MONDO Vanilli album, AMERICA'S NEWEST HITMAKERS, climbs rapidly to number one on the charts. This manic reflection of chaotic times has the effect of making the times even more chaotic.

1995

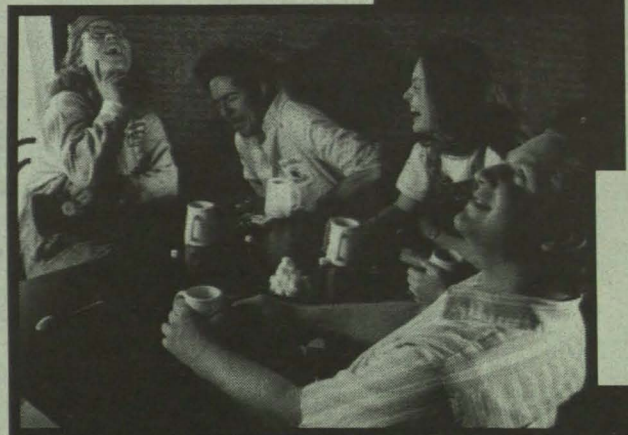
May 15, 1995: Police Roadblocks on the Information Highway: Censorship enforced on the Internet by the Feds. The Net has been identified by the New Conservatives as the medium of the future. The religious Right, old-style feminists and the politically-correct Left have been pouring millions into mass recruiting for their Human Anti-Degradation League, which pressures their membership to buy

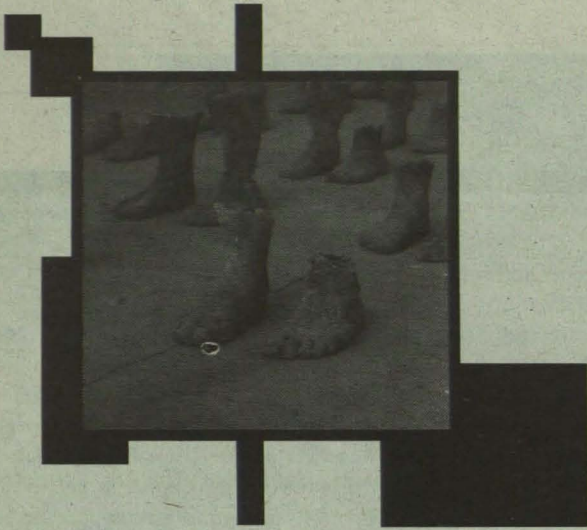
modems and SIGN ON. The constituency of the Net changes over a few months to be powerfully pro-censorship.

In spite of thousands of vocal nerds, net management and the FCC are pressured to draw up „Anti-Degradation standards“ — which for starts ban all the usual religious and sexual words like damn and pork, along with racially offensive or sexist terms like whitebread and chick — enforced by Federal spot-monitoring of all messages on the Net. The parallel, pointed out at once by scandalized Libertarians, is the federal highway system: the local governments aren't REQUIRED to set 55 mph speed regulations, but they'd better if they expect to get federal funds. The Net management caves in to unremitting pressure: the Net is no longer gross.

May 16, 1995: the CryptoNet. You can't censor what you can't read. Cypherpunks [A GROUP OF HACKERS, CRYPTOANARCHISTS AND CRYPTOGRAPHY FANS CONCERNED WITH PRIVACY AND FREEDOM], disbanded a year ago when they believed they had Won, reconvene. They and Libertarian cryptophreakers and hackers everywhere initiate emergency countermeasures, issuing manifestos and rants, and posting directions for obtaining encryption tech, both software and hardware [AN EXAMPLE OF ENCRYPTION HARDWARE IS THE SCRAMBLER PHONE. SOFTWARE ALLOWS EMAIL TO BE MASHED INTO WHAT LOOKS LIKE RANDOM BITS UNLESS YOU HAVE THE KEY TO UNMASH IT]. Hackers stay up all night and bash code [that is, they program] or dig out their old email encryption gear and fire it up: heh: practically overnight there are several compatible pseudonymous encrypted email systems [USING A PSEUDONYM WITH THE PROPER EMAIL SYSTEM PROTECTS YOUR CARNAL REAL IDENTITY]. Internet traffic starts to look like — random bits! Except for the religious bits. And the random chitchat. Technical discourse seems to have disappeared from the Net. But what remains is very nice.

