

## Timothy Leary

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### The Cyberpunk:

### The Individual as

### Reality Pilot

“Your true pilot cares nothing about anything on earth but the river, and his pride in his occupation surpasses the pride of kings.”

—Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

### Who Is the Cyberpunk?

Cyberpunks use all available data input to think for themselves.

You know who they are.

Every stage of history has produced a name and a heroic legend for the strong, stubborn, creative individual who explores some future frontier, collects and brings back new information, and offers to guide the gene pool to the next stage. Typically, the time maverick combines bravery with high curiosity, with super-self-esteem. These three talents are considered necessary for those engaged in the profession of genetic guide, a.k.a., philosopher.

The classical Old West–World model for the Cyberpunk is Prometheus, a technological genius who “stole” fire from the Gods and gave it to humanity.<sup>1</sup> Prometheus also taught his gene pool many useful arts and sciences. According to the official version of the legend, he/she was sentenced to the ultimate torture for these unauthorized transmissions of Classified Information. Prometheus was exiled. In his/her own version of the myth (unauthorized) Prometheus (a.k.a., the Pied Piper) uses his/her skills to escape the sinking kinship, taking with him the cream of the gene pool.

The New World version of this ancient myth is Quetzalcoatl, god of civilization, high-tech wizard who introduced maize, the calendar,

erotic sculpture, flute playing, the arts. And the sciences. He was driven into exile by the G-man in power, who was called Tezcatlipoca.

Self-assured singularities of the Cyber Breed have been called mavericks, ronin, free-lancers, independents, self-starters, nonconformists, oddballs, troublemakers, kooks, visionaries, iconoclasts, insurgents, blue-sky thinkers, loners, smartalecks. Before Gorbachev, the Soviets scornfully called them hooligans. Religious organizations have always called them heretics. Bureaucrats called them disloyal dissidents, traitors, or worse. In the old days, even sensible normal people used to call them mad.

They have been variously labeled clever, creative, entrepreneurial, imaginative, enterprising, fertile, ingenious, inventive, resourceful, talented, eccentric.

During the tribal, feudal, and industrial-literate phases of human evolution, the logical survival traits were conformity and dependability. The "good serf" or "vassal" was obedient. The "good worker" or "manager" was reliable. Maverick-thinkers were tolerated only at moments when innovation and change were necessary, usually to deal with the local competition.

In the Information/communication civilization of the twenty-first century, creativity and mental excellence become the ethical norm. The world has become too dynamic, complex, and diversified, too cross-linked by the global immediacies of modern (quantum) communication, for stability of thought or dependability of behavior to be successful. The "good person" today is the intelligent one who can think for him/herself. The "problem person" in the Cybernetic Society of the twenty-first century is the one who automatically obeys, who never questions authority, who acts to protect his/her official status, who placates and politics rather than thinks independently.

Thoughtful Japanese are worried about the need for ronin-thinking in their obedient culture. The postwar generation is now taking over.

### Cyberpunk Yuppies in the Soviet Union

The new postwar generation of Soviets have apparently caught on that a new role model is necessary to compete in the information age. Under Gorbachev bureaucratic control is being softened, made elastic to encourage some modicum of innovative, dissident thought!

Aleksandr N. Yakovlev, Politburo member and key strategist of the glasnost policy, describes that reform: "Fundamentally, we are talking about self-government. We are moving towards a time when people will be able to govern themselves and control the activities of people that have been placed in the position of learning and governing them.

"It is not accidental that we are talking about *self*-government, or *self*-sufficiency and *self*-profitably of an enterprise, *self*-this and *self*-that. It all concerns the decentralization of power."

The Cyberpunk Person, the pilot who thinks clearly and creatively, using quantum-electronic appliances and brain know-how, is the newest, updated, top-of-the-line model of our species, *homo sapiens sapiens, cyberneticus*.

Let us meet some of these Pilot People. Their example may encourage and empower you to start taking over the wheel. Of your own life.

