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## interview?
14 messages

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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>                     Sun, Feb 7, 2016 at 9:11 PM
To: 4@torley.com

Hi Torley,

I've been following you on Flickr for a while, because I really like the Second Life imagery you capture. Due to the nature of your interests, I'd love to interview you for my cyberpunk newsletter Exolymph. Is that something you have time for? We could do it via voice or text, whichever you prefer.

Thanks,
Sonya

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**TORLEY** <4@torley.com>                                    Wed, Feb 10, 2016 at 9:15 AM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

Friendly greetings Sonya!

Thanks for getting in touch. I am obsessed with many things cyberpunk, and that includes virtual worlds with Second Life! Exolymph looks cool.

How'd you find me?

I think text would work best for now — have you also heard the sci-fi/cyberpunk music I do? A lot of it revolves around themes like hacking sequences, alternate universes, etc. http://torley.com :)

Please let me know how you'd like to go forth!
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TORLEY - Amplify your awesome @ http://torley.com

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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>                    Wed, Feb 10, 2016 at 12:20 PM
To: TORLEY <4@torley.com>

Awesome! For starters I'll just ask some general questions about your background and inspiration. Then we can go from there! (I found you when I was searching Creative Commons images on Flickr.)

1) How and when did you get into Second Life? How have virtual worlds and virtual spaces affected your artistic practice?

2) What interests you about the cyberpunk ethos, in general? Do you see yourself as participating in current cyberpunk culture or future cyberpunk culture? (If that distinction makes sense.)
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**TORLEY** <4@torley.com>                                    Wed, Feb 10, 2016 at 4:19 PM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

Let me know if you want more or less details, but here goes!

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Ah Sonya, you phrase these questions so succinctly yet thoughtfully!

So, in a nutshell — or watermelon rind, as watermelons are my signature fruit and color — it was 2004 and I had suffered a lot of personal tragedy, such as my Dad dying, having hearing loss (hyperacusis), and other rotten shit. I was feeling pretty down and wanted to have hope for the future of my life. Especially since my direction — insofar as a "purpose to what I'm doing here" — was pretty unclear and felt muddy. I went to the library, read various sci-fi/transhumanist books, including novels by Neal Stephenson, William Gibson, etc. I read about uploading one's brain into a digital space, life extension, and similar concepts.

I was re-energized, and wondered if there was a "real" (as real as real can be) place where I could explore some of these ideas. I learned of the cyberpunk city "Nexus Prime" in the Second Life virtual world — almost all content created by its users! — constructed on the aptly-named Gibson region, featured in the New World Notes blog and others. There was such a richness and history to its community, it seemed as I read stories before diving in. The people who made Gibson seemed like characters out of a comic book — a superhero team! I got glossy eyes thinking of the possibility of being able to meet them inworld... and being able to have an easily-morphable avatar form to represent myself seemed very appealing, with all the freedoms it would grant.

I debated signing up for an account (at the time it was a 7-day trial and $10 for a Basic account afterwards), but it turned out to be the best $10 I ever spent. The Residents (inhabitants and customers of Second Life) were so welcoming! At the end of that week I committed to being inworld, and I've been here ever since. As a metaphor that worked on such a practical level, my first avatar was an amplified version of my physical self, then I projected further into the future — and became an incarnation of my time-traveling daughter, who came back to tell me "THINGS ARE GOING TO BE OKAY". It was an internal narrative exercise that I chose to share openly, and it all worked out. I wouldn't have believed it at the time. It's just as wild as it sounds and helped me build confidence through rough months, to where I gained the strength to share my story and help others. I continue to love hearing stories of how Second Life positively transformed someone's first life.

Eventually, I was hired by Linden Lab (makers of Second Life), which I am immensely grateful for as it changed my first life even further. I continue to work here on all of their products, including Sansar — our next-generation virtual world. It's been a delight watching and participating in everything that's grown and changed over the past decade and more, and yet the constant themes of creative expression and empowered self-identification remain strong as ever.

And those pictures you found — I still explore rabidly, sharing cyberpunk and many more cool spots so others can come and see for themselves. And using the inworld camera, I take shots from my perspective, or particular things (from the lovely to the WTF) I find notable. I celebrate that artistry — someone may be an extremely introverted individual who ends up comfortable with using SL as a medium... they wind up touching so many people, so profoundly, with their art in SL — whether it's a sculpture or a city. Many of these places are showcased in the Second Life Destination Guide, which is a curated guide to our best places.

