

Future Culture Manifesto

MANIPHEST DESTIN-E: WHAT *IS* FUTURECULTURE?

A Manifesto on the Here-and-Now Technocultural [R]evolution

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You are five years old. You are lying on a grassy hill, blowing bubbles up into a clear field of blue sky. Bubbles. Right now, as a five year old child, you look at the bubbles, and words pop into your head: "pretty", "oooooo", "float". To you, the bubbles are almost like people -- at least somewhat analogous to Bugs Bunny or a Smurf. Your wide eyes follow the bubbles as they traipse along the gentle prevailing curves of soft winds, turning, rotating, revolving endlessly in the air. A sunray beams its light through one particular bubble you have been admiring, and within its midst your eyes become privy to a new world -- a heretofore unknown domain of chaotic rainbows swirling about along the bubble. The colors, like a sentient anthill, work at once individually and synergetically to give the bubble its unique flavor, an individual identity among the community of bubbles.

As you lay your eyes on the continually morphing rainbows in the bubble, admiring how this internal shapeshifting never ceases as long as the bubble is "alive", the wind brings forth from nearby another bubble. Now you are focused on two bubbles circling each other ever closer, probably communicating in some fashion on some sort of subatomic level. Now that your eyes know to look for the chaotic rainbows, you enthusiastically discover them in this second bubble as well. The rainbows exist in both bubbles, with only a thinly veiled invisible wall of air separating the two. The rainbows do not stop in admiration or wonder to ponder the existence of another bubble, they continue on with their duties in the wake of the orbic maelstrom that is the individual bubble. And suddenly, in the mesh of an event that seems at once both predetermined and free, the bubbles combine and join forces as one. If the sun catches the bubble-morph at the right angle you can still see a wall, where airspace once existed, within the bubble. All the while, the chaotic rainbows have continued of course, and now willingly flow back and forth between what was once two separate entities. The shape of the bubble-morph is still oddly circular as a whole, with the original shape of the individual bubble-orbs still clearly visible.

The bubble-morph is still at home among the individual bubbles and still haphazardly surfs the winds as if nothing had happened. Low and behold, a third bubble approaches its vicinity. Same chaotic rainbows, seemingly no different from any other bubble in the group.

POPI Quickly this third bubble seemingly self-destructs without any reason, sending a fury of bubble residue out into the wind. Some of it lands on a tree, some on the grass, and yet more lands on the bubble-morph. As the bubble morph continues to rotate, revolve, spin endlessly, the residue makes its way to the translucent crease marking the marriage of two individual bubbles. And, then, it is gone. Absorbed into the structure of the bubble morph, evolving into yet more particles of chaos rainbows.

More bubbles float by the bubbly-morph. Some stumble in its wake and escape its grasp, some pop, some are attracted to it and become yet another aspect of the holistic bubble-creature, still other bubbles diverge into a completely different spacial area. If you watch long enough, you might even see one portion of the bubble-morph leave, mutating back into its original state as an individual bubble.

All the while, bubbles are combining into new bubbles, bubbles are popping, bubbles are floating, rotating, revolving, spinning, shapeshifting. Affecting and being affected by each other and other entities such as the wind, a sharp blade of grass, a flower pedal. The chaotic rainbows never cease, the bubbles will always exist as long as you, as the bubble-maker, decide to keep blowing bubbles.

You are now, let's say, 40 years old. You are sitting on the same hill with your five year old child, urging him to discover the wonders of the bubble world. Your eyes are not as wide anymore, at least not as wide as your child's. But do you still find delight and joy in the wonders of bubbles? There is beauty in the bubble world, even though you may approach it now from the perspective of an accomplished chemist, or physicist, or artist, or engineer, or cyberneticist, or 7-11 night manager. Hopefully, you have not closed your eyes to the magic your child sees, the magic you once saw.

It should be obvious, by now, that bubbles are a metaphor. What do you think the metaphor is? I would be interested to hear what people have to say in this regard. But, since this text is to be confined to the context of futureculture, the bubbles are meant to represent subcultures. The chaotic rainbows represent the people, the material articles, the ideas, the *memes* that define those subcultures.

Thus, you can see, subcultures combine into cultures or bigger subcultures (it's all relative), subcultures may self-destruct, they may evolve or morph, they may diverge in a separate direction. But whatever the case, there's still bubbles because we, as a global village, are like the five year old -- entrenched in the world of bubbles, looking on with wide-eyes.