### Cyber Is the Greek Word for Pilot

*"A great pilot can sail even when his canvas is rent."*

—*Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

The term *cybernetics* comes from the Greek word *kubernetes*—pilot.

The Hellenic origin of this word is important in that it reflects Greek traditions of independence and individual self-reliance which, we are told, derived from geography. The proud little Greek city-states were perched on peninsular fingers wiggling down into the fertile Mediterranean Sea, protected by mountains from the landmass armies of Asia.

Mariners of those ancient days had to be bold and resourceful. Sailing the seven seas without maps or navigational equipment, they were forced to develop independence of thought. The self-reliance that these Hellenic pilots developed in their voyages probably carried over to the democratic, inquiring, questioning nature of their land life.

The Athenian cyberpunk, the pilot, made his/her own navigational decisions.

These psycho-geographical factors may have contributed to the humanism of the Hellenic religions, which emphasized freedom, pagan joy, celebration of life, and speculative thought. The personal and polytheistic nature of the religions of ancient Greece is often compared

with the austere morality of monotheistic Hebraism, the fierce, dogmatic polarities of Persian-Arab dogma, and the imperial authority of Roman (Christian) culture.

### A Recent Example of Unauthorized Cyberpunk Behavior

The opening moments of the movie *WarGames* offers a classic example of *cybernetic* performance.

It's a foggy night. An Air Force Captain is skillfully steering a jeep up a winding Colorado mountain road to the secret SAC nuclear missile launching silos. He is accompanied by a lieutenant. The captain speaks the first words in the movie. He tells the lieutenant that he and his wife planted a cultivated grade of marijuana seeds in their garden and, to ensure their growth, invoked the Tibetan Buddhist prayer for enlightenment. *On mane padma hum.*

At this point, the officers reach the entry check-point, identify themselves, and are issued pistols. The huge steel vault door opens. The two men enter the "control" room from which the bombs are fired. As they check dials, the captain continues his story. The cannabis harvest was very successful. The lieutenant interrupts the story. A red light on the control board is flashing ominously. The captain tells him to tap it with his finger. The light disappears. Get it? The captain is a quantum-whiz, alert, competent to detect and debug errors in the electronic system. The blinking begins again. An alarm sounds. They consult the code book and confirm the validity of the message. They gulp. They are commanded to launch nuclear missiles at the Soviet Union.

The captain balks. He orders the lieutenant to phone headquarters for human confirmation. The lieutenant, a loyal liege vassal, protests that this is an unauthorized action. But he obeys the order of his immediate superior.

No answer.

The lieutenant primly reminds the captain that orders command him to fire the nuke. The captain shakes his head. He commits an act of independent thought. He says he won't kill fifty million people without a human command.

The lieutenant, dutifully following the government regulations, points his pistol at the captain's brain.

Cut.

### The Roman Concept of Governor, Director, Steersman

The Greek word *kubernetes* translated to Latin comes out as *gubernetes*. The basic verb *gubernare* means to control the actions or behavior of, to direct, to exercise sovereign authority, to regulate, to keep under, to restrain, to steer. This Roman concept is obviously very different from the original notion of "pilot."

It may be relevant that the Latin term "to steer" comes from the word *stare*, which means to stand, with derivative meanings "place or thing which is standing." The past participle of the Latin word produces "status," "state," "institute," "statue," "static," "statistics," "prostitute," "restitute," "constitute."

### Example of Governing or Steersman Behavior

A helicopter lands at the SAC base. It is carrying two high status officials of the government. They carry institutional briefcases and standard, serious, worried looks. They are furious. It seems that 25 percent of the captains in silos refused to launch without human confirmation. The government response to this independence of judgment by individuals is predictably institutional.

"Get the persons out of the loop."

They introduce WHOPPER, a totally obedient Artificial Intelligence system guaranteed to follow government orders and to be free of the subjective, (PUNK) human unreliability factor.