Since I was little, I've been hooked on visions of a future. Some more dystopian than others. There are several prior works of art which've inspired me hugely in my outlook and approach. Are you familiar with The Mind's Eye videos? The second and third one in particular, Beyond the Mind's Eye

and Gate to the Mind's Eye, respectively scored by Jan Hammer and Thomas Dolby, contained such compelling computer-graphic storytelling paired with irresistible soundtracks. They led me on the road to virtual reality which I am still traveling to this day. The ability to further manifest what you see — well, in your mind's eye!

I work on multimedia across the spectrum. When I compose electronic music, I do see "cinematics" in my head. They come to me with several "thoughtlines", or "themes". Music that might accompany a hacking/digital intrusion sequence forms one such prominent vein. Imaginary landscapes cluster around these nodes, shifting things of glimmering, vibrant color. Newer aesthetic words like "vaporwave" also cross-pollinate. I've been musically influenced by so many of my Second Life adventures, visiting the "builds" created by diverse Residents. Listening to their stories and knowing that even though our technology gets more advanced, we work in tandem with the machines to make more art... thinking back to what Kraftwerk said about being a "sound worker" and conducting experiments. I iterate with these ideas... so certainly, threads cross over from my work with Linden Lab. The artists I admire most, such as Philip K. Dick and Wendy Carlos (composer for Tron), repeatedly revisit and even ram into the same themes, and reinforce them over a lifetime. I relate a lot to this.

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2) What interests you about the cyberpunk ethos, in general? Do you see yourself as participating in current cyberpunk culture or future cyberpunk culture? (If that distinction makes sense.)
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First, touching on stereotypes that are so prominently identified with the genre: I first watched Blade Runner on a fuzzy VHS, and the whole spectacle gripped me on what must've been a 14" CRT monitor. It was like finding the remnants of a lost civilization I in some way wanted to be part of, despite it taking place in the then-distant future of 2020. There was beauty and horror, possibilities and oppression.  I used to download MOD music files from BBSes, and one of them was (I would learn much later) the Blade Runner "End Titles" by Vangelis. Many years later, I saw Blade Runner in a cozy bookstore, on a fairly big screen with crisp Blu-Ray, and it brought the whole thing full circle, because I knew some of the geeky audience around me are actively making and shaping the future, building VR tech, 3D printers, and other innovative stuff. It also reminded me of how some NASA engineers credit Star Trek with their professional trajectory — art and life in this intertwined dance.

Anyway, I've long romanticized big cities with towering skyscrapers, and couriers scurrying in the dark, running past neon signs with some data that was too precarious to simply upload... so it had to be done sneakernet-style. I definitely enjoy the whole audiovisual package, even if it's the most superficial images of what comes to mind when a cyberpunk trope is mentioned... and as a strain of sci-fi, to quote Gibson, to realize we are living in an unevenly-distributed future RIGHT NOW. It's happening all around us.

More recently, I've really enjoyed Mr. Robot with its unique take on the classic anti-authoritarian themes, and I'm super looking forward to Deus Ex: Mankind Divided. I'm a big fan of all that and I like to discuss those works.

For me, cyberpunk has always meant giving unpopular (minority) ideas a fighting chance. That has a musical parallel for me, because I buck overt repetition (which is conventionally not done in many electronic genres), conventional song structures, yet I LOVE a catchy melody. Anyway, it means a resistance to change the system, and augment one's personal self. Which is what I chose with my life path. One person can be the change in the world around them (apropos Gandhi) without being presumptuous about it. We each contain that power to alter the operation of the big machine, even if we may be "just" a gear or cog in the works. Megacorps fascinate me, and all the fictional marketing that goes into the worldbuilding process.

I also find it really funny how all sorts of additional terms have attempted to supplant cyberpunk, even as it "went out of style" not that long ago, it keeps coming back and being relevant. I can't think of a better word either, though aside from its popular themes as somewhat aforementioned, it's fair to say that semantically, "cyberpunk" encompasses both so much and so little stylistic variation.

So, while I don't draw a hard line where I do participate, culturally speaking, to paraphrase Bruce Lee, I've adapted what is useful... and damn does it make me feel alive.

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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>                    Thu, Feb 11, 2016 at 7:20 PM
To: ▓░TORLEY░▓ <4@torley.com>

I get the sense that you're quite optimistic. Is that true / do you agree? What are your thoughts on human nature?

