EMBRACING CYBERCULTURE ON GRAPHIC DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about exploring the concept of Cyberculture on graphic design. Today, people from the different background of age and culture are engaged in using personal computers, smartphones, and even digital cameras. They are known as the active media users. They are the new inventors of graphic design, digital images, animation and films in cyberspace. This study uses a thematic lens to describe writings on popular Cyberculture. The interesting part of this section is the construction of cyberpunk and cyborg that engaged in many popular Cyberculture writings. Two lenses derived from popular Cyberculture were assessed; one is cyberpunk and two is the cyborg. These two lenses are the foundation for reviewing Cyberculture on graphic design and a reflection of graphic design involvement with the computer and the Internet are discussed. The finding on graphic design in the lens of Cyberpunk seen in design illustration of favourite comic characters. Where, active media users may transform the iconic characters into cyberpunk that portray dark colours with streaks of neon colours and lighting. While from the lens cyborg, a graphic design series can be seen in the conceptual digital art by fans illustrations that revolve around popular movies and TV series. When graphic design took notice of the cyberspace, it increased the popularity for active media users to implement a graphic design into their personal artwork. The significance of this paper is apparent that the internet is a global mass communication and had made graphic design plagiarism informal and confusing. This paper is merely an introduction to popular Cyberculture writing and its influences on graphic design. As expected the effect of Cyberculture on graphic design is far from being categorised into Cyberculture Studies; let alone being part of a Critical Cyberculture. New studies may embark on a critical Cyberculture, which involves politics, law, education, health, economy, trade, and art.

Keywords:
Cyberculture, graphic design, cyborg, cyberpunk

INTRODUCTION

The question here is to reflect on what is Cyberculture? Is it a form of study? Or is it a social phenomenon that linked with the Internet and network communication? There are many theories in terms for explaining Cyberculture. Some researcher suggested, 'To define Cyberculture is to engage in obsolescence or uselessness (Read and Gessler, 1996:306). Explained by Marcinkowski (2014), Cyberculture is a concept that can be applied to many fields of studies such as human development and participation in current culture. As scholars suggested, Cyberculture is not a concept that merely examines cyberspace issues, new media, and the internet. As an example, Cyberculture studies may involve the exploration and observation about cyberspace such as the study of online communities, the issues of Multi-user domain (or MUD), and the study on ethnography in a virtual environment, gender issues in cyberspace; and the list goes on. In his book entitled *The Language of New Media*, Lev Monavich (2002) had described cyberspace as '…the study of various social phenomena associated with the Internet and other new forms of network communication'. A significant portion of Cyberculture, can be characterised by its descriptive nature, dualistic ideology, and frontier metaphors (Silver, D., 2000).

Manuel Castells (2005) had suggested in a book *The Rise of the Network Society* that emphasize on the 'real Virtuality' (or Cyberculture) is a most valuable concept; it is relatively a brand-new model of culture. There are two qualities described in the real Virtuality model is the information that the integrated communication system is known as the cyberspace. Second the scope of time has the concept of history, presence, and future bound and connected. The changes in the traditional concept of culture from local or national culture to Cyberculture, are clearly linked to the growth of the Internet and then in particular World Wide Web (WWW). On Marcinkowski (2014) paper had addresses Piot Zawojski's (2010) opinion on Eugene Gorny's definition of the development of Cyberculture. The first stage of Cyberculture was built from the bases of dualistic ideology. The most important feature of this thinking is between online and offline world. The first stage of Cyberculture becomes a Popular Cyberculture due to the journalistic writings in newspapers about the online world and these writings were descriptive in nature. For example, information from journalist writings was popular on the topics of 'Internet as frontier' metaphor, that suggests a communication system known as the cyberspace. The second stage of Cyberculture would consider the online and offline world to be interconnected and attached. In this stage holistic 'worldpicture' can be created via cyberspace and become the tool of reality. This stage has been characterized as a Cyberculture studies. In Cyberculture studies focuses mostly on virtual communities and online identities. For example, in Silver (2000) on *Introducing Cyberculture* had claimed there are many scholars (Jones 1997; Kinney 1996; Kling 1996; Rosenzweig 1999) have noted the dualistic ideology in popular Cyberculture often took the form of dystopian rants or utopian raves. What Silver (2000) means by dualistic ideology on dystopian rants or utopian raves is the cultural critics, such as; the societies, the journalist was blaming the Internet for deteriorating language, politics, economic segregation, and social breakdown. For instance, Birkerts (1994) recommended that the Internet and computer technologies had provided the user's to decline literacy and become a less grounded person in the spirit of reality. A study from an early journalist Julian Dibbel (Dibbell, J., 1993) titled 'A Rape in Cyberspace' had suggested the in Cyberculture studies on cyberspace is that people still meet but not face to face. That is, Cyberspace offers real opportunities to communities and individuals to communicate, to interact in a virtual community, however, without the physical geography found in the neighbourhood, city, or country. In Rheingold (1993) had defined a virtual community as;