### Cyberpunk/Pilots Replace Governetics/Controllers

*"Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the selfhood of every one of its members. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs."*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

*"Who so would be a man must be a nonconformist."*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

The word "cybernetics" was coined by Norbert Wiener (1948), who wrote, "We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the

name of Cybernetics, which we form from the Greek word for steersman [sic].” The word “cyber” has been redefined (in the *American Heritage Dictionary*) as “the theoretical study of control processes in electronic, mechanical, and biological systems, especially the flow of information in such systems.” The derivative word *cybernetate* means “to control automatically by computer or to be so controlled.”

An even more ominous interpretation defines cybernetics as “the study of human control mechanisms and their replacement by mechanical or electronic systems.”

Note how Wiener and the Romanesque engineers have corrupted the meaning of cyber. The Greek word “pilot” becomes “governor or director”; the word “to steer” becomes “to control.”

We are liberating the term, teasing it free from serfdom to represent the autopoietic, self-directed principle of organization which arises in the universe in many systems of widely varying sizes. In people, societies, and atoms. (As explained in the Cybernetic Organization chapter.)

#### Charles Augustus Lindbergh: Cyber-Politician

Charles Lindbergh was a Republican congressman from Minnesota who first attained national prominence when he attacked industrial and commercial trusts, denounced promilitary propaganda and war profits. His courageous and skillful maverick attitude culminated in his active opposition to World War I in 1917. These acts of independent thinking destroyed his governmental career.

He was the father of Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Lucky Lindy, the Lone Eagle, who attained fame as sky pilot, philosopher, ecologist.

#### Our Oppressive Birthright: The Politics of Literacy

The etymological distinctions between Greek and Roman terms are quite relevant to the pragmatics of the culture surrounding their usage. French philosophy, for example, has recently stressed the importance of language and semiotics in determining human behavior and social structures. Michel Foucault’s classic studies of linguistic politics and mind control led him to believe that

human consciousness—as expressed in speech and images, in self-definition and mutual designation . . . is the authentic locale of the determinant politics of being.

. . . What men and women are born into is only superficially this or that social, legislative, and executive system. Their ambiguous, oppressive birthright is the language, the conceptual categories, the conventions of identification and perception which have evolved and, very largely, atrophied up to the time of their personal and social existence. It is the established but customarily subconscious, unargued constraints of awareness that enslave.

Orwell and Wittgenstein both agree. To remove the means of expressing dissent is to remove the possibility of dissent. “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.” In this light, the difference between the Greek word “pilot” and the Roman translation “governor” becomes a most significant semantic manipulation. And the flexibility granted to symbol systems of all kinds by their representation in digital computers becomes very dramatic.

Several questions arise. Do we, for example, pride ourselves for becoming ingenious “pilots” or “dutiful controllers”?

#### Who, What, and Why Is Governetics?

“*Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead.*”

—*Captain David Glasgow Farragut’s order to his steersman at the Battle of Mobile Bay, 5 August 1864*

“*Aye, aye, sir!*”

—*Unknown enlisted steersman at the Battle of Mobile Bay, 5 August 1864*

The word governetics refers to an attitude of obedience-control in relationship to self or others.

Pilots, those who navigate on the seven seas or in the sky, have to devise and execute course changes continually in response to the changing environment. They respond continually to feedback, information about the environment. Dynamic. Alert. Alive.

The Latinate “steersman,” by contrast, is in the situation of following orders. The Romans, we recall, were great organizers, road builders, administrators. The galley ships, the chariots must be controlled. The legions of soldiers must be directed.

The Hellenic concept of the individual navigating his/her own course was an island of humanism in a sea of totalitarian empires.

Athens was bounded on the East (the past) by the centralized, authoritarian kingdoms of the Middle East. The Governors of Iran, from Cyrus, the Persian emperor, to the recent Shah and Ayatollah, have exemplified the highest traditions of state control.

The Greeks were bounded on the other side, which we shall designate the West (or future) by a certain heavy concept called Rome. The caesars and popes of the Holy Roman Empire represented the next grand phase of institutional control. The governing hand on the wheel stands for stability, durability, continuity, permanence. Staying the course. Individual creativity, exploration, and change are usually not encouraged.