June, 1995: The MONDO Vanilli World tour uses robots, artificial life, and 3-dimensional visual and audio technology to give attendees a wraparound full-sensory experience of such wonders as a lesbian sm session, the slaughter and cooking of a large pig, a kind of neo-Erhardt





Seminar Training (EST) session and other delights. The use of the most advanced illusionist theater technology for an erotic and psychologically challenging audience experience makes the tour a wild hit. The HADL uses the MV world tour as a pretext for extending itself internationally, with very mixed results. Holland and Scandinavia predictably laugh even more than they did at MV, but in most European countries the conservatives recognize their own, and HADL signs Tem up.

July 18, 1995: The long-foreseen Federal banning of „unauthorized“ encryption software and devices. The battle for the Internet part 3: a special session of Congress passes a Public Safety Encryption Bill to outlaw use of non-regulated encryption, both hardware and software. This hurry-up legislation is HADL-backed, and supported by haters of child-porn GIF files everywhere [GRAPHIC INFORMATION FORMAT == A FORMAT FOR SENDING PICTURES ONLINE].

Mandatory prison terms are suggested for violations of the new bill, which is based on the old laws that ranked cryptography along with munitions as a government prerogative. The attendant new bureaucracy is called the Encryption Regulatory Commission (ERC).

July 19, 1995: Nerds' Revenge: instant Underground, CounterNets, Media hacking. The Cypherpunks, world's first completely open conspiracy, becomes a secret anti-organization. Some Extropians [A SILICON VALLEY GROUP OF SCIENTISTS, MATHEMATICIANS, PROGRAMMERS AND WEIRDIES DEVOTED TO COMBATING ENTROPY WITH EVERYTHING THE HUMAN MIND CAN THROW AT IT, TO EXTEND LIFE AND INTELLIGENCE], some Libertarians, some hacker types decide it's time to create an Underground. They do this by declaring there is one. (An Underground is first of all a semiotic construct.) They post these declarations Internet-wide without interference, since they avoid saying „fuck“ or any of those other words. They seem to have a lot of fun with this: they bounce their manifestoes untraceably and sign them with faction names like The Moles [a word that means either a burrowing mammal or a deep-cover spy], their motto — „We are the blemishes on corporate America“ etc.

Having declared it into being, most of them join the Underground simply by taking up a secret life based on untraceable communications. Some of them go further: becoming invisible in a data-based culture is something they've worked up to for years. They vanish. (And very happily in most cases — those who always secretly longed for their own Revolutionary Underground... like the Rave kids who got their

own Sixties.)

Those who physically Go Under sometimes leave the US to join or create their own TAZes — temporary autonomous zones — in parts of the world where they can be free from laws, cops, and the unbearable pressures of niceness. There has been since 1992 a movement toward setting up „offshore“ banks and other financial and trade institutions, free ports, etc. out of the reach of governments, particularly the U S. This movement becomes more important as these years wear on.

An underground, especially a conceptual one, lives by communications. Most of the ongoing revolutionary discourse takes place (surprise!) on the Internet. Pseudonym talks to pseudonym via offshore remailer systems [USUALLY A BBS THAT SERVES AS AN EMAIL DROP, LIKE A PO BOX, SO THAT RETURN ADDRESSES CAN'T BE TRACED. USING SEVERAL REMAILERS EVERY TIME PRETTY WELL OBLITERATES YOUR TRAIL] with elaborate verification protocols to prove they are who they say they are. (The easy way to verify, with unregistered encryption keys [IF YOU ENCRYPT SOMETHING WITH YOUR PRIVATE KEY AND ONLY YOUR PUBLIC KEY UNSCRAMBLES IT, IT MUST BE FROM YOU. A GOVERNMENT PLAN TO REGISTER — AND READ — ALL KEYS IS IN THE WORKS.], is outlawed.) This leads to the reputation net that Cypherpunks foresaw long ago — Skull vouches for you, so Cruncher thinks you're okay. Disguised messaging — steganography — is the easy way to send stuff you don't want read: into a harmless Hallmark greeting GIF you insert an encrypted goody whose presence the Feds won't suspect if your handle is AuntMarge. Pseudonymous posting on the Internet is possible by bouncing posts through remailers — hello, Finland! But there's a growing feeling that hitchhacking — hitching a ride on existing media — needs to be extended. SneakerNet is one microwave relay-hacking crew. Satellite hacking is long overdue: there's a group called Reach! and another called Mooners. Over the course of months a Conelrad network is painfully hacked together in urban areas of North America: a radio-based semi-encrypted independent net — look: no wires! The conceptual BigNet (all the nets and BBSs) that links the whole Underground together is called the Mycelium. This is typical nerdish humor: Mycelium is the underground net of fibers constituting the real body of a plant that only occasionally sprouts mushrooms. Meanwhile, other Underground hackers with long-standing grudges against broadcast media find new and fascinating ways to subvert it.... INTO THE MATING GAME FLASHES A MICROWAVE-RELAY HACKER IN A SMILEY-FACE MASK READING OFF A SHEET OF PAPER: „AND NOW, A BRIEF MESSAGE FROM YOUR HACKER UNDERGROUND: TODAY'S STUFF YOUR GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WANT YOU TO KNOW.“

