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The Cyberpunks Are Right: We Need Internet Rebellion

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, April 12th, 2017

Cyberpunk first became a thing in the 80's, before the internet as we know it existed. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* was an early exponent, as was author Bruce Sterling's *Mirrorshades* anthology. MIT's [Henry Jenkins](#) says, "Cyberpunk's protagonists are hackers, rockers, and other cultural rebels, clinging to a cult of individualism in a culture characterized by corporate control and mass conformity." Cyberpunks are hybrid rebels, combining the punk rock call to question authority with the world of digital technology.

[embedvideo id="14294561? website="vimeo"]

[Blade Runner – Tears in the Rain](#) from [Grapefrugten](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Cyberpunk became a subgenre of science fiction, just as punk became a subgenre of rock music. In that sense, it's reductive. But as political commentary—no, political stance—cyberpunk culture couldn't be more relevant than it is right now.

I'm not saying this because of the live-action adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* is out. Yes, this movie could fit in the cyberpunk genre, but its makers are guilty of whitewashing. Scarlett Johansson plays the lead role in an adaptation of a Japanese anime film. The ethos of cyberpunk stands firmly against putting a white face in a Japanese role. It's a clear case of Western hegemonic assimilation.



Tommaso Meli/Flickr

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As new digital privacy concerns arise—such as the fact that your internet browsing history is now up for grabs—cyberpunk is becoming relevant again. You have no control over what companies do with your data, data you pay to create by paying to use the internet. For quite some time, companies have been using your online data to try and sell you stuff. The [value of data in business](#) comes from two types of data usage:

- *Predictive analytics* software analyzes your activities based around website cookies, things you've purchased online, the number of times you've visited a website, consumption trends, etc.; then, marketers use this information to try and sell you stuff

- *Social analytics* software reviews your social networking activities in order to determine what companies are doing right, what they're doing wrong, and how they can better cater to your needs

As a response to the normalization of these types of analyses in business, adblocker software has become very popular. Companies can analyze your browsing data and use it to market to you; fortunately, all you have to do is download an adblock extension to silence their shouts for attention. You're used to this, and there's a certain level of control.

In 2016, Obama signed a rule intended to give you more control of your data. By the end of 2017, the FCC was to begin limiting what your Internet Service Provider (ISP) can do with your browsing history. ISPs would not have been able to sell your data anymore. But Congress and Trump [killed the rule](#). Your data is up for grabs to the highest bidder.

On a practical note, you can do multiple things to counter this. You can check into whether your ISP will let you opt-out. You can set up a virtual private network (VPN), which keeps your activities private. A VPN is also a good way to avoid ghost phishing on public WiFi. But VPNs are [imperfect at best](#). They slow down internet speeds, and some apps won't work with them. The best option is to use a [Tor browser](#), which means you are completely anonymous and your service will continue to work as normal. Like everything else, Tor isn't perfect, so pay attention to [do's and don'ts](#) in order to ensure optimum anonymity.

Although there are practical solutions to ISPs and companies spying on your activities, the fact still remains that in principle, the government is saying you shouldn't have control over your personal data. For all the outside world is concerned, our activities are what define us. When it comes to your activity online, you are up for sale. If that doesn't bring out the cyberpunk in you, what will?

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