### Christopher Columbus: Another Example of Cyberpunk Behavior

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) was born in Genoa. At the age of twenty-five, he showed up in Lisbon and learned the craft of map-making. This was the golden era of Portuguese exploration. Many pilots and navigators were convinced that the earth was round and that the Indies and other, unknown lands could be found by crossing the western seas. What was special about Columbus was his persistence and eloquence in support of the dream of discovery. For over ten years, he traveled the courts of Europe attempting to make “the deal” to find backing for his “enterprise of the Indies.”

According to the *Columbia Encyclopedia*: “Historians have disputed for centuries his skill as a navigator, but it has been recently proved that with only dead-reckoning Columbus was unsurpassed in charting and finding his way about unknown seas.” Columbus was a most unsuccessful governor of the colonies he had discovered. He died in disgrace, his cyber-skills almost forgotten. (At least that’s what they tell us in the authorized history books.)

### Cyberpunk: The Pilots of the Species

*“The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators.”*

—Edward Gibbon

The word *cybernetic-person* or *cybernaut* returns us to the original meaning of “pilot” and puts the self-reliant person back in the loop. The words *cybernetic-person*, *cybernaut*, and the more pop term *cyber-*

*punk* refers to the personalization (and thus the popularization) of knowledge/information technology. Innovative thinking on the part of the individual.

According to Foucault, if you change the language you change the society. Following Foucault, we suggest that the term *cybernetic-person*, *cybernaut*, may describe a new model of human being and a new social order. *Cyberpunk* is, admittedly, a risky term. Like all linguistic innovations, it must be used with a tolerant sense of high-tech humor. It’s a stop gap, transitional meaning-grenade thrown over the language barricades to describe the resourceful, skillful individual who accesses and steers knowledge/communication technology towards his/her own private goals. For personal pleasure, profit, principle, or growth.

Cyberpunks are the inventors, innovative writers, techno-frontier artists, risk-taking film directors, icon-shifting composers, expressionist artists, free-agent scientists, innovative show-biz entrepreneurs, techno-creatives, computer visionaries, elegant hackers, bit-blinking *Prolog* adepts, special-effectives, video wizards, neurological test pilots, media explorers—all of those who boldly package and steer ideas out there where no thoughts have gone before.

Cyberpunks are sometimes authorized by the governors. They can, with sweet cynicism and patient humor, interface their singularity with institutions. They often work within “the governing systems” on a temporary basis.

As often as not, they are unauthorized.

### The Legend of the Ronin

The following quotes come from *The Way of the Ronin* by Beverly Potter, Ph.D. “[T]he Ronin . . . has broken with the tradition of career feudalism. Guided by a personally defined code of adaptability, autonomy, and excellence, Ronin are employing career strategies grounded in a premise of rapid change.”

Ronin is used as a metaphor based on a Japanese word for a lordless samurai. As early as the eighth century, the word *ronin*, translated literally as “wave people,” was used in Japan to describe people who had left their allotted, slotted, caste-predetermined station in life. Samurai who had left the service of their feudal lords to become masterless.

"Ronin played a key role in Japan's abrupt translation from a feudal society to industrialism. Under feudal rule, warriors were not allowed to think freely or act according to their own will. On the other hand, having been forced by circumstances to develop independence, they took more readily to new ideas and technologies and became increasingly influential in the independent schools. These schools . . . were more liberal than were the official government schools, which taught only the traditional curriculum."

The West has many historical parallels to the *ronin* archetype. The term *free lance* has its origin in the period after the crusade when a large number of knights were separated from their lords. Many lived by the code of chivalry and became "lances for hire."

The American frontier was fertile ground for the *ronin* archetype. *Maverick*, derived from the Texan word for unbranded steer, is used to describe a free and self-directed individual.

