

## **THE CYPHERNOMICON:**

Cypherpunks FAQ and More, Version 0.666,  
1994-09-10, Copyright Timothy C. May.

<http://www2.pro-ns.net/~crypto/cyphernomicon.html>

Excerpts:

### **3.3 - The Cypherpunks Group and List**

?? no formal rules or charter

?? no agreed-upon mission

#### **3.3.2. "Who are the Cypherpunks?"**

- A mix of about 500-700

- Lots of students (they have the time, the Internet accounts). Lots of computer science/programming folks. Lots of libertarians.

#### **3.3.3. "How did the Cypherpunks group get started?"**

+ History?

- Discussions between Eric Hughes and me, led to Eric's decision to host a gathering

+ First meeting was, by coincidence, the same week that PGP 2.0 was released...we all got copies that day

- Mailing list name "Cypherpunks"?

#### **3.3.6. "Members hip?"**

- about 500-700 at any given time

- many folks join, are overwhelmed, and quit

- other groups: Austin, Colorado, Boston, UK

#### **3.3.7. "Why are there so many libertarians on the Cypherpunks list?"**

+ The same question is often asked about the Net in general. Lots of suggested reasons:

- A list like Cypherpunks is going to have privacy and freedom advocates. Not all privacy advocates are libertarians (e.g., they may want laws restricting data collection), but many are. And libertarians naturally gravitate to causes like ours.

- Net grew anarchically, with little control. This appeals to free-wheeling types, used to making their own choices and building their own worlds.

- Libertarians are skeptical of central control structures, as are most computer programming types. They are skeptical that a centrally-run control system can coordinate the needs and desires of people. (They are of course more than just "skeptical" about this.)

- In any case, there's not much of a coherent "opposition camp" to the anarcho-capitalist, libertarian ideology. Forgive me for saying this, my non-libertarian friends on the list, but most non-libertarian ideologies I've seen expressed on the list have been fragmentary, isolated, and not coherent...comments about "how do we take care of the poor?" and Christian fundamentalism, for example. If there is a coherent alternative to a basically libertarian viewpoint, we haven't seen it on the list.

- (Of course, some might say that the libertarians outshout the alternatives...I don't think this is really so.)

### **3.3.10. "Why the name?"**

- Jude Milhon nicknames us cypherpunkts? (by analogy with Mikropunkts, microdots)

## **3.4 - Beliefs, Goals, Agenda**

### **3.4.1. "Is there a set of beliefs that most Cypherpunks support?"**

+ There is nothing official (not much is), but there is an emergent, coherent set of beliefs which most list members seem to hold:

\* that the government should not be able to snoop into our affairs

\* that protection of conversations and exchanges is a basic right

\* that these rights may need to be secured through technology rather than through law

\* that the power of technology often creates new political realities (hence the list mantra: "Cypherpunks write code")

+ Range of Beliefs

- Many are libertarian, most support rights of privacy, some are more radical in approach

### **3.4.2. What are Cypherpunks interested in?**

- privacy

- technology

- encryption

- politics

- crypto anarchy

- digital money

- protocols

### **3.4.3. Personal Privacy and Collapse of Governments**

- There seem to be two main reasons people are drawn to Cypherpunks, besides the general attractiveness of a "cool" group such as ours. The first reason is personal privacy. That is, tools for ensuring privacy, protection from a surveillance society, and individual choice. This reason is widely popular, but is not always compelling (after all, why worry about personal privacy and then join a list that has been identified as a "subversive" group by the Feds? Something to think about.)

- The second major is personal liberty through reducing the power of governments to coerce and tax. Sort of a digital Galt's Gulch, as it were. Libertarians and anarchocapitalists are especially drawn to this vision, a vision which may bother conventional liberals (when they realize strong crypto means things counter to welfare, AFDC, antidiscrimination laws...).

- This second view is more controversial, but is, in my opinion, what really powers the list. While others may phrase it differently, most of us realize we are on to something that will change--and already is changing--the nature of the balance of power between individuals and larger entities.

#### **3.4.4. Why is Cypherpunks called an "anarchy"?**

- Anarchy means "without a leader" (head). Much more common than people may think.
- The association with bomb-throwing "anarchists" is misleading.

