Interview : Lepht Anonym

Cyb3rmonk
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This interview is with [Lepht Anonym](#) who has been described as the first back alley cyberneticist, a romantic Gibsonesque title indeed...

How does the title of the first back-alley cyberneticist fit and is it appropriate to describe your work in this manner ?

I don't think it's entirely appropriate to give me titles at all... Flattering, but I don't think I've done enough to warrant it. My "work" is really just a starting point for other, more talented humans (or those with more resources) to dive off from.

What importance do you place on your work ?

Little to none. It is the knowledge gained, and the people who joined the community as a response to that, which matter.

Do you hope for uptake on your tech and/or your philosophy ?

Of course. That's pretty much the entire point. I'd like to see self-modification out of curiosity become something which is not considered out of the ordinary at all amongst hackers. I'd be disappointed to go to all the trouble of creating sensory extensions and be the only one to take them up.

What is your tech ?

It's not mine. I didn't invent most of the things I'm known for. The nodes are Steve Haworth's invention, although I did come up with the scheme for making our own and the method for doing so. The Southpaw, when it comes to fruition, will be somewhat more "mine", but everything I do is a community effort at least. I could not do anything without reader support and input.

What is your philosophy ?

Er, I don't really know. I have a code inscribed on my arm that I live by - determination, discipline, defiance - I don't know if that's what you'd call a philosophy. Curiosity above caution, perhaps. I'm an atheist anyway; I'm a member of the British Humanist Association, but other than that, religion and philosophy are at best unimportant to me.

What developments in cybernetics are applicable to the "kitchen" as you like to call it ?

I think you misunderstood me. That refers to my actual kitchen, as in the place easiest to sterilise in the house and safest for operations. If I had a better theatre, I'd use it, but I really am confined to a kitchen or a bathroom

right now.

As for developments, well, I don't know if any of them are applicable to what we do as biohackers. That's the reason for the movement in the first place; there might well be improvements in intelligent prosthetics, robotics, etc. But they don't trickle down to us, the people without several thousand euros spare to invest in rebuilding someone's lab experiments. To boot, most of those developments are medical only. The concept of modification pretty much only exists in research as a solution to tragic medical deficiencies (artificial eyes for blindness, prostheses for limb amputation, drug delivery devices for diabetes...) and not as a legitimate choice healthy people could make. That side is more or less left for hackers to pick up.

Medical techniques, sterilisation and the like are always useful to us, however. As are developments in miniaturisation of components, in bio-proofing electronics and in wireless conductivity. You can use a hell of a lot of the information out there.

Where will back alley cybernetics be in 20 minutes from now ?

Dunno. Perhaps we'll have invented the Southpaw and a couple of us will have a sense of north. Perhaps I'll be in hospital dying of systemic sepsis. Maybe someone will give me a goddamn job so I can afford some components. Who knows.

Could you please contrast said kitchen developments with moneyed developments ? What difference does money make ? Bio-augmentation ?

It seems to make one come up with interesting, hyper-expensive and highly theoretical ideas (hey wouldn't it be cool if nanos could transport oxygen for low-sat patients whose red blood cells can't do it ?) that can't be implemented, or can only be implemented for a lot of money and are therefore limited to the extremely rich (the various dubious strategies for life extension and the whole field of cryogenics comes to mind).

Basically you can't compare biohacking to moneyed developments in the various sciences. It's just not the same thing. I don't have money for genetic experimentation with retinal efficiency, for instance, but I also don't have to wait several years for ethics approval and grants if I want to try something out.

What is your philosophy ? Self harm ?

I don't have a philosophy about it. It's a symptom of many different problems that many different people I'm in contact with suffer from, and despite rumour's efforts, it's not linked to biohacking. The one is not a form of the other, and vice versa. It would be great if none of us had to resort to cutting ourselves up to cope, just like it would be great if people didn't see scars on someone's arms and assume a bunch of judgemental bullshit about attention-seeking and necessity, but the real world is not great.

You stated in your talk that curiosity outweighs the need for biological safety. Could you elaborate ?

I get so many emails that say I should stop what I'm doing in case I get hurt, or that the scars and pain can't be worth the payoff of minor sensory expansion. People say "leave it to the scientists in labs" and "you're a danger to kids who will follow you" and "what about if you get sepsis ?!". I'm not with those people. If I were cautious, I would never have gotten anywhere.

Has your curiosity, philosophy, self harm and augmentation led to any diagnosis of mental illness ? Thoughts on possible diagnosis ?

I am diagnosed with unstable emotional personality disorder (borderline personality disorder to Americans), chronic episodic major depression and opiate dependence. All of these predate my experimentation by quite a way, although the UEPD was initially mistaken for Asperger's syndrome as it has similar symptoms in some people. To be honest my illnesses don't really have anything to do with biohacking except when they put me out of action.

If the question meant do I think the diagnoses are legit or just based on psychiatrists not understanding what I do, no, there really are things wrong with me. I might wish there weren't but that's the way it is.

