

# Can a computer virus create anarchy?

Mondo 2000 & Anarcho-Futurism

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

1993

“You could say that cyberpunk is intrinsically anarchistic. It’s endlessly anti-authoritarian, and it can be employed like a weapon, like a computer virus, injecting new information by means of the existing mechanisms. The pop image of anarchism has always been a bomb—yeah, well, this is an ideological bomb that has been planted in the culture.”

—John Shirley, *Mondo 2000 User’s Guide To the New Edge*

*Mondo 2000* (#9, \$5.95 or \$24 for 5 quarters, from PO Box 10171, Berkeley, CA 94709-0171) exudes the exotic hyper-contemporary chatter and stylized computer-generated glossy graphics of anarcho-futurism.

While most *Fifth Estate* readers probably cringe at the thought of technology in the service of the revolution, the sexy visuals and cyberpunk rhetoric were enough to seduce me to drop six bucks into the jaws of bookstore capital so I could digest the substance beneath the sheen.

Yet much substance I did not find. While the writers and interviewees included some of my favorite scribes of contemporary dissent (the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, Hakim Bey and Kathy Acker), *Mondo* seems more intent on promoting the lifestyle enhanced by technology than on fostering the ideas of rebellion that are integral to at least their posture.

The readers who write to the “Letters, Fax and E-Mail” section seem to buy the hype as authentic rebellion as they write about “posses of urban nomads” and “tribes of techno guerillas” living and working communally. Other articles include the dismal “Four Arguments For the Redemption of Television” and the anarcho-capitalist, post-nationalist rave on the benefits of offshore banking as a means to keep the hands of the governmental racket off your precious cash.

As a sci-fi fan curious about the emerging cyberpunk milieu, I devoured William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* a few years back as part of a class in urban studies. I did not find such a bleak picture of the future as an endorsement of the accelerated dissemination of new infotech products which will irreparably alter the consciousness of daily life.

While Gibson clearly romanticizes his outlaw protagonist who is perpetually jacked into a vortex of virtual reality more real than reality itself, the novel is a weak sales pitch for the techno-new wave. But when Gibson’s prophecy for the expansion of late capital into a matrix of meta-reality becomes accessible from the corporate peddlers of computech (regular advertisers in *Mondo* and one reason for the mag’s User’s Guide), the gloomy futurist portrayal that made exciting fiction becomes a frightening recipe for an individual’s simulated bliss and the planet’s certain misery.

The propagators of mondoism are irritatingly smug as they preach the redemption and liberation promised by technology that offers dizzying decentralization. Just think, any computer deviant with a few thousand dollars can arm themselves as an autonome of electronic mail to disarm authority. Perhaps skilled computer hackers can even infiltrate and dismantle the mechanisms of power, just like in the movies. *Mondo* does not offer accounts of actual assaults on authority beyond those comprised of attitude.

These comments must appear as an odd pastiche of paradox and hypocrisy as we become further computerized for the production of this paper and further away from any tangible adherence to our primal vision. Within the last year, I have purchased my own home computer and do more and more of my writing as a monitor surfing Macintoshhead. My partner, who always teases me about my love/hate relationship with my computer, said, "It's a sort of master/slave thing, except it's uncertain if the computer's serving you or if you're serving the computer."

Yet the following comment on cyberpunk, unlike Shirley's anarchistic one, makes our opposition to the toys of the spectacle resonate more clearly. Rudy Rucker writes: "For me, the best thing about cyberpunk is that it taught me how to enjoy shopping malls, which used to terrify me. Now I just pretend the whole thing is two miles below the moon's surface, and that half the people's right brains have been eaten by roboticized steel rats."

Endemic of techno-commodity culture, shopping malls still terrify me and they rightly should. Rather than use the modern imagination to pacify our nausea caused by the sterility of shopping mall society, why not use the primitive technics of fire, and live the Mojo Nixon song "Burn Down The Malls."

# fifth Estate

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