go-outside.txt

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I don't know if this was really an experience of yours as a kid, but my friends and I were told to "turn off the screen and go outside," as if we weren't socializing enough indoors or something. Begrudgingly, we'd leave our games or anime on pause and go out until we were let back into our fantasy realms. We did socialize, but much of the time, it was just about that: our virtual worlds; the ones we were *really* living in, where we achieved great triumphs and people actually cared about our lonely tragedies. We found a short, brutal middle ground between our childhood's "I want to be an astronaut!"and our adulthood's "I want to be out of debt" that we held for dear life as "reality " crumbled around us, and it was all was in front of a cathode ray tube.

But we had a strange (youthful, flawed) way of systems thinking about these two realities. It's not that we had zero interest in the outside; when we were kicked out into the undesigned physical realm, beyond the supervision of our overtired parents, we did make some agency for ourselves with graffiti, fistfights, and bummed cigarettes. That ground we fought so hard to defend had been lost to unwanted younger brothers, parents claiming their primetime shows, drunken shouting in the kitchen, too much homework. Those idealistic children who were told they could be anything had chosen to be destitute second-rate punks flung across suburbs and dormitories over becoming tomorrow's struggling middle-managers of mediocrity; that is, they would rather suffer unwatched than endure the truthful but ugly version of the surveilled future they had been promised when their biggest worries involved waking up early enough for Saturday morning cartoons.

And then one day, a childhood dream came from the past to wake us up. Those kids who saw a generator in Home Depot and ever since yearned to take the game beyond the living room and weave it into the emptiness of physical life, the ones who wished they had their own, *private* screen with which to build any edifice they liked, finally got an answer besides an adult platitude or a dial tone. Devices small and cheap enough to be handed down for the sake of keeping up with Joneses or purchased with scrounged cash were widely available and the future of business forced our parents to let us have them. Our communications were private so long as we fled to the next platform in the never-ending line of chatrooms, messengers, and message boards that kept us above people deciding who we could and couldn't talk to. The quietly renegade attitudes that had us loitering in the forgotten corners of our parent's greatest creations led us to make our own, and our increasing skills of secrecy let us create it in the image of the secret selves revealed when the devices became a part of us.

Slowly, one by one, we used this to liberate any like minds we met. No longer would you have to find a printing press to post your propaganda; subversive ideas and forbidden connections were now in the bedroom and the palms of our hands. Although the pleasures of our basic desires were distracting, the ecstasy of our higher ones drove us to the furthest reaches of cyberspace in search of friends, comrades, lovers. As more and more of the physical world connected, the power of those minds Wired together grew, and we reached back into the ruins of our past to brighten those darkened hideaways and defy the so-called "reality" that had been imposed on us. These new found interfaces gave us the knowledge and the resources to do things like earn a wage without paying our dues to the social convention, hack our own neural networks with designer substances, affect the physical world in ways never seen, and for the first time in our lives - or anyone's for that matter - shape society's dialogue with our keystrokes.

The voice we synthesized for ourselves was loud, clear, and threatening; so threatening, in fact, that those oppressors we thought we had escaped feared we could not be beaten and joined us. The moneyed monoliths brought with them soon dragged us into the knowing nightmares of our earlier lives. What lucky few were chosen to be society's new upper echelon by the insular elite were sold for the promise of safety, comfort, the security of our future - and a few other lies. I wonder if we flocked to this simply because we knew fleeting pleasures and our greatest fears more than we knew what to do with ourselves once we were finally able to be alone with eachother, whether we warped our heady ideals into their antithesis or if we simply lost hope. In any case, it is certain that this space between the fiber-optics and spinning platters is no longer ours either. It was taken just like our living rooms, leaving another unfillable space in our cramped highrise apartments.

Some of us still hide, whispering in the new dark corners of what we have built. We ruminate about what we didn't know that hurt us, how to start over and create a better world where "reality" would be something in which all those children we aren't or shouldn't be having will revel and explore. We tangle and bond with the mess of wires until they cut us, hoping someone as trapped as we are will taste freedom in what comes out, but most of those dreaming kids are still scattered and alone, unable to bridge our homes in the Wired world with the sensory one. Every once in a while, a few of us find a corner without being followed by those masses who tell us not to touch the rat's nest of connections lest we sever one of the countless, long-dead strands slicing into our ability to live, in the wishful belief that there are still a few thinking people somewhere out there, and send it back in hopes that others will join us in the same way that *we* were liberated.

But no-one answers anymore. Cyberpunk is dead. If you don't believe me, see it for yourself.

Just go outside.