**Net Culture**

**Great Britain between Europe and America**

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Net Culture as a young culture

There’s nothing much real than the real freedom. Like a soul from the nowhere enters a body, the body like vessel transmits the soul trough it - right to the centre of cyberspace. So it's full cycle.

Christian Kirtchev

**Research objectives**

The main objectives of my research are to get to know what the net culture (cyberculture) really is and to observe the role of the countries which have an influence on it.

To accomplish this, the following steps will be made:

to give a concept about the net culture and its environment on the whole;

to describe the history, main trends and distinctive features of the net culture;

to reveal pluses and minuses of it, in comparison with the human culture;

to examine the ideas and opinions discussed by the people who research this topic, and

to make an analysis of the theoretical problems existed in the subject matter.

The methods of carrying out the research are:

to read the materials like reports, lectures and essays about the net culture from all available information sources including the Internet and library;

to discover the environment of net culture penetrating into the culture itself with the use of chats, electronic bulletin boards (BBS), IRC-channels, forums, newsgroups and other communication possibilities presented in the culture;

**Expected results**

broaden our understanding of other cultures as well as of the culture we belong to;

to show probable future of our world upon establishing of net culture justifying on my own predictions and on the scrutiny of the scientific theory, to state my own viewpoint on the topic.;

demonstration of how the new technologies can influence our lives in order to keep people well informed and confident in the things awaiting them in the coming years;

explanation on the wide perspectives of eliminating many barriers with the new young developing cultures arrival.

The state of research in the field

The end of XX century was marked by the entry of essentially new means of mass communication in the life of people – the global Internet network. Internet has become an integral component of information space in postmodernism societies, and its value grows steadily every year. The global network creates conditions for formation of virtual communities, generates new types of text formats, erases borders between the states, eliminates distances separating people and, finally, builds around itself the specific form of the culture - cyberculture.

Research

Cyberspace

Although The United States of America, Great Britain and Europe are located on different continents, however, Internet consolidates those geographically distant places and brings them together, making them as a single whole. Talking about the Internet and the environment for the net culture, both being inseparable, this global network itself represents a non-hierarchical structure, a system without any central item supervising information streams. Being put into words by father of cyberpunk William Gibson - a global network is “collective hallucination” (William Gibson 8), a cyberspace, outside which there are no those points (cities, museums, libraries, etc.) which we virtually visit, but only lines exist - the liaisons connecting Web-pages demanded by us.

The virtual world in which there is a person as a result of merge computer graphics with an opportunity of direct influence on events, it is accepted to name a cyberspace. This term appeared in 1985 in William Gibson's science-fiction novel “Neuromancer” for the first time, where it is used for the description of universal electronic meditation in which billions of people coexist. In opinion of the conducting researcher in the given area, Francis Hammit, the cyberspace is a sphere of the information received by means of electronics. As Vadim Emelin in his “Global Network and Cyberculture” said, “The Internet is nomad space - an inhabitancy of nomads, and similarly to a map, cannot be made in frameworks of any structural or generating model” (Vadim Emelin 5).

Rhizome

As a key category for the philosophical analysis of the global network Internet we use a concept "rhizome" - specific concept of a postmodernist discourse. The given term has been borrowed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari from botany. The first two principles of the rhizome are the "principles of connection and heterogeneity" (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari 3). These principles require that any point of a rhizome system can be connected to any other point. The rhizome can be broken off in any place, but despite of it, it will renew the growth either in an old direction, or will choose new one.

It is appropriate to mention here about the history of the global network creation. It takes the beginning in the days of Cold War - the project of the Internet was developed by the American militaries with the purpose to provide the greatest viability of control systems in case of nuclear attack. Their idea was in the following: important data was located not in one place, but dispersed and duplicated on cross-connected remote computers. Thus militaries tried to avoid fatal failure of control systems: if in case of an attack there would be efficient even with one of the computers - the data which had spared on it would allow to give a command about assault and battery of "impact of requital". From above-stated it is clearly visible, that the early Internet possessed anti-hierarchical structure, which fully satisfied the requirement of heterogeneity of connections in rhizomorphic designs.

