

WORLD CORRESPONDENCE - An Interview with Neil Cumberland

Znamya - The city that never sleeps

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Neil Cumberland,
founder of the
Avatar Persona

I am standing with Lynn and husband Neil in their digital shed outside their newly-built house in Znamya¹, 150km (100 miles) from the hustle and bustle of Moscow. Their shed, made of digital grass², is rather patches of synthetic fabric, made to resemble grass that actually harness solar power for the home.

It is 9.30pm in the evening, or rather 21:30 uT (Unified time) but the "sun" is still shinning with a gentle breeze. It has been 8 years since the European space mirror³ turned operation to illuminate sun-starved winter times. The creation of a perpetual day has been hailed as one of the major developments in the year 2086, including the introduction of a worldwide Unified time⁴ (uT) to foster greater standardization and cohesion in this increasing fragmentation of the globe today.

Lynn sneezes and she takes out her digital hankie⁵, that instantly changes colour. It hints Lynn has caught a mild cold and she turns away to gesture Aico⁶, her humanoid servant. Aico translates this gesture and dials the delivery of a prescribed medication to be delivered. Neil turns towards me and gestures me to take a look inside their home.

As I hand my business card⁷ to Neil, he puts the digital card into his online concierge portal⁸ and speaks a few words. Music plays into the dinning hall with an old favourite hit: Bee Gee's Saturday Night Fever; ironically reminding me of Lynn's mild cold. Minutes later, my favourite dishes where I had tasted only 2 days ago in Lyon, France arrived at the doorstep. With a business card that stored all my preferences and some highlights of my digital blog, Neil immediately made me feel at home where my favourite Bordeaux wine was poured.

As we ate the French cuisine, served with digital forks, knives and spoons⁹, indicators on the cutlery flashed. "High in sodium, the escargots!" exclaimed Neil. Sensors on the tip of the fork tasted the food content. Moments later, Neil gestured for Aico and dialed up the French chef who appeared on the Hologscreen¹⁰. The Hologscreen, a full 3D virtual omnipresence projector, could make the chef appear as if he was physically standing in front of us. "Just too salty, Pierre!" exclaimed Neil.

Neil Cumberland
at his intelligent
home in Znamya.

As the Pierre digitally took his leave, Neil wanted to see of the recent news reports that I had contributed to iBC¹¹ news, which I had worked as a reporter for 18 years. Thinking that it would be a casual dinner, I had left my digital sketchbooks¹² in office, taking with me only my Euro-cash¹³ card, a digital cash currency that replaced the paper-based Euro currency only last year.

Neil took me to his study room, where auto-skins¹⁴ had configured the walls of the room to suit tonight's French atmosphere. While most surfaces are ceramic bare, the table was covered with untidy piles of e-books¹⁵. Neil says that his current favourite isn't one of the stacked tomes on novels or terrorism but the sprawling re-write 17th century Spanish novel Don Quixote. "A new translation," he enthuses. "With the writer still not yet finished on it! And I'm reading as he is writing the last chapter! Amazing!"

A touch on the ceramic pad¹⁶, immediately logged my biometric identity on the UKnet¹⁷ server, where my profile came up. At once was I able to show Neil an earlier report that I had made in Beijing last week.

There, people were traveling in Segways¹⁸! A far cry from just 50 years ago where cars were causing rampant jams. The Segways were the fifth generation of networked personal mobility vehicles where one could also dock at a Segbooth¹⁹ connecting their Segway to Global Office Network and instantly turn their Segways into a mobile office! Talk about Chinese business-mindedness.

Neil was also kind to share with me his living diary²⁰ which also acted as his media connector. The living diary is a digital blog, where it resides as part of a wearable electronic jacket. The jacket tracks his daily actions, records sounds, notes visual places and even absorbs smells. He had set its privacy and security level to medium and there was no need to be shy!

Neil's living diary last entry showed that he had last been to office early in the afternoon, where he had been entertaining a group of Korean visitors. They were interested in his company's latest software, the Avatar Persona²¹, an agent based software where it could help reduce information overload by simplification of hard text based data and transferring them to memory patches. Users can access and transfer these data by sticking the memory patches onto any part of the body. When done, the patches biodegrade and are harmless. The use of mind and memory transfer technologies was a revolutionary feature to moving away from object based products²².

