

Anarchism 2.0

Anti-authoritarian Politics in the Age of Distributed Network Technology

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The Internet in the past two decades made a huge impact in our daily lives. It helped people from all walks of life empower themselves. With the said technology some even bring down their respective totalitarian government and clamor for genuine democracy. This politicalization is typically inherent in the infrastructure of the Internet.

In fact, the emergence of anarchist movement in the Philippines came into being during the early days of web 2.0. It was this moment when anti-WTO uprising in Seattle transmitted its data packets around the globe and infected the multitudes especially the young people in Southeast Asia who were tired of the aging politics of authoritarian Left.

However, together with global restlessness, Capitalism reinvented itself and accommodated its mutation process with the impact of distributed network technology.

This paper will try to understand the opposing characteristics of Digital economy brought by the Internet. Furthermore, it will also look at the development of early anarchist thought and locate its influence in the inception of distributed network technology.

The concept of Commons as neither public nor private property will also be introduced in this paper. Moreover, the nature of Philippine state is scrutinized to explore other revolutionary possibility that is neither national reactionary nor national revolutionary.

Anarchism in the Age of Material Production

Anarchist thought and practice flourished during the industrial revolution in Europe. It was this moment in time that trade unions and worker's cooperatives were rallying under the banner of International Workingmen's Association (First International) mostly influenced by the ideology of anarchism.

The thriving anarchist thought seeks out the answer to the condition of massive exploitation and alienation of workers from their labor in the age of industrial mass production. However, early anarchist thought and practice was divided into two major strands namely, Individualist and Collectivist, as a result of articulating the political economy of material production attributed to Capitalism.

These strands led to diversity of perspectives but despite of the differences they altogether stand in common against all forms of authority. Here are the leading anarchist thought and practices that were popular during the industrial revolution in Europe:

Mutualism

This particular strand of anarchist thought is attributed to the French philosopher and politician Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. It is a political and economic concept that gives importance to spontaneous order- an organization without central authority. Nevertheless, the economic aspect of Mutualism is derived from William Godwin's idea of free distribution of surplus goods by making it sure "that individuals have a right to the product of their individual labor", thus adhering to the labor theory of value. Godwin based his theory on the economics of handicrafts, says George Woodcock in "Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements (1962)".

Anarcho-communism

Whereas Mutualism adheres to the labor theory of value Peter Kropotkin and the anarcho-communists rejected it by abolishing wage labor and collectivizing the means of production by all means. Because they believe that there is “no valid way of measuring the value of any one person’s economic contributions,” Furthermore, the Italian section of anarcho-communists, Errico Malatesta explained:

“[...] instead of running the risk of making a confusion in trying to distinguish what you and I each do, let us all work and put everything in common. In this way each will give to society all that his strength permits until enough is produced for every one; and each will take all that he needs, limiting his needs only in those things of which there is not yet plenty for every one.” (Malatesta, Errico. A Talk About Anarchist Communism Between Two Workers)

As early as 1880 the anarcho-communists has already advanced the notion of shared commons as central to their politics. In fact, the practice of this theory in the age of material production was applied during the infamous worker’s controlled economy of the early days of Spanish Revolution in 1936. It was this moment in modern human history that proved the possibility of a society that value the practice of sharing resources without the need of a State or leadership among themselves.

Post-Production Generation

Several decades later Capitalism has become complex. Material production gradually loses its phenomenal stage and its revolutionary class component has become virtual. This virtuality of the advance class is located among the precarious worker, unemployed youth, knowledge workers and the general multitude who immaterially produce and consume on the *Internet* says Tizziana Terranova in her book “*Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy* (2003)”. On the other hand Marxist revolutions has produced State economies parallel to early Capitalist mode of production. But both are being challenged by a new mode of production put across by immaterial labor.

Distributed Network Technology

Immaterial labor is necessitated by knowledge economy put forward by information revolution. This is a revolution in technology that was developed in the laboratories of knowledge workers who believe that open collaboration is the answer to resolving a problem in any research. Thus, the Arpanet was developed to allow its users to build systems for themselves and electronically link the computers of various laboratories together (hi-tech gift economy). Later, this infrastructure is popularly known as the distributed network technology or simply *The Internet*.

However, this technological advancement according to Richard Barbrook (*The Holy Fools*, 2005) produced a new kind of economy that combines the commodity economy of Capitalism and the hi-tech gift economy attributed to anarchism, which “at one and the same time – in opposition

and in symbiosis with each other.” The mutant character of Digital Economy is partly because of financial institutions and military industrial complex investment in the early research of Arpanet.

No wonder Capitalism is desperate to contain the intangible goods of immaterial labor namely, music; fashion; ideas; software and computer codes, using the same mechanism they did during the early days of material production to extract profit. But in the other realm of immaterial labor that resonates the element of gift “Copyright is protected and broken. Capitalists benefit from one advance and lose out from another.” says Barbrook. Therefore the *Internet* is the contemporary location of resistance however mutant it is.

The New Commons

In Capitalism there are only two distinct form of property namely, public and private property. But both function in the same primary characteristics as private property (Michael Hardt, 2012). Whereas public property has the element of free accessibility it’s not entirely true because it is governed by an external entity that monopolizes its decision-making.