#### **3.4.5. Why is there no formal agenda, organization, etc.?**

- no voting, no organization to administer such things
- "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"
- and it's how it all got started and evolved
- also, nobody to arrest and hassle, no nonsense about filling out forms and getting tax exemptions, no laws about campaign law violations (if we were a formal group and lobbied against Senator Foo, could be hit with the law limiting "special interests," conceivably)

#### **3.4.6. How are projects proposed and completed?**

- If an anarchy, how do things get done?
- The way most things get done: individual actions and market decisions.

#### **3.4.9. "Cypherpunks write code"**

- "Cypherpunks break the laws they don't like"
- "Don't get mad, get even. Write code."

#### **3.4.10. Digital Free Markets**

+ strong crypto changes the nature and visibility of many economic transactions, making it very difficult for governments to interfere or even to enforce laws, contracts, etc.

- thus, changes in the nature of contract enforcement
- + (Evidence that this is not hopeless can be found in several places:
  - criminal markets, where governments obviously cannot be used
  - international markets, a la "Law Merchant"
- "uttering a check"
- shopping malls in cyberspace...no identifiable national or regional jurisdiction...overlapping many borders...

+ caveat emptor (though rating agencies, and other filter agents, may be used by wary customers....ironically, reputation will matter even more than it now does)

#### **3.4.17. "Shouldn't crypto be regulated?"**

- Many people make comparisons to the regulation of automobiles, of the radio spectrum, and even of guns. The comparison of crypto to guns is especially easy to make, and especially dangerous. A better comparison is "use of crypto = right to speak as you wish."

That is, we cannot demand that people speak in a language or form that is easily understandable by eavesdroppers, wiretappers, and spies.

+ If I choose to speak to my friends in Latvian, or in Elihiuish, or in triple DES, that's my business. (Times of true war, as in World War II, may be slightly different. As a libertarian, I'm not advocating that, but I understand the idea that in times of war speaking in code is suspect. We are not in a time of war, and haven't been.)

- Should we have "speech permits"? After all, isn't the regulation of speech consistent with the regulation of automobiles?

- In closing, the whole comparison of cryptography to armaments is misleading. Speaking or writing in forms not readily understandable to your enemies, your neighbours, your spouse, the cops, or your local eavesdropper is as old as humanity.

#### **3.4.18. Emphasize the "voluntary" nature of crypto**

+ those that don't want privacy, can choose not to use crypto just as they can take the locks of their doors, install wiretaps on their phones, remove their curtains so as not to interfere with peeping toms and police surveillance teams, etc.

- as PRZ puts it, they can write all their letters on postcards, because they have "nothing to hide"

- what we want to make sure doesn't happen is others insisting that we cannot use crypto to maintain our own privacy

+ "But what if criminals have access to crypto and can keep secrets?"

- this comes up over and over again

- does this mean locks should not exist, or.....?

#### **3.4.19. "Are most Cypherpunks anarchists?"**

- Many are, but probably not most. The term "anarchy" is often misunderstood.

- As Perry Metzger puts it "Now, it happens that I am an anarchist, but that isn't what most people associated with the term "cypherpunk" believe in, and it isn't fair to paint them that way -- hell, many people on this mailing list are overtly hostile to anarchism." [P.M., 1994-07-01]

- But the libertarian streak is undeniably strong. And libertarians who think about the failure of politics and the implications of cryptography generally come to the anarcho-capitalist or crypto-anarchist point of view.

- In any case, the "other side" has not been very vocal in espousing a consistent ideology that combines strong crypto and things like welfare, entitlements, and high tax rates.

(I am not condemning them. Most of my leftist friends turn out to believe in roughly the same things I believe in...they just attach different labels and have negative reactions to words like "capitalist.")

#### **3.4.21. The "rejectionist" stance so many Cypherpunks have**

- that compromise rarely helps when very basic issues are involved

- the experience with the NRA trying compromise, only to find ever-more-repressive laws passed

- the debacle with the EFF and their "EFF Digital Telephony Bill" ("We couldn't have put this bill together without your help") shows the corruption of power; I'm ashamed to have ever been a member of the EFF, and will of course not be renewing my membership.

#### **3.4.22. "Is the Cypherpunks group an illegal or seditious organization?"**

- Well, there are those "Cypherpunk Criminal" t-shirts a lot of us have...

- Depends on what country you're in.