"Although many of the Ronin's roots . . . are in the male culture, most career women are well acquainted with the Way of the Ronin. Career women have left their traditional stations and battled their way into the recesses of the male-dominated workplace. Most women's careers are characterized by a multiplicity of experiences and back-and-forth moves between home, work, and school, causing them to confront the critics of self-direction. Like the Ronin who had no clan, professional women often feel excluded from the corporate cliques' inside tracks, without ally or mentor."

#### Shall We Boot-Up Some Examples of Cyberpunk?

Carol Suen Rosin, proponent of nonmilitarized outer space, has become "an honest broker" between the American and Soviet scientific groups.

Stanley Kubrick is the essence of cyberpunk.

Mary Ferguson, psyber-punk. Wrote *The Aquarian Conspiracy* and publishes the *Brain/Mind Bulletin*.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak.

David Hockney.

Andy Warhol.

George Koopman.

William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Rudy Rucker.

Charles Lindbergh: "We (that's my ship and I) took off rather suddenly. We had a report somewhere around 4 o'clock in the afternoon before that the weather would be fine, so we thought we would try it."

"I saw a fleet of fishing boats. . . . I flew down almost touching the craft and yelled at them, asking if I was on the right road to Ireland. They just stared. Maybe they didn't hear me. Maybe I didn't hear them. Or maybe they thought I was a crazy fool. An hour later I saw land."

In 1922, Lindbergh left a promising university career to study air navigation and flight. He was one of the first pilots to carry mail through the skies. On May 21, 1927, he made the first solo nonstop flight from the North American continent to the Eurasian continent. "Lucky Lindy" immediately became a national hero.

In 1929, he married Anne Morrow, an intelligent, cultured author and woman of means. After the marriage, she became an accomplished pilot. The couple astonished the world by making several highly publicized flights together.

In 1936, Lindy (by then in exile) collaborated with Alex Carrel in developing an enhanced heart appliance to aid human circulation.

In 1938, after visiting the Eurasian continent, Lindbergh became convinced that America should stay out of the power struggle developing between the Axis and the Allies.<sup>2</sup>

The media widely publicized a motto/logo for Lindy: "Smiling Through."

Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

Mark Twain. He purchased the Remington-Type writer when it appeared in 1874 for \$125.00. In 1875, he became the first author in history to submit a typewritten manuscript to a publisher. It was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. "This newfangled writing machine has several virtues. It piles an awful stack of words on one page. It don't muss things or scatter inkblots around. Of course it saves paper."

Gertrude Stein.

Roy Walford.

Wilt Chamberlain.

Mathias (Rusty) Rust, age 19, a lanky, teenage loner from Ham-

burg, Germany, attained All-Star status as a cyberpunk when, on 28 May 1987, he flew a one-engine Cessna through the impenetrable Soviet air defenses and landed in Moscow's Red Square. There were no gubernatorial or organizational motives. The technological adventure was a personal mission. Rusty just wanted to talk to some Russians. German newspapers celebrated the event, calling it "the stuff of dreams" and comparing the youth to the Red Baron Manfred von Richthofen and Charles Lindbergh.

Stewart Brand, founder of *Co-evolution Quarterly*.

Bob Harris, the owner of a hardware store in Riverside, California, is an amateur glider pilot. On 17 February 1986, while soaring over the high desert north of Edwards Air Force Base, he caught the most beautiful "mountain wave" he'd ever seen and rode it to a height of 49,000 feet. A world record. His celebration was rudely interrupted by the Federal Aviation Administration, who moved to revoke his pilot's license. The charge: Pilot Harris had failed to get permission. The flight was unauthorized.

#### The Cyber-Flash Kid: Another Example of Innovative Behavior

The third scene in *WarGames* introduces us to the hero, Matthew Broderick. He is in a video arcade playing a space adventure game with poise and proficiency.

Get it? He's an Electron Jock. A Quantum Wizard. But is he a company man? Or a self-directed cyberpilot? Let's find out.

He is late for school. His autocratic biology teacher gives him a bad time. When the officious teacher asks about the origin of asexual reproduction, Matthew suggests, "Your wife?"

Okay, we get it. Matthew is ungovernable. He's a cyberkid.