These interruptions are REALLY POPULAR: people sit with their remotes ready to tape them, and trade them back and forth. When hackers crack into and read off long-secret government statistics on real unemployment rates — greater than 50% in mid-1995 — the viewing, taping public has a mass breakthrough on the reality front: most of them do little BUT view and tape. The world is the TV screen. The message is the media. And media — especially with that self-realization — is getting weirder by the day.

Sept. 1995: MONDO Vanilli's TV show As a huge media event, the MONDO Vanilli TV show opens in tandem with a marketing push of the MONDO Vanilli headware, available for \$18.95 at 7-11 stores, that allows the viewer to see and hear the program comfortably in 3D. The show is the Monkees forcibly bred with David Cronenberg — a ridiculous pop band living together and getting silly, yeah, but beneath the surface extremely weird biological and psychic stuff is happening. The show is bizarre and sexual, but not as far Tround the bend as MV's public performances. The program's popularity, however, raises to new volume the shouts for censorship of the TV waves, now supporting over 1,000 channels and generally viewed as being both out of, and

beyond control. But if they can control the Internet, thinks both sides, why not television?

Oct 1, 1995: The Mutants' Manifesto is posted on the Net. The Underground, already very various, sprouts a few new manifestations: armed persons with serious politics, like the Paxton Quigley Brigade — „We're Armed, We're Female.“

[MS QUIGLEY WROTE Armed and Female, DEFENDING FEMALE SELFDEFENSE. SHE TEACHES SHARPSHOOTING.] One branch of

the armed wing, heh, call themselves the Mutants, dedicated to „Mutating and Taking Over the World.“ Their manifesto forms one of the core documents of the book. To media- and Net-hacking activities the Underground has been adding direct actions against financial and law-enforcement operations of the State and the mega-corps. Popular aboveground cyber-writer and humorist St. Jude is called the patron saint of the movement — the saint of hopeless causes, yes — for her satires on the goals and methods of the Underground. She denies any direct connection, but she is continuing a longterm lovership with one of the group's perceived „leaders,“ and helps maintain communications among factions.

Oct 3, 1995: Robin Hood Day. Today people all over the United States and Canada woke up either richer or poorer. Bank accounts of less than \$30,000 were mysteriously credited \$3000. Accounts with more were debited the same amount. There were no public announcements, no manifestoes.

Nov - Dec 1995: The X-Xmas campaign. Pirates jam Christmas advertising and traditional tired holiday hoopla, substituting advertising-parody jingles and Tom Lehrer-style carols. A couple of factions start a „Take Back the Solstice“ campaign, broadcasting pagan spiral dances with torches, prayers for the safe return of the sun, etc. Immediately other segments of the Underground come back with pagan parodies and Free the Holidays campaigns — Let My Kwanzaa Go! It's very festive.

1996

Jan 1996: Simone 3Arm does a solo performance tour, which morphs over the course of the tour into a Goddess revival-meeting format. Mass conversions result.

Feb 2, 1996: The second MONDO Vanilli record release, LOTSA STUFF, comes with an album's worth of music and a full CD-ROM. This will be a pretext for exploring the evolution of computer-based multimedia technology and its links to other forms of media. LOTSA STUFF gets hacked immediately and is made freely available on line — which fact is then heavily publicized by MV. MV thus sets a Free-the-Media precedent — seemingly encouraging phreakers to crack and freely distribute not only its own stuff but any musical or CD-ROM release.