**International Network: influences**

Individual countries cannot fully influence and absolutely control the Internet culture development, because already the word “Internet” speaks for itself – “International Network”. It is the people from all over the world who create the culture. During the research it was found out that the net culture in itself ignores the principle of authority - both in political, and in cultural spheres. On the other hand this net culture development started once and depends on the level of technological progress caused by a financial position of this or that state. The problem of digital divide (a precipice, an inequality), described by Eugene Gorny in “Dynamics of Creativity in Russian Cyberculture”, is formulated simply: the inequality in access to information technologies entails a deepening of other kinds of an inequality - economic, social and cultural. (Eugene Gorny 14)

For instance, Igor Vasjukov in his work named “Village Kompjuterrovo and Its Inhabitants” also looks at the problem of factors according to which cyberculture and its philosophy are formed. He thinks that, certainly, first of all, it is due to occurrence of a significant share of economical freedom in a society, an opportunity for people to earn money, including the enterprise ways. Igor writes, “I bet that private computer firms in 90th years of the last century have made for a computerization and information of a society such things that never would have been created by the official structures of the former USSR” (Igor Vasjukov 7). A rapid development of scientific and technical progress in the West in the 90th has a huge value for cyberculture blossoming. The factor of economic independence of the computer industry is also important, and it is such characters, for example, as Bill Gates with his Microsoft®, which are the independent and most powerful propaganda factors influencing minds of the inhabitant, a symbol of success and prosperity of the person included in cyber environment.

Net culture: history

A Polish sociologist Jan Sсhepanski writes:

Simplifying we could tell: there are the certain ideas transmitted from generation to generation, systems of values are connected to these ideas; they in turn define behaviour and activity of individuals and groups, their ways of thinking and perception. This entire complex refers to as culture (Jan Sсhepanski).

From my point of view all connected to Internet can be divided into two groups: common users and those for whom the Internet is a hobby. The first ones in a network try to follow the same rules and laws which are compelled to be observed in a daily life; the others, on the contrary, find rescue from them in the Internet.

Anyone of use even if one time heard about hackers – people who are the masters of their doings, “guru” in the computer world. Certainly, existence of hacker movement would not be possible without development of network technologies which result was the creation of global network Internet. The subculture of hackers is of interest for us meaning that it is the first example of influence of computer and network technologies on formation of specific cultural currents which main idea can be considered from the slogan “The information wants to be free”. Hacker activity also has formed a basis for movement of cyberpunks in which it is most indicative technological, cultural, philosophical and aesthetic aspects of information revolution have merged.

The seat of this culture subsequently distributed to other countries and regions, was the Californian coast of the USA where technocratic ideas of scientists and the engineers developing the newest computer techniques; the ideology of hackers postulating free circulation of the information; sociological and futurological prophecies of theorists of a post-industrial society; hippie-anarchist ideals of marginal subcultures, asserting firmness of personal freedom; and also ideas of economic liberalism of “Jefferson’s democracy”.

Thirty years later Richard Barbruk and Andy Cameron will name an alloy of these ideas of “the Californian ideology” in which, despite of its ambiguity and discrepancy ideas of information liberalism and virtual democracy will most fully be embodied. Accordingly, the Californian events of the 60s and 70s can be considered as a reference mark of cyberculture formation just as the Parisian events of 1968 became a starting point for the culture of post-modern.

**Network liberalism**

Of course, all the cultures want to be free and independent. Network liberalism is some kind of social, political, economic and ethical implication of those basic, ontological principles of the system of the global network which have been characterized above as rhizomorphic.

The most appreciable embodiment of the Internet’s libertarians became “The Declaration of Independence of the Cyberspace” by John Perry Barlow, written and placed in a network in 1996 in reply to attempt of the American government to enter censorship on the Internet. Hence, the basic idea contained in the Declaration, - declaration of independence of a cyberspace of a World Wide Web from the state structures:

Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live. We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth. We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before (John Perry Barlow 1).