In your videos you speak of "the Southpaw", a cybernetic compass. Could you update the readers on your progress or lack thereof ?

Right now I have just come back from a long illness, so there's not any progress to speak of, unfortunately. You should check biohack.me for updates on it and threads about what other people are contributing to the project, since that's the main hub for this sort of thing - there'll also be updates on my blog, but biohack.me has more users.

Could you briefly provide guidance to our readers who may want a minor cybernetic augmentation ?

I'm in the process of writing guides for what I know how to do, so if anyone wants to put an RFID tag under their skin or make and insert EM sensory nodes, I can tell them how to do that. Email me with "guides request" in the subject and I'll add you to the list of people to distribute them to when they're done. I don't work very fast, though. What I suggest is asking your doctors about it first in case they are willing to help you, because it's so much easier with help regardless of what you're doing.

What do you recommend under current tech, i.e. where to begin ?

Maybe start with fingertip nodes - they're easy to make, and the payoff is large for little expense. The insertion is agony, though, it's really not for everyone.

Can you be contacted for guidance and/or a walkthrough ?

Yeah, of course. As above, if you want the guides I can easily add you to the list for distribution. I can't answer all mails due to the amount of them I get but if the answer isn't in my FAQ I can probably help you personally. Just don't be offended if you get a copypasta telling you to read the FAQ - it's not personal.

Are you aware of others practicing in this field ?

I'm afraid not. Checking biohack.me is your best bet to find other biohackers.

What is in the near future for you ? Cybernetic augmentation ?

Same thing as always, still working on the Southpaw. It will take a while.

Could you explain some terms ?

- **Practical transhumanism, H+ :** H+ is just short for transhumanism ("humanity plus"

augmentation/improvement). "Practical transhumanism" is a phrase I coined to describe actually fucking doing something about it, since at the time there was an overwhelming trend for those who called themselves transhumanists to be mostly people who wrote books about how awesome it would be if they had nanite blood and a robot body, and the fans of the books. "Practical transhumanist" is a differentiating term, referring to what is now also called a biohacker.

- **Grinding :** I didn't hear this until last year. It seems to refer to the same thing as "biohacking" or "practical H+".
- **Cybernetics :** I'd say the use of artificial components to improve the efficacy or functionality of the human body. However, I avoid using the term myself, because it seems to connotate a very heavily modified human being, to an extent that people use it to describe something I neither am nor ever could achieve. Equally, I don't use the word "cyborg" - it's too dramatic. It means Motoko Kusanagi, not me.
- **Wetware :** it just refers to electronics situated inside the body.

"My world became a maze of metal plates, and logic gates and opiates" - Did you write this phrase and what does it mean to you ?

I did not write it - it's from a song called Wetware written about me by a friend of mine, [Spoon](). My MP3 of the track became corrupted, so I can't give it to you, but the lyrics were :

Chorus :
I'm gonna short circuit, my wires crossed
I've been disconnected, my memories have been lost
Don't wanna wait for Masamune's solid state shell
Just pass me that fucking scalpel, I'll do it all by myself

Society is a charade, it's our parade
Of the laws we've made and the souls we've saved

I augment my cranium so I can feel
I got neodymiums and modules of steel
Though my flesh may be torn, or my senses depressed
I'm implanted babylon!

[chorus]

My world became a maze of metal plates
And logic gates and opiates.

I insert an aperture of silicon di
So I can know my temperature when I'm high
I despise the sanctified, faith and pride
You're beings of meat, brains, bone and hide

[solo, chorus]

He's quite a talented man, really. I was hugely flattered to have a song written about me, and that line in particular is very descriptive. Hence its presence as part of my blog and a circuit-board/maze tattoo on my right arm.

What comes to mind when I say "Cyberpunk" ?

St. Gibson and the movement that he started. I've been described as part of that movement, but I don't know anymore whether I really fit the description of a cyberpunk.

Have you ever read William Gibson's "Neuromancer" and if so, what did you think of it ?

I've read everything the man ever wrote. He was a visionary, not to mention a master storyteller. There are some problems in how he characterises women within his writing, but that was a feature of every author of his time and he was far less affected by it than some others of the genre. I spent quite some time, as I suspect we all did, pissing and moaning that my world was nothing as glamourous, retro and advanced as he had imagined it would be. As you know, I decided to do something about that, but the inspiration largely came from Gibson and the various offshoot authors of cyberpunk books and manga (yeah, I used to read manga. Spank my ass and call me a weeaboo).

Please don't think I'm comparing myself to William Gibson, by the way; I write too, but not well or in the same genre, and I am not the world-shaker that he has become through his work. He really changed things, and I want to generate a tiny fraction of the change he did. The difference is that he used literature, whereas I am using experimentation; and that he was very, very good at that, whereas I am one mediocre biohacker with the luck to have some media attention every now and again. They will never call me St. Lepht.

Links

[Sapiens Anonym](#)
> Lepht's Blog

[Sapiens Anonym FAQ](#)
> Read this first

[Cybernetics for the Masses](#)
> Lepht's lecture at the 27th Chaos Communication Congress

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