> 'A group of people who may or may not meet one another face-to-face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks. In cyberspace, we chat and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and metagames, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. We do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind (58).'

People from a different background of age and culture could engage in using personal computers, smartphones, and even digital cameras. They are known as the active new media users who generate content that is motivated by the same drive as an artist; namely the creative will. These users of the internet and mobile technologies have become the creators of digital images, films, and graphic designs in the cyberspace in which values are created (see: Marcinkowski, 2014). In today's generation, everyday people use smartphones, computers or tablets and anyone with an internet access can communicate to share and upload their thoughts and works of art. Web sites such as DeviantArt, Pixiv, and SheezyArt allow its' users to upload illustration (traditional and digital), writings and even animations to be criticized and appreciated by their peers. An example such as music and short films uploaded to websites such as YouTube and NicoNicoDouga for the same reasons. In fact, many professionals have even used such sites to promote their personal design works as well as any upcoming projects. Other sites such as Kickstarter even allow users to develop

their next idea to gain project funds, which is to make those ideas a reality. StudioADI, for example, used Kickstarter to help fund their in-house film called Project Harbinger Down. However, let's embrace the concept of Cyberculture on graphic design. Likely, that when reviewing graphic design in the lens of computer and the internet, and exploring the meaning of Cyberculture; it can be more complex than just popular Cyberculture.

METHODOLOGY

Cyberpunk
The interesting part of this section is reviewing how popular Cyberculture writings that were descriptive had made graphic design became involved in the creation of computer graphic design. This section is the part where the construction of lens on how cyberpunk and cyborg engage in the production of popular Cyberculture. From this point of view, then will a reflection on graphic design involvement in the computer and the Internet would be discussed. In particular, technology is becoming a popular trend, there are also a group of minorities via online that felt threatened by the idea of technology; governing the organic purity of the human race is absolute. As Cyberpunk ideology claims the human society are controlled by computers. The followers of cyberpunk had developed from the notion of limited dualism which is the dystopian rants or utopian raves. The cyberpunk genre was built on science fiction early literatures, movies and video games of this genre points to fear that the world may eventually control solely by computers (see: Caballaro, D., 2000).

When Pivato (1984) in the History of Cyberpunk discusses that no one can truly agree when the cyberpunk genre began and by whom, than many seem to attribute cyberpunk to William Gibson's novel Neuromancer (1984). However, some would argue that the cyberpunk visual characteristic was the result of Ridley Scott's vision of a dystopian future presented in his movie Blade Runner (1982). But even more, would argue that the seed of the cyberpunk genre indeed planted from Philip K. Dick's novel, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968). It is likely that, the cyberpunk genre is a speculative fiction genre. Its focus is mostly centred on the transformative effects of advanced scientific techniques, particularly computer technology, information technology, and cybernetic technology. The style also concentrates on the changing implications of these things in social order, or rather, how society breaks due to these systems. Cyberpunk implicated the changing effects of social order and how society breaks due to the empowerment of technologies. The style is notable in having an unwelcoming outlook of the future and technological advances, or rather, how selfishness is inherently a part of human nature and no matter how advance our technologies are our nature would find a way to dissolve it. A typical story of a popular Cyberculture would involve the protagonists of the cyberpunk genre are usually computer hackers, rebels, and anti-heroes. The antagonists, on the other hand, are typically multinational corporations; police state or even an entire government, which may lead by a wealthy businessman or corrupt politicians, as an example.

