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Computers and Anarchism
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Computer-mediated relations with things are also alienated. The thing is replaced by its image, reduced to behaviour which can be objectively observed and controlled. The context of things is reduced to the width of the information channel by which one is connected with them. Within associations, computers greatly strengthen organisational autonomy. Autonomous organisations dominate the whole society, by lasting, by spreading, by reproducing themselves, by introducing hierarchical and mediated relations between people.

Since each person's self-image reflects relations with society and nature, the more people's relations are mediated by computers and the more autonomy is in fact surrendered to other people or organizations, the more those people will define themselves as alienated and passive. This will in turn corrupt other relations which were originally free.,

The zone of order which each computer defines is real and expansive. Within this zone, reason and information are alienated and the ideologies of rationalism and instrumentalism are established, corrupting everything they touch.

Computers present in tangible form a danger which inheres in all forms of order: theory. Ianguage, technique, organisation. These do not need to be completely formalised to take on the character of order. Reason is always partially formalised, so the dominion of order is always partially established. Limits are necessary. They must be defined and enforced. But this is precisely the function of order itself.Order cannot be trusted as its own controller.

The boundaries of freedom cannot be defined, or it is not freedom. Only anarchy, the living spirit of freedom, can defend freedom.

Introduction

In this paper I hope to give a brief survey of two aspects of human culture and the relationships between them and anarchism, the most positive and forward-looking expression of the human spirit; and computers, the most powerful and complex technology produced by human ingenuity.

It may seem strange to consider anarchism and computers together. After all, hasn't anarchism always been a marginal and unsuccessful political movement, while computers have been so central and effective? There is hardly an area of life which is not being revolutionised by computers. Besides, anarchism and computers are like opposites-extremes of disorganisation and organisation. They could hardly be relevant to each other.

Well, anarchism and computers are opposites in a way, and their difference does have to do with orgalusation. But it is a difference of kind rather than of degree. And, as I hope to show, each raises crucial concerns, both theoretical and practical, for the other. Further, when considered generally, anarchism and computers are representative of two major forces in cultural history.

Anarchism is the political expression of anarchy, a cultural force for the proliferation of human forms of life. Computers are the technological expression of another cultural force, which I shall call order, which strives for definition and control. In human history these forces have both developed, now in harmony, now in opposition.

In psychic life, anarchy is reflected in eros, expansive and joyful; order in thanatos, static and insecure. In political life, anarchy is reflected in liberty, order in authority. In economic life, anarchy is reflected in sharing and giving; order in owning and taking. Seen in these terms, the mutual, and equal relevance of anarchism and computers becomes clearer.

Currently, order is ascendant and anarchy is discredited and discouraged. As an anarchist, I am interested in the nature of, and requirements for, a world in which anarchy is the reigning spirit. In Section 2 I shall survey the realm of anarchy, looking at our relations with other people and with society in general, our relations with things and with the world

in general, and our relations with ourselves. our sense of identity, our knowledge and activity. In Section 3 I shall survey the realm of order, and the place of computers within it.

Neither anarchy nor order alone is a possible basis for human culture. Anarchy without order is limited in its means of existence and its means of expression. Order without anarchy is sterile and self- destructive. The current domination of order is both oppressive and dangerous. The discovery of possible healthy relationships between anarchy and order- and, more concretely, the delineation of the requirements for the socially beneficial design and use of computers are among the most urgent tasks facing us. In Section 4 I shall describe some of the ways in which the use of computers threatens human freedom. I conclude that there is no safe way to use computers. The benefits of computers are always bought at the price of freedom.

My own conception of anarchy is based on several years of reading, discussion and rumination. It is only one of a wide variety ofconceptions of anarchy. I have been involved with computers for about 18 years in various capacities. I am fascinated by their suggestiveness and by their challenge. At the intersection of these two interests, as well as many others, lies a persistent puzzle: what are the possible relationsbetween the formal and the informal? The thoughts expressed here are necessarily incomplete.