- Probably in a couple of dozen countries, membership would be frowned on

- the material may be illegal in other countries

- and many of us advocate things like using strong crypto to avoid and evade taxes, to bypass laws we dislike, etc.

**4.4.1. This is the message each new subscriber to the Cypherpunks lists gets, by Eric Hughes:**

4.4.2. "Cypherpunks assume privacy is a good thing and wish there were more of it. Cypherpunks acknowledge that those who want privacy must create it for themselves and not expect governments, corporations, or other large, faceless organizations to grant them privacy out of beneficence. Cypherpunks know that people have been creating their own privacy for centuries with whispers, envelopes, closed doors, and couriers. Cypherpunks do not seek to prevent other people from speaking about their experiences or their opinions.

"The most important means to the defense of privacy is encryption. To encrypt is to indicate the desire for privacy. But to encrypt with weak cryptography is to indicate not too much desire for privacy. Cypherpunks hope that all people desiring privacy will learn how best to defend it.

"Cypherpunks are therefore devoted to cryptography. Cypherpunks wish to learn about it, to teach it, to implement it, and to make more of it. Cypherpunks know that cryptographic protocols make social structures. Cypherpunks know how to attack a system and how to defend it. Cypherpunks know just how hard it is to make good cryptosystems.

"Cypherpunks love to practice. They love to play with public key cryptography. They love to play with anonymous and pseudonymous mail forwarding and delivery. They love to play with DC-nets. They love to play with secure communications of all kinds.

"Cypherpunks write code. They know that someone has to write code to defend privacy, and since it's their privacy, they're going to write it. Cypherpunks publish their code so that their fellow cypherpunks may practice and play with it. Cypherpunks realize that security is not built in a day and are patient with incremental progress.

"Cypherpunks don't care if you don't like the software they write. Cypherpunks know that software can't be destroyed. Cypherpunks know that a widely dispersed system can't be shut down.

"Cypherpunks will make the networks safe for privacy." [Eric Hughes, 1993-07-21 version]

## **16.4.2. The Crypto Anarchist Manifesto**

Timothy C. May [tcmay@netcom.com](mailto:tcmay@netcom.com)

A specter is haunting the modern world, the specter of crypto anarchy.

Computer technology is on the verge of providing the ability for individuals and groups to communicate and interact with each other in a totally anonymous manner. Two persons may exchange messages, conduct business, and negotiate electronic contracts without ever knowing the True Name, or legal identity, of the other. Interactions over networks will be untraceable, via extensive re-routing of encrypted packets and tamper-proof boxes which implement cryptographic protocols with nearly perfect assurance against any tampering. Reputations will be of central importance, far more important in dealings than even the credit ratings of today. These developments will alter completely the nature of government regulation, the ability to tax and control economic interactions, the ability to keep information secret, and will even alter the nature of trust and reputation.

The technology for this revolution--and it surely will be both a social and economic revolution--has existed in theory for the past decade. The methods are based upon public-key encryption, zero-knowledge interactive proof systems, and various software protocols for interaction, authentication, and verification. The focus has until now been on academic conferences in Europe and the U.S., conferences monitored closely by the National Security Agency. But only recently have computer networks and personal computers attained sufficient speed to make the ideas practically realizable. And the next ten years will bring enough additional speed to make the ideas economically feasible and essentially unstoppable. High-speed networks, ISDN, tamper-proof boxes, smart cards, satellites, Ku-band transmitters, multi-MIPS personal computers, and encryption chips now under development will be some of the enabling technologies.

The State will of course try to slow or halt the spread of this technology, citing national security concerns, use of the technology by drug dealers and tax evaders, and fears of societal disintegration. Many of these concerns will be valid; crypto anarchy will allow national secrets to be trade freely and will allow illicit and stolen materials to be traded. An anonymous computerized market will even make possible abhorrent markets for assassinations and extortion.

Various criminal and foreign elements will be active users of CryptoNet. But this will not halt the spread of crypto anarchy.

Just as the technology of printing altered and reduced the power of medieval guilds and the social power structure, so too will cryptologic methods fundamentally alter the nature of corporations and of government interference in economic transactions. Combined with emerging information markets, crypto anarchy will create a liquid market for any and all material which can be put into words and pictures.

And just as a seemingly minor invention like barbed wire made possible the fencing-off of vast ranches and farms, thus altering forever the concepts of land and property rights in the frontier West, so too will the seemingly minor discovery out of an arcane branch of mathematics come to be the wire clippers which dismantle the barbed wire around intellectual property.