Generally, anyone tightened in the Internet has equal opportunities with others for self-expression. As a result, each person - irrespective of the status, health, a race, sex and so on - begins the game with the same zero level on identical game field to all and by constant rules.

**Cyberpunks, netizens**

The main direction in the cyberculture is the movement of cyberpunks. Nowadays the term cyberpunk means the whole subculture and movement. These two words 'cyber' and 'punk' accentuate the two essential characteristics of cyberpunk: technology and individuality. The cyberpunk is not only and not so much youth movement or a direction in science fiction. I think, the cyberpunk is more likely necessary to consider as style of a life in which a special place is taken by the virtual reality. As a matter of fact, the main idea of the cyberpunk is that as a result of development of information, electronic and virtual technologies borders between the person and machine are irrevocably washed away. At the same time, the hacker distinguishes from the cyberpunk in the way that the first can be named the pioneer, the colonizer of a cyberspace, and the latter can be considered as the full inhabitant, the citizen of the computer network, netizen, Gibsonian "console cowboy" (Neuromancer 45). Movement of cyberpunks also distinguishes extreme individualism and isolation of its participants from social processes. For example hackers try to avoid all stupid people. By this I mean they try to avoid all people who are not on a similar level.

Netizens, also called netrunners, are the cosmopolitans of the Net. They live there, using all their spare time surfing the Web, searching info and files, downloading software, music, pictures, chatting, writing mails and newsgroup postings – communicating at all. Netizens don't stand any restrictions in the Net, and they don't avoid skirting their digital rights sometimes if it is required to access places and information they want. Like hackers, netrunners usually have their own Net aliases, nicknames, or avatars (virtual fancy dress) - their Net person. It may be totally different from the real person behind the alias; it may even be different gender.

**Culture peculiarities**

Cyberculture is open enough. More precisely, it can be open for those who are ready to make some efforts for studying bases of its existence and overcoming of barriers. The authority of the network person is defined by collective interest and by obtained recognition of other users.

Stratification in the cyberculture possesses the following important properties. Initially it is rigidly not set. Those who yesterday were anybody and anything, at today's professional or personal growth can rise in the stratification tree on the first place. Competence, professionalism, knowledge and skill to incur the responsibility are the main things in the circles of cyberpunks! Next comes the instability of statuses of the cyberculture representatives. Yesterday, for example, you were almost cult person and today have lagged so behind that you simply cease to be of the interest to the others. One of the main purports of creation of the Internet is in the maintenance of enough high degree of publicity of existence, in overcoming the narrow-mindedness of own ego.

The cyberspace creates unique temporary space where under condition of continuation interaction intersubjective time is reciprocally being stretched. This provides comfortable and cozy zone of a reflection. In contrast with face to face contact partners have much more time for thinking on the answer. On the other hand, the time in the net culture is compressed. If you are a member of online society for some months, you already can safely name yourself as "an old man". You can supervise and receive all that information which you need to receive. You cannot collide with unclear phenomena and not to reckon at all with interests of other individuals who are distinct from you. I name this as a monologue under a kind of dialogue.

In the community of the net culture there is its own variation of language formed. It is no so complicated, however for the usual person it will be difficult to understand the conversation of cyberpunks. Problem of showing emotions in the cyberspace is solved by the use of special text signs – emoticons or also known as smilies. They consist of many variations of symbols, representing the likeness of the human face but only typed on the keyboard of the computer. Most known and frequently used of them are: :) – smiling face, meaning that you are in a good mood, or like :( - sad physiognomy. There are already collections of them that can be easily found in the Internet. Net culture has own esteemed library, where especially the literary school based on fantastic takes place, also called cyberpunk style; authors like William Gibson, Bruce Bethke and Bruce Sterling. Netizens are unpretentious to the food as well as to the clothes. Movies watched are of the same cyberpunk manner, like “Blade Runner”, “Terminator” and “Matrix”.