In this regards on expressing a sense of rebellion in the context of graphic design (or the art) relationship as the creative person are often stereotyped as the rebel outsider. The 'punk' portion of cyberpunk suggests dark and cynical visuals. That the visuals of cyberpunk borrows heavily on elements of film noir, detective fiction and a postmodern deconstruction of the conflicting effects of technology due to abuse, mishandling, misuse, and corruption leading to a dystopian and oppressive future. For the most part, expresses a sense of rebellion, signifying a category of cultural revolution. For example, as suggested by Alfrey, a rebel is an individual who wants to lead rather than follows, s/he capable of generating innovative ideas without the need for an external exchange with other sources of ideas (see: Alfrey, P., n.d.). In terms of graphic design in the cyberpunk lens, the visual of it would portray the concept of dark colours that are used prominently in designs from graphic artist/designers, with streaks of neon colours and light effect which contrasts with dark colours. Cyberpunk cities are also usually designed using only one colour with different hues, depending on the mood and setting (Petkovic, V., 2014). The clothing worn in cyberpunk genre is mostly known to have futuristic characteristic, with materials ranging from leather to futuristic fabric

(Melell, 2012). Previously in the early days of cyberpunk, the designs were usually viewed as rustic, albeit futuristic. There are other designers suggesting that, due to the popularity of the aesthetic and Zen perception of *Apple* design, cyberpunk design has become more slick and streamlined and still retaining a rustic feel of a cyberpunk.

Cyborg

Whereas Cyborg theory first emerged in the 1960s when Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline wrote a report on "Cyborgs and Space" (see: Clynes, M. & Kline, N., 1960), as the term cybernetics often incorporates an implicit anticipation of the future (see: Gandy, 2005). In the 1960s, Halacy, D. S. (1965) later wrote a journal on "Cyborg: Evolution of the Superman" that had introduced an idea of 'new frontier,' which identified as the relationship between mind and matter, among the 'inner space' to 'outer space.' The Cyborg concept gradually evolved into an even wider collection of fields ranging from in vitro fertilization to science fiction cinema (see: Gandy, M., 2005). Especially within anthropology, scholars had begun expressing a new subfield which is cyborg anthropology. Donna Haraway's had written in Cyborg Manifesto in 1985 that could be considered the founding document that addresses cyborg anthropology. First is exploring the philosophical and secondly is reviewing the sociological ramifications of the term. According to Donna Haraway's essay, the concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, distinctly by those separating humans from animal and human from machine. She had written, 'The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the primary family. The cyborg would not understand the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust'. In more recent Amber Case (2011) has been responsible for explicating the concept of Cyborg Anthropology to the general public. Amber Case studies include the interaction between humans and computers. She is exploring how our relationship with information is changing the way cultures think, act, and understands their worlds (see: Case, 2011). The objective of much scholars study cyborg anthropology is the cyborg. A cyborg traditionally defined as a system having an organic and inorganic component. Today the cyborg concept has often misapplied. According to Armitage, J. (1997), cyborgs are everywhere and multiplying, for example, people who have an implanted pacemaker or attached prostheses are certainly cyborgs. The range of cyborg technologies, in recent cyborg cultural theory discussed the role of space technology, war, medicines and the imagination in the production of cyborgs (see: Gandy, M., 2005), can restore health problems and normalising the deaths, and thus it brought fear to society on superhuman, that suggest cyborg can plausibly become a more efficient killer (see: Armitage, 1997). Some life examples of human cyborgs are Sterlac formerly known as 'Stelios Arcadiou' and Neil Harbisson. Sterlac, a performance artist, uses his body to elaborate a performance involving technology based on the cyborg concept. One of Sterlac performances in 1980 had used a mechanical, human-like hand that is attached to his right arm naming it "Third Hand" (1980). It uses a wrist rotating mechanism with an elementary sense of touch attached to the artist body which he performs acoustically with his brain waves, muscles, pulse, and blood flow signals. Stelarc's projects on the trans-human art had made science fiction seem plausible; his works had employed virtual reality, robotics, medical instrument, prosthetic, and the Internet (see: Stelarc, 2015). As soon as, Neil Harbisson, a contemporary artist and cyborg activists was born with a condition known as 'achromatopsia' it had only allowed him to see in greyscale. Neil acknowledged as the pioneer, human being to having an antenna implanted in his skull. With the antenna, he can see visible colours (and even invisible colours such as infrareds and ultraviolet) through sound waves and he also can receive images, video, images, music, even phone calls directly into his head using the antenna as an external device for mobile phones or as satellites. Today, Neil Harbisson is officially recognised as a cyborg (Harbisson, N., 2010:1) and a contemporary artist and cyborg activists (see: Jeffries, S., 2014). Possible that, when reviewing graphic design in the perspective of the Cyberculture there are various relations that links cyborg and graphic design. For example, the concept of combining organic organisms (cyborg) and technology is seen in comic graphic illustration in, character design in game development, or even in promotional items such as movie posters. This could be seen in Cyborg Superman (1993) by Dan Jurgen, Fantastic