Arise, you have nothing to lose but your barbed wire fences!

Culture Shocked August 20, 1997

### **Geek Love**

By Katharine Mieszkowski

<http://www.sfbg.com/SFLife/31/47/shock.html>

A NAKED BODY stands totally encased in dark cellophane tape, with only a narrow slit left open for breathing. Soon, holes will be carefully snipped out so the nipples can emerge, and many fingers will reach in to squeeze them. But don't get too uncomfortable. In about half an hour, the prisoner will be released from the sticky bondage and resume cheerily mingling with the other guests.

This isn't a scene out of some dank S-M dungeon or a hyped-up nightclub freak show. It's taking place at an otherwise mild-mannered San Francisco party, thick with computer programmers and other geeks -- the kind of gathering where chubby coders wearing Birkenstocks and socks nervously munch on a few too many potato chips.

Numerous hard-core nerds loaf about; they're the sort who clearly feel comfortable in a social situation only when the conversation turns to familiar geeky topics like the latest ruling on federal privacy laws or the fastest, cheapest way to access the Net.

Weird sex! Computer nerds! It's as if the two pop icons of the End of the Millenium have converged to duke it out for global domination. What happened? Did someone accidentally post the E-mail invite to the wrong mailing list? Quite the opposite. This is the domain of the nervert.

Meet the nervert. A hybrid of lust and insecurity, awkwardness and longing, the nervert is a curious, if oddly logical, beast. A nerd first, pervert second, nerverts emerge from the primordial slime of Usenet, eager to breathe musky air. Inhibited and shy by nature, but yearning to bust out of their shells, they pop up all over the Bay Area's many fringy sex cultures and nudist encampments.

You'll find them acting as voyeurs at erotic play parties, crouching in the sand dunes at nude beaches, studiously taking courses like Talking Dirty or How to Pack a Dildo with self-appointed sexperts, pondering the S-M action at Bondage A Go Go at the Trocadero, and merrily boiling, bobbing, and bubbling in the hot springs at Harbin. Nerveverts love any excuse to be around naked people, even if it means baring their own bods, which they're so self-conscious about.

One self-described nervevert, the kind of hipster who always has a smooth, shaved head (because he's going bald) and almost never removes his chic black gloves (because his hands hurt from too much typing) offered these insights into what makes your garden variety nerd likely to turn 'vert:

Nerds are well aware that they'll strike out every time in the Ken-and-Barbie land of Marina-style bar scenes. The sexual mainstream has already rejected them.

So nerveverts seek out situations in which the rules about what is and isn't desirable are simply different. One positive consequence of being a lifelong social outcast: it makes you more open to interesting alternatives.

Yet the unwritten rules of human contact remain hopelessly obscure to the real nerd, who fails to grasp the kind of implicit social cues that most people take for granted. This is endlessly frustrating to the supremely logical nerd mind, which thrives in a RTFM ("read the fucking manual") environment in which there's a knowable system that can be examined and mastered. Human beings -- they don't come with \$\*&%@ manuals!

But consider this predicament as a lucky "freedom from social skills" and you'll see that it makes nerveverts uniquely suited for highly structured sex games and all kinds of role-playing fantasies -- from naughty nurse to D&D. They can at once escape the impossible task of just "acting normal" around others, and deliberately, systematically create their own worlds.

While nerds don't do well with emotional nuances, they do respond well to the open communication, honesty, and well-defined rules inherent to S-M and safer-sex practices. All this pragmatic processing is like a Rosetta stone for the subtle cues nerveverts can't read on their own. What a relief.

Are you a nervevert?

Test no. 1: Pick up a copy of Exhibitionism for the Shy, a handbook on perverting by Carol Queen, a self-styled nervevert and early adopter of the term. (She may be second only to Fakir Musafar, the venerable grandfather of the modern-primitives movement, as the best-known of the species.) Does this look like your version of Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus? If so, you may be a nervevert.

Test no. 2: Do you brush up on your massage techniques before going to a rave in hopes of scoring some great cuddling with a cute high girl or intoxicated boy whom you fear would never be interested in you were s/he not under the influence of MDMA? If so, chances are good ...



