

Collage

Basic Proposition for a Meta-Anarchist Political Vision

negligible forces

Sep 7, 2020

Contents

Fragmentation as an alternative to consensus	3
Virtual polities and the Collage	4
Alterprise and forks of freedom	5
<i>Metaanarchy is a panarchy, but not every panarchy is metaanarchy</i>	6
Meta-X. Baseline protocol for the Collage	7

Fragmentation as an alternative to consensus

Consensus is when people reach a mutual agreement on a given issue. Anarchy loves consensus. Actually, some anarchists seem to believe that it's the only acceptable form of decision-making.

Unfortunately, consensus has its limitations. The capacity for consensus drops *rapidly* as the size of the group increases; it usually takes a lot of time to reach one; not everyone are fans of participating in sophisticated and lengthy discussions on every single issue. Those are all usual objections to anarchism — and arguments for top-down governments. That is, states.

States rely on the principle of *one-for-all decisions*. They claim it as an inevitable consequence of large-scale organization — because it's not like an actual consensus can be reached between millions of people, right?

But you don't need a consensus for millions of people.

Sometimes, though arguably so, there is an actual necessity to enact a decision that *has* to be shared by a group of people this large. Perhaps, some kind of an issue of planetary scale — akin to climate change.

However, this happens drastically less often than the state strives to present. There are far less groups that actually require a commonly shared decision. The state operates in this manner not because of some “*natural necessity*”, and not because it has the best interests of society in mind, but to impose a type of governance that is more convenient for the state itself. Unified systems are far more compatible with centralized governance.

Being used to this approach to decision-making as the “natural” one, some of us may unconsciously transfer it onto our ideas of a freer society. That's kinda what happened to “representative democracy”: all residents of the country are obliged to express the enormous aggregate of its collective will through the bottleneck of a single ruler, a single set of rules, a single voting act. Although some things have changed, the structure of governance remained similar to that of a monarchy. No wonder this kind of democracy appears hardly functional to some people.

If convenience for society (rather than convenience for top-down governments) is a priority for us, another type of decision-making comes to the forefront. “*Fragmentation*”.

What's that? It's a type of decision-making which implies that different people should be able to enact different decisions regarding how they want to live — and how they want to organize their habitat. It also implies that their coexistence can be coordinated within prescriptions of mutually shared protocols.

The principle of fragmentation is highly prominent in the open-source software industry — known there as “*forking*”. But can we apply it to political organization?

Let's look at examples.

Residents of a neighborhood disagree on whether a road must be built in the place of a local garden. To resolve this dispute, one could use conflict resolution techniques, reconcile both sides and achieve consensus on the basis of a compromise. One could also find new, nontrivial solutions which would satisfy everyone. If there are no resources for such luxury — perhaps, act in accordance with the opinion of the majority. But no matter what type of method we apply here, this would still remain a one-for-all solution. In this particular case, technologies of our time leave us with no alternative approaches to this problem. So, *here fragmentation is inapplicable*.

Here's another example. Residents of a town believe that publicly smoking weed is harmful to everyone in that town. Residents of another town believe that publicly smoking weed is harmless,

and maybe even beneficial to the smokers. Now, you can *fragment* the decisions at the regional level. Weed-haters can prohibit smoking in their town, and weed-lovers can allow it in theirs. In this situation, *fragmentation is preferable*.

All that's required is a shared protocol to which both towns subscribe, and which postulates that separate towns can make their own policies on weed-smoking. Let's call this an "*interpolity protocol*". If necessary, it can be a formal protocol of explicit mutual agreement — otherwise it's an informal protocol of "*we just kinda let each other do our own thing*". It's the "agree to disagree" principle but applied to actual political organization.

Now, in some countries, a similar system of decisional fragmentation already exists, relying on high degree of regional autonomy. But it is confined by strict borders of states or regions. It is still subject to central authority. It responds very poorly to the shifts of opinions of local residents. Whereas *fragmentation* can take place to a practically infinite degree — all the way to individuals (or even subpersonalities). It can allow for much more dynamic and adaptive political organization, converting on-the-spot decisions into societally recognized ones almost "in real time". That is what's called "*free flow of desire*" in Deleuzian jargon.

On the other hand, the idea that a large group *has* to partake in a single uniform decision implies suppression of some portion of people with differing interests, e.g. with *differing desire*. This is usually followed by delegitimization of those interests with a variety of justifications: they're non-citizen, they're unpatriotic, they're privileged, etc.

Dictatorship of the few, rule by the majority and consensus are all different methods of coordination within a single architecture of a cohesive decision-making network. Consensus is, of course, the most anarchist option within this particular architecture.