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**▓░TORLEY░▓** <4@torley.com>                    Thu, Feb 11, 2016 at 7:45 PM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

Yes, I'm really optimistic and am pretty energized with positivity — perhaps in some way that's to make up for the time I was the complete opposite. But it tends to be a practical, not just a "hopeful" optimism. I find a lot of cynicism to be a waste of time that discourages progress and exploration of possibilities — having an abundant sense of humor is rewarding to me. Even if it gets weird.

Human nature is a big, messy ball of stuff. You commonly hear things like "people are the same everywhere" and "people want to be good", but the operative term there may be "want" — people struggle so hard to reach their goals. I see repeated, redundant mistakes not learned from. And ihere's so much distrust online, it results in dumb prejudice. We have been conditioned — by way of social media and such — to react quickly to what we read and see without a second thought. And a lot of those reactions are very, very hurtful to each other.

So, any optimism I have is tempered with empirical assessments. I don't consider myself a misanthrope, but I believe that when resources are limited and stress levels run high, humans turn on each other and reflect the bad habits from their environment. It's not as simple as that, but consider: after a joyful spectacle like New Year's or most big concert or sporting events, I've observed most humans will degrade themselves to utter rudeness and try to push each other out of the way. Alcohol is a factor, but then again, I believe being drunk may bring out someone's true "raw" state. I've been in the middle of those crowd crushes — it's fucking scary when you get separated from loved ones! I've seen mothers shove their babies-in-strollers as a sort of weapon-shield. I've seen a wild herd of humans barge their way past transit workers, using "the safety as a mob" to skip the queue and avoid paying fare. I've seen things... well, let's just say it would make Roy Batty shake his head. Rather than "the wisdom of the crowds", this is tantamount to "the dumbasses of the masses", and it isn't atypical.

Maybe the most terrifying thing is that humans aren't so dissimilar from the zombies we enjoy watching on shows like The Walking Dead or games like Dead Rising 3 — yet there's a message that runs throughout those tales, that the real monsters are the living humans. But when a human's needs are provided for and they feel safe yet willing to take risks, amazing things can happen when you link up several or more humans in this configuration. Trust, accountability, transparency (a crying shame some of these meaningful words get sullied into corporate buzzwords). The zombie/reptilian/monkey-brain must be overriden, however. Each of us can make conscious choices to better the world and those around us. It was because I was treated so well upon entering Second Life that I wanted to give back to the community and help others.

I suspect it ties into what Alvin and Heidi Toffler wrote about "future shock" all those years ago due to accelerating change — an added source of stress is having to keep up with all these gadgets evolving around us. Repeated learning without a chance to sit down and apply that knowledge seems like a waste. In the electronic music community, there's a related acronym: GAS, for Gear Acquisition Syndrome, this terrible tendency to keep buying stuff, thinking it'll be the miracle to unlock all your creativity, but you end up shallowly flitting over a pile of equipment and aren't any more artistically enriched until you can dedicate yourself to deeper focus. There's that word again, "focus", and it's probably one of my favorites. But there's much to learn from monks/nuns and those who are able to concentrate for great stretches.

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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>                    Fri, Feb 12, 2016 at 9:17 PM
To: ▓▓TORLEY▓▓ <4@torley.com>

I'm so curious about your daily life and your everyday environment. What is your home like? Your daily habits?

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**▓▓TORLEY▓▓** <4@torley.com>                    Sat, Feb 13, 2016 at 6:25 AM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

[redacted]

I prefer to scan photos and documents, rather than keep them taking up space. I care a lot about acquiring bigger, faster hard drives — SSDs are a godsend! But generally I don't like large pieces of furniture or things you can't fold. I think it's a very antiquated mindset to have things that don't serve you, and items that require constant maintenance are a real drain unless feel a sort of higher calling and really love it. I avoid those because they take away from my creativity, and idea-to-execution is severely important in my day-to-day life. So is doing quick checks weighing the benefits vs. burdens of something.

[redacted]

I don't have a lot of physical musical equipment. It's mostly "in the box" and virtualized (thank goodness for Virtual Studio Technology) but I do enjoy foot controllers (because they enable me to use all four limbs in tandem). In fact, when I take pics in Second Life and various games, I have a USB pedal I can repeatedly slam to trigger the snapshot command. I enjoy that tactile feeling.