Test no. 3: Was Usenet your great awakening experience to the world of sexual deviance? Do you avidly follow alt.sex.bondage and soc.bi? Bonus: you always lurk, but never miss reading a single message.

The final analysis: Read Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the sci-fi polyamory and free-sex bible. If you instantly consider it one of the five most profound works you've ever read and feel driven to start your own nonmonogamy support group, even though you're not exactly having sex with anyone right now but you'd just like to discuss the theoretical issues and maybe meet someone in the process, case closed.

## **Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High-Tech**

by Paulina Borsook

PublicAffairs, 2000. 267 pgs.

Review by Bob Murphy @

<http://www.cyberselfish.com/reviews18.html>

[Posted July 21, 2000]

Borsook's first target is Bionomics, the spawn of apologist Michael Rothschild:

Bionomics [describes] the way the world works in terms of learning, adaptation, intelligence, selection, and ecological niches. It favors decentralization and trial and error and local control and simple rules and letting things be. Bionomics pays homage to Friedrich Hayek, one of the residents in the traditional libertarian pantheon, who believed that only free markets can lead to freedom (been to China lately?) and that command and control (all government interventions of course irresistibly leading to Stalinesque collectivization of farms) leads to serfdom. (32)

Bionomics states that "the economy is a rain forest." The Bionomics argument goes that a rain forest ecosystem is far more complicated than any machine that could be designed--the idea being that machines, and machine-age thinking, are the markers of Bad Old Economic thinking. No one can manage or engineer a rain forest, and rain forests are happiest when they are left alone to evolve, which will then benefit all the happy monkeys, pretty butterflies, and funny tapirs that live in them. In our capitalist rain forest, organizations and industries are the species and organisms. Although if a corporation is the analog for, say, an individual tapir, then what is the rain forest analog for an individual person? A mitochondria?

What about the fact that actual rain forests are now being destroyed because of the free market? (32)

The tender reader may feel that Borsook's scathing attack, though not incorrect, is a bit too merciless. But this is not at all the case. For these self-styled freedom lovers--where "freedom" is used in an incredibly Victorian sense, of course--are not blissfully ignorant of the utter absurdity of their position. When the plight of the Amazon rain forests is pointed out to them, they bravely maintain that South American countries are not examples of what they 'mean' by "free markets" (as if issues of social justice revolved around semantics!). That Borsook has neglected to even bring up this silly rebuttal is an example of her under-appreciated compassion.

Unfortunately, Bionomics is not the only refuge of today's incipient fascists. A more virulent strain of egoists has arisen:

"Anarcho-capitalist," which is how many cypherpunks describe themselves, is as hardheaded as it gets. This dimly veiled social Darwinist/ property-is-next-to-godliness/ everything-is-contractual political and economic philosophy (with Nietzsche crawling around somewhere inside there, too) was first articulated by economics professor Ludwig von Mises in the 1920s and 1930s, echoed later by economist and Mises student, Ayn Rand-follower Murray Rothbard-and portrayed in sci-fi writer Robert A. Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, which posited a utopian society based on libertarian, Nietzschean ideals. (97-98)

This reviewer must confess that he finds the sheer wit of this passage to be simply impenetrable. Based on his meager studies, he had never made the connection between libertarianism and Nietzsche. He was rather sure that the reactionary Ludwig von Mises had ridiculed anarchists as hopelessly naïve, and that the exasperating Murray Rothbard had referred to the products of the information superhighway as "mindless pap."

This cruelly meritocratic world-to-come described in cypherpunk postings is reminiscent of 1950s science fiction. In these yesterday's tomorrows, the males with superior intellect, as measured in rocket-scientist terms, ruled. (In current terms, benefiting hugely from cash sucked from high tech entrepreneurial activities, generating untraceable untaxable financial reserves and tweaking the global monetary supply through anonymous transactions.) And incidentally, in these Good Societies of the future, the ruling males also scored with the initially reluctant biology-officer bodacious babes. Aldous Huxley, writing years before, commented obliquely on a society of the future based on Nietzschean ideals in *Brave New World* (the genetically determined top-drawer alpha males were explicitly assigned foxy females)-but Huxley wrote his book as a cautionary satire. In the same way that the more you run away from something, the closer it gets to you, Huxley's teaching story about a land of ultimate government control doesn't look so different from the cypherpunk social-Darwinist promised land of total libertarian freedom. (98)