But it is possible to invent anarchist methods of decision-making on the basis of *different architecture*. For example, networks with high degree of fragmentation. In those kind of networks, tightly interconnected areas — one may call them "*assemblages*" by Deleuzian terminology — are intermitted by loosely connected "gaps" between different areas/assemblages.

As a matter of fact, the technology of consensus in a large anarchist society could function only alongside the technology of fragmentation. In fully connected areas/assemblages, consensus is most likely to occur. Those areas/assemblages could be communities of people with similar values — as well as self-sovereign individuals. The fact that there are gaps of lesser cohesion between those areas/assemblages allows every area/assemblage to choose its own paths of existence and development.

Virtual polities and the Collage

What would be the most effective political framework for fragmentation? I'm not sure there can be a decisive answer to that question right now, but we can already start trying to outline and implement such a framework.

Imagine *virtual polities*, which act as decentralized law providers for all who wish to use their services. Users of different virtual polities are subject to different sets of restrictions which they themselves deem preferable. They often form localized communities, because it is more convenient to interact with users who have the same providers. But the providers are not subject to strict borders. Virtual polities are not territorial in themselves, although they can condense on certain territories. Somewhere, focal points emerge which gather users only of a particular vir-

tual polity, while elsewhere users of many different systems settle alongside each other. Relations between users of different virtual polities are coordinated by networks of interpolity protocols of varying scale, formal and informal. Virtual polities can exist within other virtual polities; they can be of any size and shape; they can intermingle, intercross, conjoin, dissociate and divaricate.

Let's call this system a "Collage". A meta-anarchist Collage, if you want to be particularly precise. A political system of maximized self-determination. It is also a system that is entirely emergent and self-organizing, and with no central authority whatsoever. In other words, it is a *confederated* system.

The Collage implies that any kind of communities are possible. *Including those which misalign with your personal values.* Including ethnonationalist enclaves — as well as communes where nationalists are strictly not welcome. As well as resorts for synthetic drug enthusiasts exclusively; or a town for people who want to create a completely functional furry society; or a medieval city with guilds and knight-hoods; or a primitivist hunter-gatherer reserve; or whatever society *you* would like to live in.

With that said, we can hypothesize that highly isolated gatherings of think-alike extremists will probably be a rare occurrence in the Collage. Although, the possibility for such gatherings will already resolve a huge amount of social tensions. But for most people it'll be probably more preferable and sustainable to live in "conservative" polities with basic anarchist norms of decentralization and self-governance; plus moderate fragmentation based on minor disagreements. By "conservative" I mean only "preserving some set of values" (in this context, anarchist values), and not the values which you associate with that word.

The extremist polities, in turn, could serve as "political frontiers" of consensual courageous experimentation, allowing the Collage as a whole to try out new unusual sociopolitical frameworks. This will allow for *non-coercive societal evolution* — in contrast to societal evolution as we know it, which happens by violent confrontation between progressive and conservative groups, as well as mutual coercion and struggle for power over others. Now, some leftists call it "the dialectical process of history", but I prefer to call it "a redundant apparatus of surplus suffering".

On the other hand, we can't really predict what the Collage will look like. Maybe it will be an infinitely varying smorgasbord of distinct worlds — rather than an assemblage consisting of a "conservative" core and "extremist" periphery as described above. Maybe it will be both of those systems existing as neighboring self-sufficient Collages. Maybe it will be something entirely unimaginable from today's perspective. In any case, historical determinism is structurally fascistic. *Remember — we'll know it only when we get there.*

Alterprise and forks of freedom

Now, don't mistake this model for simple voluntarism. It's not like we can just get rid of the state and the free market will instantly arrange us into peaceful consensual autonomies. Actually, the global capitalist market in its current form, if met with no resistance, would most likely devour and suppress any attempts at forming a plural meta-anarchist network of autonomies.

The Collage must evolve independently, gradually and organically: by many different people trying out many different approaches at the same time to see what works, and synthesizing those approaches together to achieve increasingly large-scale solutions. This is how all functional societal systems emerge — through gradual evolution, not meticulous planning.

But if so, how can we foster such a system into existence?

First and foremost, everyone should have the right to create their own political project and invite anyone who wishes to participate. Let's call this activity "*alterprise*" — enterprise of alternatives. So, we need to *acknowledge the right to alterprise*. Doing alterprise should be as easy as doing a commercial start-up in a country that is oriented towards supporting emerging small businesses.

A lot of nasty things can be said about "unbridled capitalism" — *and I already mentioned some* — but it can't be denied that market dynamics can be used as a great tool for rapid systemic development. A market, when organized properly, is essentially a technology of synthetic evolution: people offer their products on the marketplace; "good" products gain audience, while "bad" products wither away; the cycle repeats.

