

Real gates of virtuality, virtual gates of reality

We live in the world full of physical, organisational and moral gates. Instead of free association and consensus, we have compulsory democratic practices which keep the gates of popular decision-making. Instead of natural educational processes within the community, we have compulsory schooling which consists of zillion small gates called exams. Instead of liberty, equality and fraternity, we have gates between those who sit in offices and those who clean them. Instead of free love, we have gates between people in the form of marriage rituals. Unsurprisingly, all gates are interconnected: educational gates reflect to work, work-place gates reflect to politics, political gates reflect to law and custom, law and custom are gates to morality, moral gates reflect to education, and educational gates reflect to our personal lives.

Anarchists have attacked various gate-keepers – the State, the Church, the School – and the very concept of gates. However, the internet seems to have opened a different kind of space without gates. For Eben Moglen, “in the network society, anarchism (or more properly, anti-possessive individualism) is a viable political philosophy” (1999). For Manuel Castells, “neo-anarchism is an instrument of struggle that appears commensurate with the needs of the twenty-first century social revolt” (2005). For Dana Ward, “the internet is the quintessential example of a large scale anarchist organization” (2011). For Howard Rheingold, “perhaps the largest incubator of online social networks and the oldest global virtual community, Usenet, is also an example of a gigantic long-functioning anarchy” (2002: 53). For Jandrić, “Wikipedias provide an inexhaustible range of Bey’s Temporary Autonomous Zones to anyone who connects to the Internet; in this way, they provide appropriate spaces for its specific, essentially educational engagement based on anarchist principles” (2010: 64).

Unfortunately, the concept of gates has remained. However, it currently undergoes deep changes which happen through two-way communication between reality and virtuality. Real-world economic relationships are slowly but surely penetrating virtuality, but virtual freedoms are very efficiently being embodied in reality. Technologies developed by global neoliberal capitalism are used by anarchists, but technologies developed by anarchists are also used by global neoliberal capitalism. Physically unlimited, almost postmodern virtual flux between ideologies and approaches may be a source of horror: it is completely reasonable to expect that one day the internet might further restrict our freedoms. However, it also presents a powerful source for liberation, because the internet could obviously be used for developing viable social alternatives.

In this presentation we shall explore history of real gates reflected on the internet, and virtual gates reflected in reality. Looking from anarchist perspective, we shall identify the main trends in those developments. We shall try and link those trends with the old, rigorously studied anarchist ideas. Following ancient proverb that history is the teacher of life, it is hoped that those links might provide us with a better insight of present and future challenges.

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