After reading this passage, one is immediately struck by the usage of the always amusing it-doesn't-take-a-rocket-scientist genre. The admirable alliteration serves to foreshadow Borsook's seamless transition to a compassionate commentary on the sexual mores of the technolibertarian:

[I]t's anomalous that many many cypherpunks are not married, have never been married, and have no kids.. Katherine Mieskowski called the people who manifest [the] convergence of computer nerd and weird sex "nerverts." When I read her column I knew exactly what she meant, for I have run into nerverts many times. Mieskowski got a nervert practitioner to explain this connection between whacked-out sex and nerditude.. This is not to say that all nerds lack social or courting skills. But a strong intersection exists between nerds and fringe sex, just as a strong intersection exists between nerds and neopagans. (99, 101)

The emphatic empathy of this passage is typical of Borsook's work. She is a spoofing and witty and clever and sarcastic and creative and energetic writer, who no doubt spent her entire adolescence brimming with anticipation for the day when our sick culture would finally appreciate these traits. (A glance at the author's stunning picture on the book jacket confirms this conjecture.)

We treat the reader to one final gem:

As the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) of the technology community

- more outrageous than most, articulating the funniest, extreme-est, most tear-down-the-walls/two-four-six-eight, organize-to-smash-the-state notions of how the world should work, will work, once their anti-good-boy vision comes to pass
- cypherpunks express and inform the ethos of the rest of the technolibertarian community. And the original cypherpunk manifestos and newsgroup postings...coalesced a political way of being, a coherent adversarial pose for being a hardheaded geek. (97)

### **Review of Borsook**

By Elizabeth Weise, USA TODAY

Reading *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High-Tech* (Public Affairs, \$24) is like sitting down to a long dinner at a quiet restaurant with author Paulina Borsook herself. You'll come away incensed, exhausted, fascinated and in serious need of a dictionary.

*Cyberselfish* is a book about the religions of Silicon Valley, if you understand religion to mean a set of commonly held beliefs. It's a very free-market, anti-regulation mindset. It has a deep belief in the capacity of individuals but tends to ignore the social and political matrix that molded them.

This is "libertarian with a small l," as many in the Valley put it. (Libertarian with a big L would be the Libertarian Party, which advocates as little government and as much individual liberty as possible.)

Technolibertarians, as Paulina dubs them, are something else again. They come in several flavors, primarily the "ravers" and the "gilders."

Ravers are neo-hippies who believe that "through the wonders of the Net we will all communicate and love one another and sing whatever the cyberspace version of 'Kumbaya' is, without the repressive parental influence of nasty old governments to interfere in this freelovefest." Gilders (think former Reagan speechwriter George Gilder) are socially conservative, "in love with the spirit of enterprise and the spirituality of the microchip."

This might sound dry. It's not. Imagine *Ulysses* (Joyce, not Homer) written as one extended, jazzlike riff on the woes and wrongs of the culture of technology. I predict a slew of Borsook imitators as soon as *Cyberselfish* hits the bookstores May 12. Not only because reading it is such a roller-coaster ride, but because one can't help but begin to think - and write - in the author's breakneck new-idea-a-minute, hyphenated/slashed/run-on intellectual style.

## **AT WITS' END**

Libertarianism in the Crosshairs

Part II of III: Those Snidely Whiplash Libertarians

by Tom G. Palmer

(Originally published by Cato Policy Report, July/August, 2000)

(First published on TDO August 24, 2000)

<http://www.dailyobjectivist.com/Extro/libertarianisminthecrosshairs2.asp>

Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig, author of *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*, is sorely vexed by the prominent place of "cyberlibertarianism" in the world of high tech. "Cyberlibertarians" apparently fail to understand that "code is law" and that "[t]his code represents the greatest threat to liberal or libertarian ideals, as well as their greatest promise" (p. 6). The problem with "code" or "architecture" as it is now is that it is not subject to political determination: "[I]sn't it clear that government should do something to make this architecture consistent with important public values?" (p. 59).

It turns out that sometimes rules of conduct (private property, freedom of contract, and all that) lead to too much privacy and sometimes to too little privacy, sometimes to too much accountability and sometimes to too little accountability, when in fact what we should want is just the right amount of privacy and accountability. And, of course, it's through politics that the Goldilocks option is discovered: "Politics is the process by which we reason about how things ought to be" (p. 59).