We were interrupted by a Hand-call²³ by one of Neil's employees who was an Indian national working overtime. At once, Neil's image appeared and acted as an interpreter between them. Language barrier was no longer a problem. Words that Neil spoke, translated to Indian, and vice versa. It was a good tool for the language of a global village – total communication with the help of omni presence. A world with truly no barriers in language, distance and communication.

Soon it was time for me to leave. As I walked towards my smart Vcar²⁴, parked vertically along the road kerb to save precious space, its sensors glowed its lights in orange, seeing that it had recognized my presence and identified me as the owner. Before I entered the vehicle, I gave Neil a digital handshake²⁵, knowing that my last thoughts of wishing Lynn a restful week would be conveyed through my digital garments²⁶ to his.

My virtual chauffeur²⁷ reported that I would now head for home as PlannerMate²⁸ indicated no other activities for the day. I laid down on the vehicle couch and set a quick nap-dream²⁹ of an Oriental setting, ready to wake up just in time at my doorstep. What a trip to Znamya! - **iBC & additional reporting with Itar-Tass**

Znamya region is
about 150km from
moscow and has
a perpetual daylight.

Lexicon of Terms

1. Znamya – located 150km (100 miles) from Moscow as a former industrial town and redeveloped as a computing hub, famous for their sun-starved winter times and where the second European space mirror turned operation in February 2086.

2. Digital grass – patches of synthetic fabric, made to resemble grass that actually harness solar power for the home. Also available in digital moss, and digital plants that help purify air in the home.

3. European space mirror – A series of reflective satellites used to create a perpetual day in a number of regions in Europe. Various voices in the scientific community argued that the project was too risky to pursue, that its potential benefits were outweighed by concerns the project would disturb the natural cycle of day and night. However, European congress pursued with its first launch in 2080. The Znamya illuminator area turned operation eight years later.

4. Unified time (uT) – A simplified expression for the old Greenwich Mean Time. Time zones around the world are made standard.

5. Digital hankie – A fabric based handkerchief with pico-capsules that change colour when exposed to germs. A new development in bio-materials.

6. Aico – a half-sized humanoid servant that carries out most daily chores. Some are dedicated at performing tasks, such as daily cooking, cleaning and even baby sitting.

7. Digital business card – Visually looks like a normal paper based business card, but with a chip that contains information of the carrier, such as his bio-data, preferences and even blog entries that are updated wirelessly from a central portal.

8. Online concierge – The virtual concierge is available everyday, around the clock to offer a personalized assistance with a wide range of services.

9. Digital forks, knives and spoons – A series of cutlery sets that incorporate sensors to detect food quality such as sodium, sugar and nut traces and subtly indicates with flashing lights.

10. Hologscreen – a full 3D virtual omnipresence projector that creates a projected image of oneself in another environment in real-time as a means of communication.

11. iBC news – International Business Correspondent, an international news network.

12. Digital sketchbooks – Digital-paper based notepads that download information with Bluetooth II to a central portal.

13. Euro-cash card – a digital cash currency that replaced the paper-based Euro currency

14. Auto-skins – Interactive skins that are configurable to change textures and colours of walls in a home environment.

15. e-books – Flexible LCD based books that offer interactivity such as speaking to the author and to leave feedback.

16. Biometric ceramic pad – Conductive ceramic pad that scans fingerprint as a form of identification.

17. UKnet – A British personalized server for storing information on the web, a predecessor to Yahoo! Briefcase.

18. Segways (5th generation) – A two-wheeled, self-balancing, computer-controlled, electrically-powered gyroscopic light-mode transportation device, with the 5th generation capable of auto-drive and networking capabilities.

19. Segbooth – Segway orientated roadside booths for docking services such as power charging and omnipresence services.

MOTOFWRD

This fictitious news report is submitted as part of an original entry for the

Motorola Seamless Mobility Competition for UK Students.



It narrates the story of a fictitious reporter who is asked to interview a person and describes both of their lives that revolve around the concept of seamless mobility with access to information, entertainment, communication, monitoring and control.

Entry Category:

Short Story (fiction)

entry code: EPEI