Universe (April, 1995) magazine illustration by Kelly Freas 1955 found in Al van Ruff (2015), and promotional poster campaign for Spaghetti TV, designed by Anthony Neil Dart (2011). The digital industry of Cyberculture had created a knowledge-based society surrounded by high technology. As the popularity of Cyberculture increases graphic design also had taken the opportunity, becoming part of the Digital Revolution Era.

DISCUSSION

Graphic design through the lens of cyberpunk and cyborg
Graphic design is known by many as the art or a set of skill of combining text and pictures in books, advertisements, magazines or newsletters, etc., when the rise of the Internet became a mass global communication network in the mid-1990s, artists immediately recognized the exciting possibilities for creative innovation that came with it. The concept of computer graphic design and its software had introduced a fast and informal method for graphic design and yet technologies also presented challenges to graphic designers' today. Today graphic design has become a product of technology and art with the combination computer software's and graphic design (see: Dan, L., 2011).   For the graphic designer that used the computer and the internet were more directed to communicate visual artwork in cyberspace. It was not that they were making only digital art/design (see: Greene, R., 2004). But, they are creating artwork with the support of digital media such as internet and personal computing. The Internet and personal computing can be seen as a medium for the individuals to communicate and share ideas in cyberspace. The graphic design expert can move between different art worlds, and thus as a possible means to self-promote their artwork in the Cyberculture ground (see: Hansson, K., 2010). Individuals and groups in the design discipline were quick on leveraging the internet and computer technologies to question and radically redefine the conventions of design, tackling some of the most pressing current trends (see: Quesenberry, L., & Sykes, B. W., 2008). Art and design discipline had covered artwork in email art, Web sites, artist-designed software, art and design, product development, political activism, communication, and internet Art (see: Greene, R., 2004). The Cyberculture perspective had evidence that artists are actively using online technologies to involve and self-promote their artwork. In the traditions of art history, creating new forms of art, and to move into fields of activity beyond the traditional artistic realm (see: Greene, R., 2004). Of course, this encapsulates the graphic designers as well. Cyberpunk was also popularised in Cyberculture as fans design illustration of a favourite comic characters in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 below by anonymous that featured *'Sailor moon'*, *'Cyborg Cyclops'* and *'Mortal Combat'* transforming them into cyberpunk that portray dark colours with streaks of neon colours and lighting effect that contrast with dark colours.
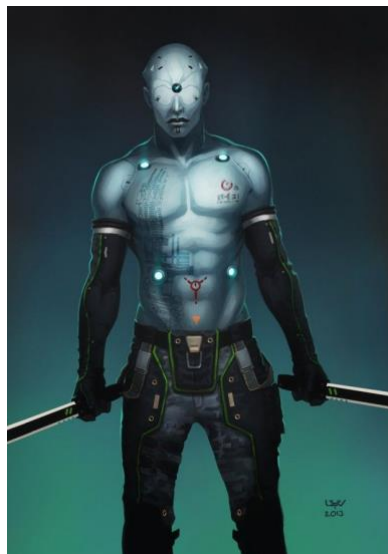

Figure 2: *Sailor moon* by anonymous
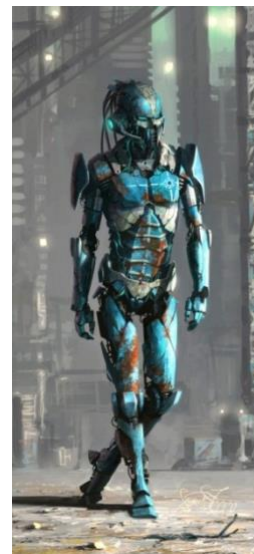
Figure 3: *Cyborg Cyclops* by anonymous

Figure 1: *Mortal Combat* by anonymous

Example on cyborg can be seen in conceptual digital art by fans illustrations revolves around popular movies and TV series that was spread in Cyberculture can be seen in Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6 below such as 'Robocop' by anonymous[1], 'Darth Vader' by anonymous, and 'Teen Titan Cyborg' by anonymous.

