

# VR Troopers

## The Virtuality of Reality

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Way back in the 1990s, the bleeding edge of the cyberpunk counterculture was in conflict over what the next stage of technological transformation was to be. On one side were the psychedelic, techno-shamans of virtual reality (VR). On the other, the data pirates of the web. The advocates of virtual reality argued that cheap VR units would soon appear in every home, providing an endless array of sensory stimulation for all participants, a world of unheard of experience.

They claimed that VR was going to crack open our minds and create mass brain-change, birthing a new world. Their arguments were much like those of the acid advocates of the 'Sixties, who claimed that drugs would totally change society for the better.

On the other side, the web-weavers asserted that the net, the data-web, would provide an infinite spring of information to everyone on the planet.

Governments could no longer conspire, and secrecy would be impossible. Power would become totally decentralized. They proclaimed that information wants to be free and humanity was coming along for the ride.

Ultimately, both sides found themselves affiliated with venture capitalism, showing their utopianism for what it really was, marketing decorated with sanitized signifiers of rebellion.

We now know which side came out on top. VR was marketed as a crappy toy (take for example, Virtual Boy, Nintendo's 32-bit portable, 3-D, tabletop video game console). The web became a major facet in the lives of all Americans, or at least the ones that mattered (urban and suburban folks living on the coasts). Virtual reality never became a reality, but reality has become more virtual. The cybernetic covers all of existence, like a thin layer of grime. Noticeable, but not obvious.

Every product above the dollar store bracket now has a web presence. Physical items have a URL, a sort of magic word, printed right on it. To learn of it, one merely needs to punch it in. And, more and more mobile devices allow you to do it on the spot. They read the cybernetic aura of all items we encounter.

Not only are these devices becoming mobile, their use is becoming integrated and invisible. The Xbox 360 video game system has an interface that allows you to control the game play with the motion of your body (though interestingly, this interface does not recognize a person in a wheel chair as being a body, showing how technology is socially constructed).

Google developed Google Glass, a wearable computer with an optical head-mounted display (OHMD), so, just like Arnold Schwarzenegger's android in the movie, "Terminator," the wearer gets continual digital read-outs. Mobile devices are expanding into daily life to the point where they can dominate perception and cognition and soon, if they haven't already, define human culture.

Cities like San Francisco are providing free wireless internet coverage so advertisers can pinpoint the user's location. This is almost occult. The physical area transmits information to the user. It is like the process that some parapsychologists use to explain hauntings, the idea that events can be recorded onto an area via psychic energy. Except this isn't paranormal, this is technology, it is techgnosis. But a gnosis controlled by corporate entities.

More and more cybernetic entities invade our daily lives. Some children's toys have associated web presences, a doppelganger they can play with online, which also informs their conception of the stuffed animal itself. The functions and actions that were once performed in everyday life are brought online.

Cybernetics mirror worlds, controlling more and more of daily experience. As these mirror worlds are formed, they converge with everyday life. More and more we live in virtual reality and even reality becomes virtual. It is a supercharging of the world described by Guy Debord in his opening paragraph in *Society of the Spectacle*, "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." But, even Debord couldn't have imagined the current immersion of human society in the inauthentic.

Community becomes collective communications through electronic devices.

Economic activity moves online and more of daily life becomes economic in nature. Activities that might have once brought individuals into semi-public spaces can be conducted in isolation. Once there was the possibility of chance encounters, but this becomes less likely in the virtual environment.

Even basic activities such as food shopping are colonized through cell phones and other mobile electronic devices. Reality is experienced through a coercive, media matrix of virtuality which controls our interactions through electronic mediation, the basis for more and more of our lives. This virtuality is not a new utopia; it is manipulated by the same agents of control now in power.

Jason Rodgers publishes *Media Junky* and *Psionic Plastic Joy* from PO Box 10894, Albany, NY 12201.

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