Probably the most important ideas I have related so far are that: 1) the process is continuous with an infinite amount of ebb and flow among and between and through subcultures with an infinite amount of possible outcomes, and 2) when subcultures combine they do not lose their original individual identity, and may in fact leave, though a synergetic effect exists which is *unrelated* to the amount of individual bubbles combined to produce the bubble-morph. The bubble-morph being, obviously, the combination in some fashion or another of separately defined subcultures. It is also interesting to note that, ultimately, bubbles are "of the same stuff" which can be paralleled to individuals in groups on a vast variety of levels.

Let us now turn to subcultures, let us see what bubbles we have blown that provide the basic constructs of what we might deem, for a lack of a better word, FutureCulture. When I use the word "FutureCulture" I am referring to the FutureCulture E-List. When I use "futureculture" I am referring to the culture of the future. But it's not really the future, it's here-and-now, and it's in this writing. There are some other words with similar connotations, but yet the distinctions need to be mentioned, and then applied to everyday life. The first word is "technoculture". Like a technocracy is a government run by scientists or those who create technology, a technoculture is a culture that is fueled by technology. America is a technoculture. We would be lost without our televisions, our cars, our computers, our telephones. Futureculture, then, is a way of deciphering what tomorrow will look like in a technoculture. Another label to mention is "new edge". This is a trendy, shortsighted term that has little relevance to the perpetual realities of technoculture and futureculture. New Edge is a here-and-now-gone-tomorrow ideal. Fairly soon, it won't be "new" and increasingly so it is definitely not "edge". The other misnomer to mention is "cyberculture". Cyberculture is probably most closely associated with the idea of futureculture, yet cyberculture is often mis- and over-used. If you look at the meaning of the word "cyber", basically "information" in an oversimplified context, it has little to do with frequently-used notions of cyberculture, specifically a Gibson-esque cyberpunk world as it exists today or in the near-future.

These are my own personal reflections on the world of bubbles, and these labels and subcultural labels I am using are better thought of as what I see as the most outstanding reference points to use in the context of getting The Basic Idea (tm) across. Relative labels and reference points, no dictatorial lines being drawn here.

Each mention of a subculture will be followed by a basic reasoning by a defense in applying the group to the idea of futureculture. The idea of futureculture evolves *from* the relationship between different bubbles and bubble-morphs.

These core bubbles and bubble-morphs produce noticeable ideas, trends, and material objects for example, which are deemed by some relatively large bubble-blower (ie society) to reflect the evolution of society and world culture. Simply put, FutureCulture represents an internal and external effort, both passive and interactive, observational and participatory, to: discover these trends/ideas/objects or at least bring acknowledgement of their existence to a larger segment of the global populous, provide an interactive forum for the global populous to discuss such matters and to reflect and refract varying cultures and subcultures, to then apply this discussion to existing cultures and subculture to plant the seeds spawning further trends/ideas/objects. Thus one can begin to see the infinitely cyclic nature of the process. It is a process which you are at varying levels of consciousness engaged in every moment you are alive, by everything you say or do, and every sensory input. By providing the on-line interactive forum of the FutureCulture e-list, we as individuals and members of varying subcultures and cultures can merge the unconscious acts of participation in culture with a conscious understanding, to create/construct/deconstruct/destroy and evolve reality and people's lives on an individual and group basis. Basically, we are analyzing existing culture, we are creating tomorrow's reality, and we are doing it on a here-and-now, globally interactive, seemingly real-time forum.

Thus I submit the reference points, the subcultures, the basic bubbles that are essential to futureculture:

Virtual Culture - This is probably the easiest to "define". We can all say with assurance, that to some degree, in any basic sense of the word, we are all participants and members of Virtual Culture. The essence of Virtual Culture lies in the notion of cyberspace. In this context I might define cyberspace as that frontier defined by electronic communications to which geography has little or no relevance to being a member of the group. If you regularly use a phone, modem, fax, or networked computer terminal, videophone, or interactive video, consider yourself part of virtual culture.

Technology is a key aspect of tomorrow's reality. Technology seemingly provides the basis of all constructs we produce. Virtual culture, then, is a giant leap forward for humankind in terms of the way we approach ourselves as individuals, and the nature of how we approach individuals in groups. Basic sociological structures will eventually be realigned to conform to this key evolutionary step as technology continues to increase exponentially, thus forever expanding the limits of virtual culture and therefore potential of all cultures. Non-communicative technological forces will be mentioned briefly throughout this writing, but the most interesting applications of technology increasingly revolve around aspects of communication.