For Lessig, the problem of Goldilocks is solved by a literal *deus ex machina*: computers themselves. In a discussion of how political bodies could regulate Internet gambling, offshore banking, and the like, Lessig states: "Rules imposed by local jurisdictions could be made effective through their recognition by other jurisdictions. Servers, for example, would recognize that access is conditioned on the rules imposed by jurisdictions" (p. 57). According to Lessig, we can leave the actual determination of what's just right to... "servers."

In a very personal attack on a libertarian journalist in a chapter titled "What Declan [Declan McCullagh of Wired Online] Doesn't Get," Lessig insists: "We need to think collectively and sensibly about how this emerging reality will affect our lives. Do-nothingism is not an answer; something can and should be done. I've argued this, but not with much hope. So central are the Declans in our political culture today that I confess I cannot see a way around them. I have sketched small steps; they seem very small. I've described a different ideal; it seems quite alien. I've promised that something different could be done, but not by any institution of government that I know. I've spoken as if there could be hope. But Hope was just a television commercial" (p. 233). (The book came with no decoder ring to decipher it.)

More could be said about Lessig's call for collective reasoning, but I merely suggest that he reread the third book of David Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*, where Hume explains the importance of stable rules of property: "The convention concerning the stability of possession is entered into, in order to cut off all occasions of discord and contention; and this end would never be attained, were we allowed to apply this rule differently in every particular case, according to every particular utility, which might be discovered in such an application." We could title this "What Larry Doesn't Get."

Paulina Borsook, in *Cyberselfish*, also laments the prominence of libertarianism among the high-tech set. Rather than a work on law, hers is a very personal (and highly abusive) attack on libertarians involved in the computer and software industries. (Libertarians are called or compared to nerds, sexual "nervets," "neo-hippies," Christian fundamentalists and "neo-pagans," terrorists, pornographers, "ungrateful adolescent offspring of immigrants," and so on—a motley collection, indeed.) In a bow to substantive criticism, Borsook restates Lessig's main point: "The technolibertarian worldview likes to pretend that there are not social decisions embedded in code, to pretend that technology is neutral" (pp. 239–40). To support that assertion, Borsook points out that search engines don't always find what you're looking for. If you want to understand the world around us, set aside Milton Friedman and F. A. Hayek and turn to "Marx and his pal Engels," who had "relevant things to say about the spread of global capitalism (and much more accurate for the description of what is happening at the end of our own century than at the end of his)" (p. 44).

Perhaps Borsook had in mind the theses of the immiseration of the masses and the inevitability of socialist revolution, but if she means only to highlight that Marx noted that the world was changing awfully fast, well, so did everyone else.

Borsook specializes in "color" paid-by-the-word journalism rather than accurate reporting: "Cato, with its menhir of a HQ smack in the middle of D.C., is among the sleekest and most fearsome of the right-wing, free-market, think-tank conquistadors.

## **Blog archives**

29/5/2000

<http://dev.null.org/blog/archive.cgi/2000/05/29>

### **`Nerverts' redux: The complex interplay between the hacker/geek culture and non-traditional sexuality: (Salon)**

[Richard Stallman] says he has never had a monogamous sexual relationship, and he's also observed that programmers tend to favor polyamorous or non-monogamous relationships more than people in other jobs... he recognizes that the unconventional choices he has made as a software engineer are analogous to the choices he's made in his romantic life as well. "I believe in love, but not monogamy," he says plainly. Deirdre Saoirse, a former employee of Linuxcare and founder of a Bay Area users group for people who use the Python scripting language, feels strongly that people involved in open source can be just as conservative and closed-minded as any other part of the population.

"Some of my female and/or queer and/or transgendered friends have felt very out of place in the Linux community," she says emphatically. "I've seen a lot of sexism and not a lot of openness to alternative lifestyles among the community as a whole, even in the Bay Area."

Sounds like the Slashdot locker-room where "gay" is a pejorative they sling at Microsoft. --acb

"Geeks are introverts, we read a lot of science fiction, and we have bizarre socialization," says Muffy Barkocy, a non-monogamous bisexual working with Apache and Perl at Egreetings.com. She believes that a geek's stereotypical lack of socialization encourages a more experimental sexual life. "Because of our lack of socialization, we don't learn about the monogamous imperative. It just doesn't occur to us."