

<THE::CYBER.COM/MUNIST::MANIFESTO>

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A spectre is haunting the Net: the spectre of communism. Whatever their professed political beliefs, every user dreams of the digital transcendence of capitalism. Yet, at the same time, even the most dedicated leftist can no longer truly believe in communism. The horrors of totalitarianism have discredited its promises of social emancipation. Seizing this opportunity, the prophets of American neo-liberalism are now laying claim to the future. The adoption of information technologies will lead to the privatisation and deregulation of all economic activities. The freedoms of the information society will be created by an elite of entrepreneurs, technocrats and ideologues. Needing to popularise their prophecies, right-wing gurus emphasise that every hi-tech professional can compete to join the emerging digital aristocracy. Above all, they predict that everyone will eventually enjoy the technological marvels currently only available to the lucky few. In the late-1990s, the prophets of American neo-liberalism measure our progress towards utopia through increases in the ownership of digital artefacts: home computers, Net connections, mobile phones and laptops. Ironically, this right-wing futurism echoes the preconceptions of Stalinist communism. In the former Soviet Union, the enlightened minority was also leading the ignorant masses towards eventual emancipation. Any suffering caused by the introduction of new technologies was justified by the promise of future liberation. During the 1930s, Josef Stalin similarly measured progress towards utopia through the rising output of modern products: steel, cars, tractors and machine-tools. Although the Soviet Union has long disappeared, the ideologues of American neo-liberalism are still inspired by the Stalinist version of communism.

vanguard party	digerati
The Five-Year Plan	The New Paradigm
boy-meets-tractor	nerd-meets-Net
Third International	Third Wave
Moscow	Silicon Valley
<i>Pravda</i>	<i>Wired</i>
party line	unique thought
Soviet democracy	electronic town halls
Lysenkoism	memetics
society-as-factory	society-as-hive
New Soviet Man	post-humans
Stakhanovite norm-busting	overworked contract labour
purges	downsizing
Russian nationalism	Californian chauvinism

According to most politicians, executives and pundits, the Net is founded upon the buying

and selling of information. As in other cultural industries, intellectual labour within cyberspace must be enclosed into commodities and protected by copyright. However, computer-mediated communications was never designed for trading information. On the contrary, the scientists who invented the Net were working within the academic gift economy. As a consequence, they embedded the free distribution of information within the technical structures and social mores of the Net. Over time, the charmed circle of users has slowly grown from scientists through hobbyists to the general public. Crucially, each new member doesn't just observe the technical rules of the system, but also adheres to certain social conventions. Without even thinking about it, people continually circulate information between each other for free. By giving away their own personal efforts, Net users always receive the results of much greater amounts of labour in return from others. Instead of needing a market, people can now work together by circulating gifts between each other. Although many on-line activities are trivial, some collaborations are creating very sophisticated products, such as the Linux operating system and interactive music pieces. Despite their power and wealth, the multi-media multinationals are unable to impose the commodification of intellectual labour within cyberspace. At the dawn of the new millennium, Net users are developing a much more efficient and enjoyable way of working together: cyber-communism.

commodity	gift
enclosure	disclosure
copyright	piracy
fixed	fluid
product	process
proprietary	open source
digital encryption	free download
original recording	latest remix
scarcity	abundance
alienation	friendship
market competition	virtual communities
e-commerce	cyber-communism

In earlier times, the abolition of capitalism was envisaged in apocalyptic terms: revolutionary uprisings, mass mobilisations and modernising dictatorships. In contrast, Net users are engaged in the slow process of *superseding* capitalism. In this dialectical movement, hi-tech neo-liberals perfect the existing relations of production by developing e-commerce: *work-as-commodity*. Reacting against this enclosure of cyberspace, left-wing activists celebrate the piracy of copyright material within the on-line potlatch: *waste-as-gift*. For those nostalgic for ideological certainty, there can be no compromise between these contradictory visions of the Net. Yet, the synthesis of these dialectical opposites is happening for pragmatic reasons. The low 'cost of entry' into e-commerce is due to the absence of proprietary barriers within the Net. The rapid expansion of the hi-tech gift economy is facilitated by hardware and software sold by large companies. Above all, Net users always adopt the working methods which are

most beneficial to their own interests. Sometimes, they will engage in e-commerce. On most occasions, they will prefer to collaborate within the hi-tech gift economy. Many social activities are already organised by voluntary labour and with donated resources. Now, with the advent of the Net, this gift economy is challenging market competition at the cutting-edge of modernity. Living within a prosperous society, many people are no longer solely motivated by financial rewards. If they have sufficient time and money, they will also work to gain the respect of their peers for their efforts. Within the Net, people are developing the most advanced form of collective labour: *work-as-gift*. During the last two hundred years, the intimate bonds of kinship and friendship have simultaneously inhibited and underpinned the impersonal relationships needed for market competition. The modern has always co-existed with the traditional. Now, within cyberspace, the exchange of commodities is being both intensified and prevented by the circulation of gifts. The modern must synthesise with the hyper-modern. Far from needing leadership by a heroic elite, ordinary people can now successfully construct their own digital future. In the age of the Net, cyber-communism is a mundane everyday experience.

The Dialectics of Cyber-Communism

The Positive:

work-as-commodity
e-commerce
reactionary modernism

The Negation:

waste-as-gift
potlatch
revolutionary anti-modernism

The Negation of the Negation:

work-as-gift
network communities
revolutionary modernism