In contradistinction to these decadent forms of property Michael Hardt defined the Commons in relation to the question of property:

“I maintain that we have to understand the common in contradistinction from any form of property. In other words, whereas property (public or private) designates limited access and a monopoly of decision-making, the common must create open access and collective, democratic decision-making.” (*Interview With Michael Hardt on the Common*: Sundell, Taavi, 2012.)

Meanwhile, going back in 1880 the anarcho-communists have already articulated the question of private property but from the context against labor theory of value and authoritarianism. Hence, for the anarcho-communists the means of production should be at the direct disposal of the participants of social production enabling a gift economy. However, this resonated to the basic concept of the New Commons in the age of distributed network technology.

The New Commons according to Abrell, Elan in “Imagining a Traditional Knowledge Commons” is, “organized around shared intellectual and cultural resources.” Meaning, it is the place where Immaterial Labor is openly shared and reproduced, thus, negating the capitalist-imposed-scarcity.

Moreover, the corporeal incarnation of hi-tech gift economy inherent in distributed network technology is found in the concept of New Commons. The only given difference between then (Commons) and now (New Commons) is its “non-rivalrous and non-subtractive[ness] because one person learning or using knowledge does not prevent another person from doing the same.” (*Imagining a Traditional Knowledge Commons*: Abrell, Elan, 2009) unlike material resources attributed to the Commons.

Hacking the Philippine State

The Philippine State is equally mutant as the Digital Economy of the global world. However, their characteristics may not be exactly the same but both apparently came out to be the freaks of nature.

The mutation of Philippine State and its nationalist narrative is traced from its layers of devastating imprints from colonialism and persistence of “oligarchic” democracy of pre-authoritarian era. The result is a dispersed body of monstrous mutant with no organs that forever devour all forms of resources of the nation, whether public or private property, leaving its people dispossessed to the bones.

I believe, without trying to understand the nature of the Philippine State as a dispersed body of mutants by hacking its own system all the way, revolutionary endeavor to defeat the monster will strengthen further the sedentary mutation process. Patricio Abinales in his essay “National Advocacy and Local Power in the Philippines (*Politics of Change in the Philippines*: eds Quimpo/Kasuya, 2010)” saw this predicament by writing a premise that Philippine State is weak yet robust because:

“Political power in the Philippines has always been founded on the strength of local elites, but the study and the progressive political praxis oddly continue to overlook this reality.” (Ibid: pp 413, Abinales. 2010)

This decentralized form of political power immanent in the Philippine State undermines both national reactionary state and the national revolutionary movement (Ibid: pp 395, Abinales. 2010). Furthermore, it is interesting to observe that this form of mutation contagiously sprawls among even the disenfranchised.

Street Vendors and Local Power

In 2003 a Japanese scholar conducted a participatory research about the urban poor’s economic survival through informal street vending in Metro Manila. Technically according to State authority it is unlawful to do business without any legal permission but surprisingly the poor can evade such law easily.

The anti-authoritarian impulse is located in the said resistance but according to the research this form of defiance against the State is partly legitimized by local power (local governance) by accepting bribes from street vendors (*Governing Informalities of the Urban Poor*: pp 362, Kusaka, Wataru. 2010).

By bribing away to redefine social order in favor to street vendors interest, however, institutionalizes the negative effect of community, which makes hierarchical relationship inevitable among the self-organized street vendors especially with their relationship with local power (*Multitudes*: Hardt/Negri, 2009). Nevertheless, it is important to closely observe self-organization here as a trajectory towards defying both the weak State and local power by asserting autonomy that will cure the contagious disease of sedentary mutation.

Radical Sharing As Habit

Whereas the anti-authoritarian resistance of Immaterial Labor is located in the matrix of the Internet, the anti-authoritarian impulse of the dispossessed in the Philippines is found in the daily struggles to live. However, both are yet to realize epistemological breaks in their respective location of resistance by their given revolutionary possibility.

In the discourse about the Commons as neither public nor private property Hardt presented the concept of institution as a place to exercise the endurance of struggle against Capitalism.

Meaning, it is an improvised place where set of practices and habits are improved to attain epistemological breaks.

For example radical sharing as a habit could strengthen the element of gift economy in the Internet and defeat its profit-making pair. This is also true with the disenfranchised Filipinos; once the habit of radical sharing is practiced perpetually their redefinition of social order will not be limited to dependency with local power and State reforms because power here is not monopolized but already shared. Thus, a new politics is required to express this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Anarchism is an ideology become apparent in modern times as a response to Western industrialization. Whereas, anti-authoritarianism is a fundamental element of anarchist ideology it predates the said ideology because anti-authoritarianism is inherent to mankind since the beginning of time.

The anti-authoritarian impulse of man is key to the success of distributed networks technology as an infrastructure that negates capitalist-imposed-scarcity. Both neo-liberal capitalism and state capitalism is challenged by this contemporary infrastructure, with the aid of a new kind of politics – a politik that habitually pursue and defend the New Commons.

This new politics will not be ideological in a classical sense like the previous leftist thoughts we have experienced, yet it will be equally militant. Its form will have the likeness of pre-Filipino Barangay, highly localized yet equally connected, fluid and non-essential. As the poet Henry Miller wrote:

“We must die as egos and be
born again in the swarm, not
separated and self-hypnotized, but
individual and related.” — *Sexus*

On the author

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