The realm of anarchy

Anarchism is the political and intellectual movement in support of anarchy. Anarchy is based on the desirability and innate possibility of free, creative, and responsible activity of people, separately and inassociation. Anarchism is motivated by both the feeling and theunderstanding that such autonomous activity is necessary for the growth and development of human intelligence, digmty and happiness .Anarchism has manifested itself in a variety of organisations and theories. But anarchy itself is not a specific theory or form of orgamsation. It is a spirit which can find expression, to a greater or lesser extent, in theories and organisations. Anarchy is not complete or consistent or definite.

Of course neither rationalism nor instrumentalism is true. They are two separate but mutually supporting rationalisations of a singk process: the subjugation of reason as an instrument of domination Reason becomes a technology. Just as reason is purified, so also that on which reason operates must be purified. The object of reason is information. The unfettered use of instrumental reason requires an arena of pure information. The more information is separated from its social and natural contexts, the greater the scope of operation of instrumental reason.

Computers are mechanical implementations of instrumental reason. They store, transmit, and manipulate purified information. They are information filters. As computers invade the world, they create widening zones of purified information, thus expanding the scope of operation of all forms of instrumental reason. Within this scope, computers are powerful devices for control. Instrumentalism enhances the power of computers by legitimising the purification of information; computers confirm instrumentalism by demonstrating the effectiveness of instrumental reason.

Computers are just as deeply implicated in rationalism. Purified reason cares only about the behaviour of things; computers are ideal simulators. Since computers are the most effective instrument of purified reason, they become models for scientific theory and method. This is a self-reinforcing process. As computers filter information, they create a reality which they can in fact model and control. Thus, computers are creatures of the underlying processes of order and of the ideologies of order.

Computers and the threat to freedom

The forces of anarchy and order are in deep conflict. Anarchy abhors domination, while order serves domination. The use of computers manifests this conflict in specific ways as disruptions of anarchist relations.

If computers mediate relations between people, then these relations cannot be direct or free. Computer mediation is alienating, reducing interaction to objective behaviour. Computer mediation restricts the variety of interaction, and thereby restricts the variety of relations built on interaction.

Just as anarchist reason and practice must be furmly rooted in social and natural contexts, so therefore the whole person must be similarly rooted. This implies that the social and natural environments of people must be relatively stable

The realm of order

Such are the basic relations within the realm of anarchy. The realm of order is quite different. Where anarchy supports creative power, orders supports dominating power. Order seeks to fix and to hold. Where anarchy integrates reason, practical and theoretical, within contexts of social and natural relations, order seeks to separate reason utterly from these contexts, to reify reason as a technology of domination over the social and natural worlds. This separation between reason and reality under the influence of domination creates a distorting tension, and this tension is resolved by the formation of two complementary ideologies -rationalism and instrumentalism. These ideologies buttress and legitimise reason in its isolated and purified form.

Within the ideology of rationalism, all reality can be completely and objectively understood by pure reason. Objective understanding is the exdusive domain of science, whose methods and theories are untainted by subjectivity. A phenomenon is considered understood when it can be isolated and controlled

Within the ideology of instrumentalism, this is all turned around the other way. Instrumentalism is pragmatic. What can be controlled is real. What is real can be controlled completely. The natural function of reason is domination. Objectivity is denied.

These ideologies maintain the separability, the authority, and the effectiveness of reason. Through these ideologies, the realm of order provides both the means of control and the mystification of control. The rule of order has been supported therefore precisely by those seeking to dominate people and things. It has repaid this support handsomely. The rule of order has also been supported by those who hope to use it as a shield against domination. This is a tragic mistake.

To analyse anarchy is necessarily to inflict an injury on it. Anarchy can not be captured in any formulation. Anarchy is metaphysically those forms of human life which support anarchy and those which are hostile to it.

Anarchism is optimistic about human nature. Only remove domination, and humanity will flower in a myriad cultures. People are naturally creative and cooperative. Of course, this is an ideal. The realisation of any anarchist society will involve many compromises with order, if only to provide some security for those who wish a less adventurous life. But in accepting order, anarchy puts itself in peril of losing its freedom.