[redacted]

Good daily habits are essential. I've found, from more advanced people I look up to, that what seems perfunctory may be vital to long-term well-being. What seems cold to others may be necessary to keep you going. For example, it's great to catch up with family and loved ones on the phone — but there should be topics in mind to address, intended outcomes. And if need be, an upper time limit. (If you've gotten other duties done and you've set a block of time aside to just wander with someone you care about, great!) Like the efficient parts of a business meeting, but preserving warmth and connection intact. Too much directionless yakking leads to decreased quality of conversation and unmemorable moments... and if you don't remember it, who cares? You certainly don't. I find it important to regularly question and improve on processes that, at one time, may have served me well, but no longer. What I say is in service of meaningful socialization.

I enjoy consuming Soylent 2.0 everyday. "Revolutionary" is an adjective not to be applied lightly, but it's saving me an accumulating amount of time. I always wake up and have a bottle or two to start my day. I'm drinking some as I communicate right now. A few bottles make up the majority of my meals.

[redacted] It's unfortunate there are many medical professionals who remain ignorant of Soylent's benefits and make certain judgments without delving deeper. I say this based on some recent, unhelpful experiences. But it's still in the early-ish days, and this is what tends to happens. I suppose Soylent is a cyberpunk ethos foodstuff — the target demographics are both diverse and fascinating. Yet we are all human, and time is a teacher that kills all its students. That's why I think their marketing is clever — they emphasize that Soylent does not outright replace conventional food, but FREES you to choose what meals you want to chew. Again, time vs. choices. Ah, when they get this down to feed more impoverished in other parts of the world, it will be remarkably meaningful. I'm excited.

I have a lot of timers and reminders that tell me when to get on things. It's easy to lose track. Creativity for me encompasses both rigorous discipline and freeform improvisation — like what Brian Eno said about control vs. surrender.

I am an evolved believer in polyphasic sleep which means I sleep several times a day — not "evolved" because I consider myself superior in that regard (although I certainly see present me's sleep habits to be better than past me), but because I've naturally adapted over time to find this right for my forward actions. I often need to take a mid-day nap or two to "vent" and "cleanse" what has happened earlier. A shower may precede it, as good a form of ritualistic cleansing as any.

I wake up early. I've been a night owl before. I like being awake for some portion of the day which feels like a floating magic. I've found myself most effective at tackling difficult challenges after being re-energized by sleep, because the day can generally (aside from other unexpected events that come up) roll downhill more smoothly, like a force of mental gravity. As the day wears on, that energy bar gets depleted, so I want to do important things first.

A lot of the aforementioned things I enjoy doing now, I learned through the Internet, which continues to be (once you get past the noise) such a great cultivator for sharing life experiences and experimenting with different things to fine-tune yourself. Some even have terms like "biohacking" which gets into more technical aspects like body mods... I haven't stepped into that arena yet. I very much enjoy reading various articulate viewpoints and considering what which was not even a possibility, moments ago.
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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>　　　　　　　　　Sat, Feb 13, 2016 at 1:34 PM
To: ▓▓TORLEY▓▓ <4@torley.com>

Do you view yourself as unusual?
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**▓▓TORLEY▓▓** <4@torley.com>　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Sat, Feb 13, 2016 at 3:30 PM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

Sonya!

I certainly do view myself as unusual in some ways... and I'm going to elaborate on that when I have a moment.

[redacted]
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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>　　　　　　　　　Sat, Feb 13, 2016 at 3:34 PM
To: ▓▓TORLEY▓▓ <4@torley.com>

[redacted]

I do have enough material already to write something about you, but if you have time to elaborate further, I am very interested in your meta-thoughts on identity and self and perception by others.

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**▉▉TORLEY▉▉** <4@torley.com>                     Mon, Feb 15, 2016 at 3:57 PM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

Thanks Sonya! [redacted]

So...

I generally don't view myself as unusual, because it's all I've ever known. A factor of "unusuality" or "eccentricity" presupposes some degree of relative comparison. I have been called such things many times by others, so I do know that others find certain traits of mine odd.

For instance, musically, I've been repeatedly told by varied people that my tracks "keep changing" and "it's not repetitive like other techno music". I have an obsession with evolving sequences and vibrant arrangements. (For lack of a better word, "progressive", though that sometimes gets equated with "pretentiousness", though that's nonsense to me.) This makes it unusual to what they're accustomed to, likely 8-bar-loop-copy-paste EDM that may have a similar structure to pop music. I tend to be more through-composed at times, though I work in myriad forms. Yet I use many of the same "tone colors" used elsewhere, albeit in quirky ways. I love bridging the alien with the familiar. I don't isolate myself from the popular/commercial — I enjoy universally catchy melodies!