Early 1996: How to Mutate and Take Over the World. Pirate media pranking by the Underground has evolved an ongoing shtick called Mutate and Take Over the World:

SAMPLE

THE EVENING NEWS IS FOCUSING ON THE PLIGHT OF THE LEFT-HANDED. SUDDENLY THE SCREEN GOES PLAID. A FIGURE STEPS BEFORE THE CAMERA: THE SMILEY FACEMASK NODS ITS HEAD IN GREETING. HIS/HER VOICE IS ELECTRONICALLY TREATED TO SOUND LIKE MICKEY MOUSE:

GOOD EVENING, COMRADES. THIS UNSCHEDULED

INSTALLMENT OF MUTATE AND TAKE OVER THE WORLD IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE COMMIE FACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ANARCHIST PICNIC, AND BY THE COPYRIGHT LAWS OF SOMEBODY'S GOVERNMENT... BUT NOT MINE.

WE ALL NOW UNDERSTAND THAT THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS COPYRIGHTED, PROTECTED, SAFE, TAME DATA. ONCE DATA'S DISTRIBUTED, IT GOES WILD — FERAL DATA. IT JUST HANGS AROUND BEING FREE AND REPRODUCING ITSELF. SOUND LIKE FUN? BUT FREE DATA CAN BE TRAPPED AND SOLD: YOU CAN SELL WATER TO SOMEBODY IN THE DESERT, RIGHT? TO SOMEBODY WITH NO ACCESS, YOU CAN EVEN SELL DATA. OKAY, SAY YOU'RE A LEFTO-ANARCHIST. YOU WRITE OR PROGRAM SOMETHING TRULY SNARKY AND YOU WANT PEOPLE TO SEE IT, FREE, AND YOU DON'T WANT SOME CORPORATE SLAVEDEALER MAKING MONEY OFF IT.

WHAT TO DO? REMEMBER, THE BEST HACK USES THE TOOLS AT HAND. THE COPYRIGHT LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WERE DRAWN UP FOR JUST THIS SITCH. YOU ATTACH A LABEL TO IT, SAYING THAT IT'S COPY-PROTECTED BY LAW, THAT IT'S ILLEGAL TO DISTRIBUTE IT AND THEIR ASS CAN BE SUED OFF... UNLESS THEY DISTRIBUTE IT FREE. THIS IS CALLED COPYLEFTING, AN IDEA CREDITED TO RICHARD STALLMAN. IT'S A SMART WEAPON: IT HITS ONLY THE LAW-ABIDING. REMEMBER THIS AND TAKE COMFORT, FRIENDS: THERE ARE MILLIONS OF WAYS TO BE POLITICALLY INCORRECT.

THE UNDERGROUND—dropping to a synthesized deep intimate tone— Loves You.

STAY FREE! A FEW SCENES OF A JAPANESE PORN MANGA ANIMATION, ITS

TRADITIONAL BLANKED-OUT GENITALS REPLACED BY NEW-MODEL CARS , TREES, AND MAJOR HOME APPLIANCES; SLOW FADE TO BLACK. NORMAL BROADCAST RESUMES.

Impressum

TU-INFO Nr. 4/96

Auflage: 13000

Verlags- und Herstellungsort: Graz

Medieninhaberin, Verlegerin und Herausgeberin:

Hochschülerschaft der Techn.
Universität Graz (HTU),
Rechbauerstr. 12, 8010 Graz.

Redaktionsteam: Peter Sabaini (ps), Jürgen Gruber (jrg), Thomas Spindler (ts), Gitte Cerjak (gc) & Klaus Trnka (klat).

Fotoproduktion und -redaktion: Andreas Abart, Martin Juen, Peter Sabaini.

Cartoon: Silvia Ederer. **Layout:** Gerald Hartl (gerald), Peter Sabaini.

Werbeeinschaltungen: Günther Agath, Alfred Holzbauer, Erik Torlutter & Klaus Trnka.

Mitarbeiter: ReferentInnen und SachbearbeiterInnen der HTU; siehe gekennzeichnete Artikel.

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Druck: Herold, Wien. Gedruckt auf chlorfrei gebleichtem Papier.