Now, what's defined as a "good" or a "bad" product is entirely circumstantial. Also, what the product or its providers gain by attracting audience also varies between different types of markets. In modern capitalist markets, a product's success results in financial gain for its provider and consequent concentration of power in that provider's hands. In a marketplace of organizational systems, the product and its author are rewarded by implementation, as well as investment of personal resources by willing participants. Think of it as free, collaborative, open-source political system development.

Similarly, evolution is not just *some* improvement. It is improvement of performance of certain tasks. And the tasks which define the evolutionary selection may be *any* kind of tasks. In order for political evolution to not result in optimization of totalitarian and centralized systems, certain criteria of selection must be configured. Firstly, a market demand for anarchist systems must emerge — *anarchist systems must prove themselves to be a better political product*. Secondly,

Metaanarchy is a panarchy, but not every panarchy is metaanarchy

Some of you may have heard of a similar political idea — called *panarchy*. At first glance, it seems identical to the meta-anarchist vision — a plurality of political systems between which people can freely choose. However, I believe there is an important distinction to be made.

A panarchist system does not necessarily rely on anarchist principles of autonomy and self-governance. It can as well be a plurality of top-down governments with territorial sovereignty, akin to Moldbug's Patchwork. A panarchy is a marketplace of political systems, but, once again, they can be any kind of political systems— for example, dystopian dictatorships with no actual alternatives.

Strong anarchist institutions and principles are *crucial* for facilitating the free flow of political desire. The Collage must have widespread reliable instruments of direct bottom-up political agency— whether based on markets, on direct democracy, on blockchain, or on something else. Without such instruments, the Collage will devolve back into statehood.

An advanced meta-anarchist society may afford to have polities with high risk of coercion — voluntary kingdoms or warrior cultures, for example — but *the systemic core of the Collage must remain anarchical* in order for the Collage to remain extant.

Meta-X. Baseline protocol for the Collage

Interpolity protocols of varying scale are the glue of the meta-anarchist Collage. To ensure freedom and flexibility, polities must have the ability to agree on their own protocols. Successful protocols are then shared and adopted by other polities. However, as with software development, it might be much more convenient to work out a basic protocol, on top of which all other protocols will be layered.

What should a baseline protocol for the Collage look like? It probably shouldn't have a lot of rules. It shouldn't interfere with the logic of individual rule systems, but it should prioritize personal liberty of individual people over local rules. For example: *anyone who wishes to stop playing by the rules of a given polity must have the ability to leave it, and they can't be held back against their will.* Or, even better — anyone, regardless of physical location, can instantly switch to a different law provider at any moment and, by that, immediately become positioned within its jurisdiction.

Baseline protocols may themselves be plural and subject to evolution. Actually, most likely they will. The more successful a given baseline protocol is, the more parts of the Collage will adopt it.

In that case, the global level of affairs will be managed by more informal conventions — or even with no explicit conventions at all, but by emergent swarm-like and stigmergic organization. The informal approach seems to be the most optimal for large-scale interrelations, as it arises naturally from the global balance of interests. Today, a major portion of international relations operates in a similar fashion. This approach involves far less algorithmization — specific situations and precedents become significantly more substantial.

At the current moment, this is mostly a vague fantasy. A questionable utopian proposition. Surely, many problems and peculiarities, not addressed in this text, will arise in practice. However, certain meta-anarchist tendencies are already present in our day and age: autonomous zones, blockchain-driven decision-making, federated social networks, micronations, private and charter cities, democratic confederalism of Rojava, free and open-source software — and many more.

The Collage assembly process has already started — but if not properly facilitated, it will be dissolved and defeated by more totalitarian and structurally fascistic tendencies: social credit systems, state police militarization, mass surveillance, usage of AI and big data for top-down control, automation of coercion, and so on.

To prevent this and ensure the emergence of the Collage, we need to continuously network meta-anarchist tendencies together; start up our own alterprizes and personal utopias; create forks of existing projects; make political and ideological innovations; *and be ready to encounter fierce resistance from the systems of status quo.*

If we somehow succeed, we may suddenly find ourselves on a planet that is a flourishing playground of chaotic consensual experimentation and constant exploration of existential possibilities; a world of unimaginable variance and beauty; a world of thousands of ontological frontiers.

I'd say such a world would be worth the struggle.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



negligible forces
Collage
Basic Proposition for a Meta-Anarchist Political Vision
Sep 7, 2020

Retrieved on Feb 18, 2022 from <https://negligibles.medium.com/collage-basic-introduction-to-the-meta-anarchist-political-vision-f61a549ad059>

theanarchistlibrary.org