Then, there's the fact I have Asperger Syndrome (on the autism spectrum), which corroborates certain traits I've cultivated over time. I don't go out of my way to do things "just because" they are weird, but if I observe an unorthodox path that serves me better, then heck yeah, that's the right way for me. It's both a rational and an emotional choice — checks out in my head AND feels pleasurable. Therefore, I find it comforting when I get to know likeminded individuals who have shared peculiarities. I've found a lot of inspiring people in Second Life and through electronic music, simply by extension of mutual interests.

The construct of identity is fascinating to me — many self-help books will point you in the direction that personal growth involves reinventing yourself. How can one stay true to themselves yet question who they are, cyclically and continually throughout a life? It seems paradoxical, but maybe that's what — or who — we all are. One even typically wears many hats in everyday life. Identity can be fluid, depending on who you interact with or how you're feeling. When people feel safe expressing themselves, they can be wonderfully complex and nuanced with all the different facets they're capable of. However, one downside to this rushed/crushed society we live in is that it perpetuates chopping things down to fit in 140-odd characters and (as I touched on earlier) reacting thoughtlessly. As Neal Stephenson dubbed one of his characters, "POOR IMPULSE CONTROL". This doesn't fairly show the full potential of what someone may be capable of, and by its unassertive compliance, harmfully rewards negative stereotyping and snap judgments. This can be demonstrated by the many hateful comments directed at celebrities and other popular figures that most people don't personally know, yet would judge from a mere "news" headline. I think all those people expressing pointless negativities have insecurities they don't feel safe talking about.

It's so important to be able to share who you really are, or at least, who you believe yourself to be. The freedom — the power — to self-identify and not let someone else brand you with marginally-accurate labels. Otherwise, you struggle with believing in yourself.

Second Life has been a safe space for me and many others — whether that's exploring identity,

sexuality, racial-cultural constructs, etc. How you perceive SL depends on how you perceive yourself — it is, like life itself, what you make of it. It's very easy to experiment with identity here. You can change your whole look as easily as people can change clothes in "meatspace". One's avatar's total appearance can be changed in mere seconds, yet may get a completely 180-degree response from those around you inworld. A hulking dragon brings out a totally different reaction than being an adorable pixie. I have been many forms, almost always revolving around my pink-and-green color scheme. I've called it "the Torley Council", wherein I imagine a type of mini-United Nations in my head, with each persona diverse yet unified — it's all me, after all.

There's a really beautiful book that includes the topic, called Infinite Reality, by Jeremy Bailenson and Jim Blascovich. It, among other things, explains the results of studies conducted with psychological VR experiences — like how students respond better in a virtual classroom because the teacher is able to maintain (avatar) eye contact with ALL students simultaneously, something that simply isn't possible IRL. (Explained in greater detail: http://www.scaruffi.com/mind/bailenso.html ) People want to believe they matter, want to have attention paid to them. My own experiences, not representative of anyone else's and ones I'm always eager to share, mean that being in SL has made me a more whole and happy person.

A lot of what I've done has been internally imitating, then innovating. Recently, I've found myself tremendously influenced by the writing of Wendy Carlos and Walter Murch, both supreme at articulating their respective crafts. So if some of what I've shared stylistically seems like a pastiche of how they might phrase things, you wouldn't be far off the mark. But really, I am a bad imitator, and I've often stumbled across things that people identify as "uniquely Torley" by trying to copycat first. Isn't this how we all are, though? As babies, we hear our parents speak before developing (biologically and stylistically) "our own voice".

We are blessed to live in such an age of technological abundance, as unstable as some systems may be. We owe it to ourselves to harness those tools to be healthier, happier, more creative human beings. When our own needs are met and our resources are replenished — and when we are genuinely comfortable in our own skin — we can more ably help each other.

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**Sonya Mann** <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>                                  Tue, Feb 16, 2016 at 9:52 AM
To: ▓▓▓TORLEY░▓▓░▓ <4@torley.com>

YES. Identity as social construct -- both self-imposed and participatory -- is fascinating.

Thank you for being so prolific and sharing your thoughts! I will send you links when this is published
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**▓▓▓TORLEY░░░▓** <4@torley.com>                                  Wed, Feb 17, 2016 at 8:44 AM
To: Sonya Mann <sonyaellenmann@gmail.com>

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you, Sonya — have have a good hiatus!

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