In my opinion, the serious difference of cyberculture from the human culture is that the first comprises not so much subject results of activity, as subjective human strength and the abilities, realized just in this activity. It is possible to attribute the knowledge, the professional skills and habits, which cyberpunks develop during their activity, a level of their intellectual development, ethical sights and aesthetic needs, forms and ways of mutual contact within the framework of the given community and outside its bounds to this.

For sure, the culture is based on both the good representatives of it and the bad ones. Computer system administrators working in support teams of many different Internet companies and providers of communication always try to help other people, who are so called lamers (beginners) in this computer world still being undiscovered by many novice users. Computer “gurus” will usually give you a quality answer to all your questions; will help to solve the problems that you have. Other than that can be told about cybercriminals, like a bandit in the real world, who stole important information from the Web-sites of the companies, stole credit card numbers to take possession of rich businessmen bank accounts. An obvious case of that evil that these cybercriminals do to the Internet and to the net culture is the recent virus named Novarg, which spread widely like the epidemic over the whole Net, infecting millions of the computer systems over the little period of time.

**Interaction with reality**

The Internet adsorbs what is created in the reality. Last book about Harry Potter has appeared in the Net in four hours after the beginning of its sale. The group of fans has bought the book, has broken it into the parts and there and then got down to work, each one under the recognition of the relative part of the pages. Other vivid example of interaction of reality with the Internet - marriage agencies. They prosper; the number of the international marriages has considerably increased. Purchase of brides is no longer the category, like purchase of air tickets from the Internet.

One more phenomenon of the same class is acquaintance and friendship in correspondence with the possible subsequent arrival on a visit. Certainly, there is a great chance to meet the person you have ever dreamed about in the Internet and to start cyber-love relationships. However, one of the main advantages of this kind of relationships is that you cannot judge people on physical appearance. As the Sara Carlstead said, “You are able to learn about the person from the inside-out, instead of the outside-in” (Sara Carlstead 2). Evident minus in this fairly often dubious love over the Net is that the couples can tell themselves any lie and the truth will be kept somewhere hard to get from.

**Conclusion**

Speaking about the nearest future, social consequences of information can be both positive and negative. To negative it is possible to point a decrease in a cultural level with an opportunity to increase sharply the number of people being only mechanical consumers of the given information; and isolation of the individual. It is necessary to understand the process of isolation of the individual when without public regulation of information a moment will come when people will start to communicate, as a rule, indirectly - through the computer. From the positive sides I want to name a free development of an individual, development of the information and communicative society, “smart” societies.

The Internet has changed society but it has changed itself, too. It has lost its relative autonomy from the rest of the culture and has become an extension of the real world. Now there is a great opportunity to create a peace around the whole globe, connect every country together. In the words of Sherry Turkle, the Internet is an “instance of evocative computer objects and experiences bringing postmodernism down to earth” (Sherry Turkle 25).

I want to say that we are already in a network, in the world of 1’s and 0’s, but we haven’t realized it yet. A network of supermarkets, a network of railways and their ticket offices, a network of bookshops, a network of McDonald’s®, a network of polyclinics, banks, housing offices. Especially it concerns the backward countries. The more advanced the country, the more it is network-enabled.

Generally people communicate by means of a printed word. Nevertheless even then, when audio-video conferences will become effective and simple in management and use, the will be no chances of the physical contact ever - it is necessary to forget about business hand shakes, friendly pats on a back and will be neither gentle embraces, nor kisses. Limitation of touch experience in a cyberspace bears a number of significant lacks with itself - however, alongside with some unique advantages - in comparison with meetings face to face.

Scientific and technical revolution has raised the question about the use of technologies, because, in fact, consequences of their rash application began to threaten an existence of the mankind making elimination of verges between essences once been opposite. So, are erased not only the verges dividing classes, races, the nations and the states, not only borders between reality and virtuality, but also specific models of a sexual accessory vary: it is shown not only in universal emancipation, but also generally in the new attitude to sexual identification; in fact, not casually "unisex" as style of behaviour and self-expression recently became popular.

I want to finish with the words of the greatest romantic of before-network epoch of XX century, Antoine de Sent-Exupery. He wrote, “The real unique luxury - is a luxury of human intercourse”.

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