The teacher sends Matthew to the principal. While languishing in the governor's office, he obtains the code for the school's computer system. Back home, he uses his PC to access the school records. He changes the unfair grade to a passing level.

#### The Cyberpunk Code: TFYQA

The three scenes from *WarGames* present the cultural drama of the Roaring twentieth century. First we note that *WarGames* is an electronic

quantum signal, a movie about high-tech computers and human evolution seen by millions, especially impressionable youngsters. The film illustrates and condemns the use of quantum/electronic knowledge technology by governments for control. The film celebrates the independence and skill of cyberpunks who think for themselves and innovate from within the static system. The captain and his wife use high-tech agricultural methods to enhance the potency of unauthorized botanical neuroactivators. The captain makes an unauthorized decision to abort WWII. In both instances, the captain follows the cyberpunk code: Think for Yourself, Question Authority (TFYQA). He pilots an independent course.

The cyberkid, Matthew Broderick, is equally courageous, outrageous, creative, and bright. He is pulled into the classic confrontation: the Authoritarian Antique Teacher humiliates and punishes the Tom Sawyer kid. Matthew Thinks for Himself and Questions Authority. He rushes to the library and researches the life of Professor Falken, scans scientific journals, scopes microfilm files—not to please the system but in pursuit of his own personal quest. Then he uses his Electron-skills in an unauthorized manner to pilot his own course.

Note that there is a new dimension of Electronic Ethics and Quantum Legality here. The captain and Matthew perform no act of physical violence, no theft of material goods. The captain processes some computer data and decides for himself. Matthew rearranges clusters of electrons stored on a chip.

They seek no control over others.

#### Cyberpunk as Role Model for the Twenty-First Century

The tradition of the "Individual who Thinks for Him/Herself" extends to the beginnings of recorded human history. Indeed, the very label of our species, *homo sapiens*, defines us as the animals who think.

If our genetic function is *computare* (to think), then it follows that the ages and stages of human history, so far, have been larval or preparatory. Now, at the beginnings of the information age, are we ready to assume our genetic function? After the larval phases of submission to gene pools, the mature stage of the human life-cycle is the individual who thinks for him/herself.

## Definitions of the Word "Cyber"

The preceding pages have discussed the politics of knowledge in terms of the concept of "cyber."

*Cyber* means "pilot."

A *cyber-person* is one who pilots his/her own life. By definition, the cyber-person is fascinated by navigational information—especially maps, charts, labels, guides, manuals, which help pilot one through life. The cyber-person continually searches for theories, models, paradigms, metaphors, images, icons which help chart and define the realities which we inhabit.

*Cyber-tech* refers to the tools, appliances, and methodologies of knowing and communicating. Linguistics. Philosophy. Semantics. Semiotics. Practical epistemologies. The ontologies of daily life. Words, icons, pencils, printing presses, screens, keyboards, computers, disks.

*Cyber-politics* introduces the Foucauldian notions of the use of language and linguistic-tech by the ruling classes in Feudal and Industrial societies to control children, the uneducated and powerless individuals.

The words *governor* or *steersman* or *G-man* are used to describe those who manipulate words and communication devices to control, to bolster authority—feudal, management, government. And to discourage innovative thought and free exchange.

We describe a person who relies on static, verbal abstractions, conformity to dogma, reliance on authority, as a vassal or G-Person or G-Man. From which we get G-think, G-text, G-babble, G-berish, vassalize, vassalize.

## Notes

1. Every gene pool develops its own name for Prometheus, the fearful genetic agent, Lucifer, who defies familial authority by introducing a new technology which empowers some members of the gene pool to leave the familiar cocoon. Each gene pool has a name for this ancestral state of security: "Garden of Eden," "Atlantis," "Heaven," "Home," etc.
2. The Axis included Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and many East European, South American, and Middle Eastern (Islamic) nations, and (later) Vichy France. The Allies included France, England, and the British Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, and South Africa). Among the countries that remained neutral during WWII were Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark, and Sweden.