Figure 5: *'Robocop'* by anonymous

Figure 4: *'Darth Vader' by anonymous*

Figure 6: *'Teen Titan Cyborg'* by anonymous

Besides the usage of graphic design in Cyberculture such as cyborgs, cyberpunk as discussed prior, most graphic designers use the computer and the internet also to self-promote the work and producing original work. Nowadays, anyone with an internet access has the opportunity to share and upload their thoughts and works of art. Websites such as DeviantArt (see: The Devious Technology Team, 2015), Pixiv (see: Tokyo Japan., 2015), and Behance (see: Part of the Adobe Family, 2015) allow its' users to upload illustration (traditional and digital), writings and even animations to be criticized and appreciated by their peers. In fact, many professionals have even used such websites to promote their own personal design works as well as any upcoming projects. While websites such as *WeLoveFineTees* (see: Mighty Fine, 2015) and *Threadless (see:* skinnyCorp LLC, 2015) provide opportunities for designers to showcase their designs and even sell them for a profit should the demand for their design is high enough. Needless to say, most of these designs are based on popular cultures that exist throughout the internet. Other examples towards design that were picked up from Cyberculture and re-used in their work can be seen in Figure x, in Design (A) T-shirt design featuring 'Leeroooy Jenkins', Figure x, in Design (B) Phone case design featuring 'Robocop', Figure x, in Design (C) T-shirt design featuring 'Sailor Moon', and Figure x, in Design (D) Ties Design is featuring 'Star Wars'

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[1] It is best to keep the person as *'Anonymous'* for ethical purposes

Figure 7: Design (A), T-shirt
'Leeroy Jenkins'

Figure 8: Design
(B), Phone case
'Robocop'

Figure 9: Design (C), T-shirt
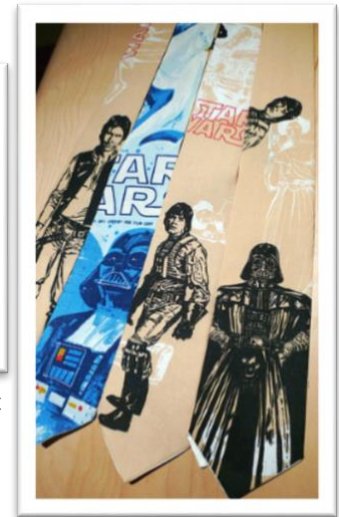*'Sailor moon'*

Figure 7: Design (D), Ties
'Star Wars'

As mentioned above, the internet has become an indispensable tool in sharing and promoting design by graphic designers either by professionals or fans.