Psychedelic Culture - Arguably begun in the 60's, this subculture revolves around the use and effects of psycho-active drugs, particularly psychedelics like LSD, to manifest new ideas, new ways of thinking, new ways of approaching reality and consciousness.

One of the mysteries of modern day society is the nature of the mind and consciousness. Psychedelic culture is vital in exploring these areas. These areas in turn are vital to our understanding of who and what we are as humans and the basic philosophical questions human have asked for centuries. Recently, psychedelic culture has bubble-morphed with virtual culture as seen in the potential exploration of the technological advancements of virtual reality as a means of "opening the doors of perception". Here-and-now extrapolations are evident in the use of "mind machines" as well as the resurgence of 60's guru Timothy Leary as a spokesperson for virtual reality. And need we mention the unbelievable explosive return of LSD across the US and other parts of the world.

Rave Culture - If you don't know what raves are, I will attempt to explain it, though with a parallel that will disturb many ravers (myself included in the group of ravers disturbed by the analogy). Aforementioned psychedelic culture reached a "peak" with the community of Woodstock. Think of rave culture as woodstock in the 90's, though with obvious notable advancements and progressions: smaller and more specific communities allow for more woodstock-esque events to occur more often and produce a higher degree of community, the music reflects technology -- techno music is the mainstay - music that may often range between 0 and 160bpm that is almost entirely created on computers and modern audio technology and is an evolutionary mutation of disco music

generally, and finally, raves are often times associated with psychedelic culture in a general desire to create one's own reality or be part of some sort of *gestalt-consciousness* event. And, most importantly, the idea of raves is to have fun!!! We must not overlook outlets of communal entertainment in futureculture. At raves, the vibe is generally happy and easy to catch, the people generally fun, the music is cutting edge, and, if you want, you can further entertain yourself with nootropic or other psycho-active substances.

Basically, raves are the entertainment aspect of the evolving futureculture as it stands now. Undoubtedly raves will eventually morph into something else, as this particular side of culture rises and falls quickly in proportion with people's day to day lives. Raves, as mentioned before, are deeply intertwined with technology as well as some aspects of psychedelic culture, thus their inclusion in futureculture.

Cyberculture - This is a difficult culture to explain as it is still in its infancy, thus it is still comprised of aspects of the varying other subcultures. I will do my best to set it apart from other subcultures.

Cyberculture is a here-and-now reality that grew out of the science fiction movement of "cyberpunk". Look at the word "cyberpunk" -- broken down you have "cyber" and "punk" which roughly translates to people using technology and information in ways that deviate from the expected norms and mores and laws of society.

Hackers are part of cyberculture. I will draw more criticism by defining a hacker as a "cyberpunk" -- as previously stated, one who uses information and technology in ways that go against the grain of norm society.

Let me put to rest an ageold debate that persists among aspiring futureculturists, he said while slowly walking backwards to the bomb shelter. Hackers originated in the 60s, and basically did they same things hackers do now, only possibly with less of a violent nature attached. Somewhere along the line, those hackers gave up their antiauthoritarian ideals and merged into mainstream society, though they still wanted to be called "hackers" because they can program a computer in nifty ways. Modern-day hackers came along, the WarGames generation, and the connection between illegality (antiauthoritarianism rather) and hackers resurfaced. Old hackers got pissed, and have done their best to dissociate themselves from the generally-accepted term of modern day hacking. This is most clearly seen in their attempt to separate "hackers" from "crackers" which I won't go into because old hackers don't realise that cracking is still hacking in the original true sense -- it does take skill and requires privied information.

Hackers nowadays, post-Wargames hackers at least, have as their motto "information wants to be free" and thus that is their goal in hacking or, more appropriately, being a cyberpunk.

Cyberculture, at its roots, appropriates (samples) heavily from other subcultures. This could be easily guessed because of the inclusion of the prefix "cyber", referring to information. In this context I would like to see usage of the term cyberculture return back to its roots -- the idea of an information culture. That is, a culture where information is an important commodity, if not the most vital commodity. Information is an important commodity in modern global culture, as witnessed by the power and popularity and prominence of CNN and Mtv in our society. When people talk about an information society, they are actually talking about cyberculture, and they are actually talking about a soon-to-be historical shift in society that is currently in it's infancy. Contributions to this shift will be seen in the wake of the ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) and other such technologies as they become more readily available and approachable to the mainstream.

We might say then, that cyberpunks (hackers, not just computer hackers either) provide the deviant portion of an existing cyberculture. Cyberculture should *NOT* be confused with technoculture, new edge, or futureculture, all of which will be put in the proper context later.