To secure anarchy, we must first secure its foundations, the basic relations which people enter into with others, themselves, and the world around them. Having set forth the basic relations of anarchy, we must still devise forms of social organisation based on these relations to solve all of the practical problems of life. But I am concerned here with the basic relations because it is on this level that the fundamental conflict between anarchy and order occurs, and it is on this level that the social significance of computers must be understood. The practical problems of social construction will keep for another day.

The basic relations of anarchy all involve people. The qualities of objectivity and subjectivity are fused in these relations. The following are sketches from three angles: relations with others, relations with things, and relations with one's self. These relations are all connected

A Relations between people

Versions of anarchism differ in their conceptions of social relations. Individualists see society as a constraint of the freedom of individuals. Free relations are modelled on contracts between autonomous social atoms, each acting in their own self-interest. As Marx observed, this model of social relations is based on capitalist ideology, is not naturalbut highly constructed, and is the opposite of free.

Social, or communist, anarchism understands that human freedom and development are grounded in a social matrix. The greatest emphasis of anarchism must be on social relations. In fact, all anarchist relations have

a social dimension. In order for people to be free, the relations between people must be free. People must interact directly with one another. People must not dominate one another. Mediation limits interaction, and hence the relations which are based on interaction. Mediation alienates people from one another and masks domination.

People can form voluntary associations in order to pursue common interests. Each person may be involved in any number of clearly or vaguely defined associations. Association entails responsibility. Responsibilities are not duties; they are not exacted by the threat of sanction. Instead, they are based on a shared ethic of respect for one's self and for others. Involvement with an association is always voluntary The degree of lightness with which a person will enter or leave an association will depend on the responsibilities involved

Some associations will be transient, others long-lasting. Associations can include or overlap each other in space or time. Society consists of this organic network of associations. Some associations will be engaged in production; others in inquiry; still others in free expression. People will be respected regardless of their associations or responsibilities. There will be many associations which will include and support people, regardless of the degree of responsibility which they can or will assume. In particular, the associations in which people are born will respect and support them.

Since relations must be direct and non-hierarchical, the size, duration, and effectiveness of anarchist associations are limited. Even to approach these limits may require extraordinary stamina in a voluntary association. To surpass these limits requires that the free and voluntary nature of the association be compromised in favour of organisational centralisation and autonomy. This is a dangerous step since it removes control from the people involved in the organisation Hierarchy and mediation will be introduced. The organisation will reproduce itself, extending the domain in which anarchist social relations are suppressed. Autonomous organisations are in basic conflict with anarchy. They can, perhaps must be tolerated, but only when kept within vigilantly observed limits. We must accept limits to effectiveness.

Anarchist society requires shared ethics, a determination to preserve freedom, and an understanding of the threats to freedom. People will

share their own visions, and will respect the visions of others. Both knowledge and practice will be pluralistic. Anarchist community depends on sharing, on shared worlds.

Relations between people and things

Anarchism has until recently had little to say about our material relations. Like many other doctrines it has not questioned the simple economic categories of production and consumption. Material abundance would be provided by the bounty of nature augmented by technology. Our manipulation of things and our understanding of things would also be objectve, independent of social relationships

This naive picture must be replaced. An attitude of domination towards nature leads to domination in social relations. Technological choices necessarily constrain social relations. An objective stance towards things spills over into alienation between people.

We must accept limits to consumption. We do not have the right to destroy nature. As we make use of nature, our responsibilities to others oblige us to renew what we use. We must choose our technologies with care, making sure that we do not thereby build social rdations which we do not want. We must not consider things objectively, but in personal, social, and natural contexts. This implies also seeing ourselves as part of nature

Private property in its current form will not exist. There will be no state to protect 'property rights'. If rights in things are recognised, they will be based on responsibility and respect.

Relations between people and themselves

Anarchist self-relations are reflections of relations with the social and natural worlds. People will see themselves within social and natural contexts, and will understand the social and natural relations involved in their own visions and activities. Yet these relations shall not deterrnine each person's visions and activities. Each person shall be autonomous: free, creative, and responsible.