Merely the tip of the iceberg

Now, what are cyberpunk, cyborg, and graphic design have in common? It is true that traditionally graphic design is a process with the combination of making art and the flexibility of technical skill in the creation of advertisements, magazines or books. Moreover, the combination of making art and the flexibility of technical skills is needed for structuring photomontage, which is a technique derived from DADA art movement (see: Meggs, 1998 pp.238). The technique of structuring photomontage uses cutting and pasting pictures and words that give various meanings in the art. Today, define in Dictionary.com, graphic design is a profession of visual communication; it combines images and words to carry information to an audience. The photomontage technique practiced today can be observed in the photo manipulation a cut and paste technique in computer Graphic Software's. The effect of Cyberculture on graphic design is far from being categorised into Cyberculture studies; let alone being part of the critical Cyberculture agenda. This paper merely a tip of the iceberg, particularly an introduction to popular Cybercultre writing and its influences on graphic design. It is apparent that the internet is a global mass communication and had made design plagiarism informal and confusing. Furthermore, it is important, for the reduction of concerns to plagiarism and the culture-wide anxiety towards the originality of the artwork is to have integrity and to acknowledge where the previous aspiration resourced. When graphic design took notice of the cyberspace of Cyberculture, it had increased popularity with users to implement a graphic design in self-promotion. Thus, this made plagiarism easy. Cyberculture had welcomed the increase concerns towards trademarks and copyright law. Nevertheless, the heart and soul of copyright law is not the ideal concept of originality, but the consequences of plagiarism (see: Buranen, L., & Roy, A. M. (1999). Issues of plagiarism are made complicated in Cyberculture, with the increasing use of the internet as a self-promotional platform and the prior rise of applying plagiarism to a graphic designer's independent visual design. It is still a relatively modern construct of protecting the anxiousness to an assumption of 'intellectual property' theft (see: Buranen, L., et al., 1999). Simultaneously, plagiariser could attain economic independence with the value of the graphic designers' independent visual designs (see: Buranen, L., et al., 1999). For example, another usage of graphic design that could view in Cyberculture is the production of a meme. One influential strategy for a graphic designer can use to self-promote their work is by implementing a meme strategy as a guerrilla marketing; a marketing strategy popularised by Jay Conrad Levinson (2007). Guerrilla marketing written in a book that

reviewed the meme strategy known to use the meme as a self-explanatory method, using words, action, sounds, and pictures that communicate an idea. A Meme in guerrilla marketing purposes is to profit instantly or selling or inspiring, and even demonstrate the promoted service or product. Nevertheless, guerrilla marketing had also raised concerns about meme strategy related to ethical problems with social media, as companies large or small, planning of advertising without taking into consideration. Such as fact to advertise their brands are likely to violate trademark and copyright laws to particular ethical problems (Ay, C., et al. 2010: 283). For example, this type of liability can arise in Meme marketing campaigns on social media where a business accompanies a picture of its product with a popular slogan or the name or picture of a celebrity. Let's say, for example, your marketing team uses the name and picture of a well-known singer, such as Taylor Swift, to create a funny advertisement next to your product without her permission (Nicholas, R., 2014: 2), thus this process violates trademark and copyright law. Another example, the meme idea has become so powerful, that it had become a meme itself as it spread from one mind to another mind to characterise the concept of all memes (see: Wilkins, J., 2008). The spread of memes can provide a business that involves product marketing, public relations, sales, and advertising to embracing the meme on the internet. The purpose can create a marketing strategy that used the distribution of meme in social media or social network to selling a product or service, and even creates awareness or trend (see: Moutinho, L., et al., 2014). There are many competitors when it comes to governing the originality of the artists/designers independent visual designs. Since the internet is known as global, a libertarian, an egalitarian that constantly and rapidly evolving and largely devoid social context (see: Katz, A., 2010). Nonetheless, the concept of originality as Alfrey, P., (n.d) had expressed is not complete because its identity is subject to a scale of relative values and knowledge, it is conditional to time and place. At the same time, plagiarism in the context of 'theft of intellectual property' has been around for as long as humans have produced symbols and writing (see: Maurer, H., et al., 2006; Dawkins, R., 1976). However, acknowledging, the Internet Law, is still critical to the global regulation. In governing originality of the artist/designers hard work (see: Fromer, J. C., 2010; Kulesza, J., 2012) because we need integrity to acknowledge the author's rights of their original work (Howard, R. M., 2007). Other forms of commercial products affected by popular Cyberculture are products based directly on such things. One may think that such products are official merchandise produced by the actual companies owning the promotional properties, but in truth they were produced by third party groups, most of which are fans of the original properties on which their products were based on. The best examples would be the T-shirts that previously mentioned above, but this product also extends to figurines, fan-made comics (doujins in Japanese), short films, animations, buttons, stickers, bookmarks, posters, illustrations, mugs, and video games (flash or even full on 3d). Lastly, yes, this paper is merely an introduction to popular Cyberculture writing, and its influences on graphic design. It is possible that when reviewing graphic design, particularly on the computer and the internet, we can expect more complex social studies rather than just a popular Cyberculture. It is inevitable that the Cyberculture studies involve other field of studies such as politics, law, education, health, economy, trade, and art. The next question to embark on is why it is important to have active media users of computer and internet aware of the formal system of copyright; online and offline?

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