As I have said, cyberculture is in its infancy. We really *don't* live in an information society, because economics, not infomics or infonomics if you will, is the underlying thread that holds our society together. However, this may be beginning to change, as witness in our reliance on economic credit systems

(your credit is just information, which can be hacked) as well as on a political scale the intertwining of political, media, and international-conglomerate businesses as the definite powerhouses. At the turn of the century, it was basically just political forces. Post-WW-II, as postindustrial society developed, it became politics + business which continues to this day, but now media (information power) is a substantial force in the global power game.

Rudy Rucker, prominent writer and scientist, is credited with the outstanding motto of cyberculture as a whole -- "How fast are you? How dense?" The phrase should be examined in the context of information processing, individuals dealing with a world that is transforming and morphing from economics-based to infonomics-based.

Industrial Culture - This is a misnomer, actually, since we realistically live in a postindustrial society. At any rate, industrial culture is most noted for a musical movement. Industrial music is highly technological, though it has a definite rebellious spirit that can easily be likened to the punk movement of the late 70's. Thus, industrial musicians could easily be considered cyberpunks, and sometimes are.

Industrial culture also consists of other types of performance art other than music. One notable inclusion is Survival Research Laboratories, which builds robots, and usually does strange things with them like putting it inside a rabbit carcass and having the rabbit carcass walk around and fall into an acid bath. Again, very cyberpunk.

These postmodern industrialists are easily seen as a byproduct of postindustrial capitalism arising out of the sleek, slick, greed-filled 80s and their never-ceasing propagation, as seen in the motivations of an individual like Michael Milken or a zaibatsu like Sony.

Again, technology is prominent in this subculture and by now you are probably beginning to see the extent of the overlap that occurs among these subcultures. The further you go, the more indescribable as individual entities they become, thus the need for a meta-subculture or meta-culture that encompasses the important attributes. From here on out, then, the focus will shift to smaller or more humanities-oriented topics.

PostModernism - Postmodern art and philosophy arises out of the here-and-now state of our world as it has evolved and changed, using WW-II as a reference point to separate modernism and postmodernism. In the postmodern world, technology is prominent (tv, radio, computer). Information is important (see cyberculture). Ideas are easily constructed and deconstructed. Communication is more readily accessible and is an artform in itself, witness the popularity of appropriation (sampling) as seen in industrial and hip-hop culture as well as the works of writer Kathy Acker. Politically, postmodernism accepts the reality of a postindustrial world moving towards an information-based world.

Postmodernism is a tricky subject, and a parallel between mentioning postmodernism can be drawn to the use of the word "shaman" in psychedelic culture - overused, often misinformed, often appropriated without true understanding. Postmodernism has been around for some time now and stands on its own, thus it is difficult to incorporate it in this context. We must at least, however, acknowledge the fact that the threads of postmodernism reality provide the basis for the evolving futureculture, technoculture, and cyberculture.

Street Culture - Primarily Afro-Centric because of the racism and general inequality that exists in America (specifically), the motto of street culture is given to us by William Gibson: "the street finds uses for itself". Thus, Street Culture can often be considered D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) culture. Hip-Hop (Rap) music is a prime example of this. Kids create singles in their basement (which is also the case with rave music and industrial music) and then market it themselves, or, better yet, market *themselves*. Street fashion is equally D.I.Y. -- small, sometimes local labels that use postmodernism elements like appropriation, also a key element in street music. For example, as I write this I am wearing a shirt by a group called 26 Red. On the back, the shirt has a picture of Charlie Tuna with the words "Human Safe". This is copyright infringement, but it is also appropriation and a realization of the realities of pop culture and not being afraid to apply them. Graffiti is street culture art, as well.

Street Culture is a product of a key shift in our postmodern world, which could best be stated as a movement towards individualization and specialization, hence the importance of D.I.Y. aspects in futureculture. You can't wait for someone to produce something to appease you, appease yourself instead. Create your own art, your own clothes, your own music, your own reality, your own manifesto, whatever.....Action is a *vital* element in all of this.

Fringe Science - The idea of hyperreality is very important in this conglomeration of cultures. Hyperreality might best be explained by looking at the realities of the world that brought Rudy Rucker to make the aforementioned statement "how fast are you? how dense?" Our world is now moving very fast, and is very dense. There is so much out there, that people have come up with new ways of looking at Why Things Are (tm) -- new explanations for new realities. Cellular automata, chaos theory, singularity, maybe even quantum theory. Time, space, dimensions, reality, consciousness, life, cybernetics, intelligence, artificial life, subatomic realities, genetic mutations -- these are a few of the fringe scientist's favorite things.

A lot of Fringe Science is an outgrowth of people involved to some degree with psychedelic culture. That aspect, combined with the fact that fringe science is "fringe" makes it less valid to some minds. However, these scientists are the post-Einsteins and should be looked at in that perspective.

Technology is readily being accepted as a foundation of humankind, and that belief continues to gain prominence in a world where technology increases exponentially. Witness the idea of an information society -- that could not occur in a world where technology and the desire to Make Something New (tm) plays second fiddle. Technology in our world is rapidly surging us upward, to a point where we are not even knowing What's Going On (tm). Witness the out-and-out FEAR of people accepting the TRUTH that is outlined in this writing, witness the fear of computers, the fear of hackers, the fear of evolution, the fear of genetic engineering... Those of us who are out there now LIVING this reality that's supposed to be for the *future* have one thing in common - a DESIRE to explore the unknown, to alter our realities, to alter ourselves and our lives, and to alter our real lives ourselves. Simply said, we are morphing. Constantly. On an individual, cultural, and global societal level. Constantly. On a multitude of levels. Constantly.

We live in a world full of infinite potential. Reality is what we make it. This may sound like I'm speaking a small fringe special interest group, but that is not the case. I am speaking to every living individual human being, especially those privileged enough to live in a postmodern postindustrial world filled with art and technology, money and information, pop culture and subcultures.

The future is now. That phrase is overused a lot, but in this context I mean that our visions of the future, what we have written about, fantasized about, our hopes and dreams of what will be -- the seed of those realities exists NOW.

In the linear flow of history, we found ourselves at an important nexus in which linear seems much too confining when we live in a technoculture that seems poised to greet an exponential model of time with open arms. Here-and-now and tomorrow we are creating New forums of communication, New philosophical schools, New art, New politics, New technologies, New realities.

In comprehending and dealing with these New realities, it is important that we reshape our mindstyles NOW to adjust to constant and consistent fast and dense change. It is no longer enough to say "change is the only constant".

We must try and keep as open a mind as possible: keep all doors of perception open, prejudices of *any* sort will not meld (and I don't mean prejudices only in the physical sense, of course -- I mean in the mindstyle sense, the "faith" sense, the action sense, etc.). An open mind, open to all ideas, all experiences, all people, all communications, allows for a completely new transreal way of looking at ourselves, our world, our realities. In that transreal mindstyle we should constantly look and redefine ourselves and our world if it is necessary. For example, we, as a technoculture, need to transcribe *everything* we can via some means, whether it be via computer network, video or audio tape, pencil, etc. Everything from the most individual moments to the most important global occurrences. It's not enough that we have I-Witness videos and America's

Funniest People and then CNN. Everything that's important and meaningful to you and your life, record it in some fashion or another. This recording allows you not only to better future generations by way of sharing the past, but it allows you the potential of looking at yourself in different lights, different angles (both literally and figuratively depending on the means of recording).

We should continue to develop the means and resources to further the specialization and individualization of interactive technologies and interactive communication forums. Basically, this is just the idea that the more say each individual has in their reality, the better. It ultimately promotes democracy and stronger communities. For example, presidential candidate Ross Perot mentioned "Electronic Town Halls", the Internet is a prime example of specialization and individualization and interactivity, and more specialized newspapers and magazines, etc., are also a good idea.

Relative to a previously mentioned idea, we need to be more open to change on every level, not only within our own personal lives, but in small groups, subcultures, and societies. We need to be able to deal with the exponential growth of communications in the world, and to do that we are being forced to change a lot of deeply-set ideals about the nature of communities, organizations, etc. For example, dealing with this change might include saying "Hey, we live in a system of representative government created 300 years ago when travel was difficult and communication very slow. Fairly soon we'll live in a world where everyone has some means of interactive electronic communication in their home, whether it be telephone or interactive-television or computer-network. On the basis of travel and communication, therefor, is representative government still a necessity?". On a more realistic level, we must own up to the fact that in a constantly changing environment, tradition for the sake of tradition is futile and laughable. If the tradition does not serve well the current environment and has no purpose, it should quickly be thrown out and changed. This idea operates on every level, from dealing with the national deficit, to how you arrange your desk at work, to the nature of power structures that govern the masses.

These are not radical ideas, they are just an acknowledgment of necessary changes in how we live our day to day lives, how we operate on every level, from the individual all the way to the individual planet.

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