A Theory of Technoanarchism

A.T. Kingsmith, York University
Abstract

This work charts the speculative relationship between technology and anarchy. What follows is not a proposal for some ‘coherent’ political system. Rather, it is a sketch of some vital ideas on epistemology, technology, and politics that speak to processes of experimenting with the digital mediums of a rapidly accelerating Internet age. This techno-genetic turn towards the rhizomatic underpinnings of technology is about venturing out into the world of objects, material processes, vibrant matters, technological and cosmological time. What this work attempts to put forward is a means to make sense of the multiple crises that we find ourselves faced with; to think through the materialities of power in order to better understand the subjugating processes of capitalism.

As a result, it puts forward a meso-politics of contingency, a set of technoanarchistic pragmatics that include but are not limited to: decentralisation, open source, anonymity, contingency, and absurdism. Running through the work are discussions of epistemology, subjectivity, integration, techno-genesis, nonconsciousness, and anarchistic forms of resistance. For technoanarchism, this resistance comes through new cartographies of speculation—a reductio ad absurdum, a meso politics of immanence that problematises not only social laws, which we see as corrupt, stifling, and transient, but moral, physical, and perceptual laws as well, all in order to envisage a post-representational political moment no longer tied to stimulated desires in a control society.

Keywords: reductio ad absurdum, techno-anarchism, meso-politics, speculation, techno-genesis

I. Introduction: Speculation and Technoanarchism

Early in 2016, a self-described ‘independent, radical’ publisher sent out an email. The email, which was vainglorious titled: ‘Psst! Downloading Isn’t Stealing [for today],’ advertised a number of ebooks for free download in honour of the release of a newly published collection of writings by computer programmer, writer, political organiser, and open-source hacktivist, Aaron Swartz.

The subject line alone is troublesome to anyone who followed Swartz’s life and politics closely—in January of 2013, facing 35 years of imprisonment for downloading over four million academic articles with the intention of releasing them online for free, Swartz committed suicide at the age of 26. Moreover, Swartz’s book, The Boy Who Could Change the World, was unavailable for download, as the publisher ‘did not have the North American rights’ to realise the writings online.

Ironically, not only does the email implicitly condemn downloading as stealing—on most days—but Swartz’s book, a book written by an open source activist who took his own life in the fight for free and open information online, was hidden behind a licensing paywall—the
very same type of paywall that Swartz was relentlessly charged with ‘data theft’ for breeching at MIT back in 2011.

The publisher’s inclinations represent a serious lack of understanding for the types of principles that Swartz was fighting to uphold. And while the perspectives that follow here are not explicitly representative of Swartz himself, they speak to a larger techno-anarchic ethos that he worked his whole life to develop. An ethos that—if the aforementioned email is any indication—is gravely misunderstood in both popular media and ‘critical,’ ‘radical,’ and ‘progressive’ spaces.

This work represents an anarchist attempt to address this knowledge gap. What follows is by no means a coherent system—no form of anarchism ever is. Rather it is a sketch of some vital ideas on epistemology, technology, and politics initiated by people like Swartz that speak to an interest in combining the new technologies of the digital age with active experimentation in order to confront the violent territorialisations of daily life in a hyper-industrialised capitalist society.

Such a speculative turn towards the anarchic possibilities of technology are about leaving the comfortable waters of human narcissism behind and venturing out into the world of objects, material processes, vibrant matters, geological and cosmological time, and thus simultaneously enacting a philosophy that rediscovers the more-than-human ecologies that we are embedded in. What this work offers is a means to further probe the multiple crises that we find ourselves faced with, to think through the materialities of power, to trace the cartographies of capitalism.

Key to such works are the common desire of leaving behind the tired distinction between nature and culture in ways that avoid reproducing the modernist trap of treating the world as separate from humanity—some raw material ‘out there’ that can be ceaselessly territorialised as our own inexhaustible means to freedom. By articulating how we are embedded within technologies and are ourselves processes of technological subjectivity, technoanarchism explodes through the constraints of endless framings around discourse, language, power-knowledge, textuality, and culture. What follows is a discussion of the possibilities—epistemologically, technologically, and politically—engendered by such realisations, in the hopes that we can not only appreciate what people like Swartz continue to fight for, but can contribute to this ongoing struggle in new ways.

II. Epistemology and Technoanarchism

The hallmark of technological anarchism is its steadfast opposition to all the established orders of things: to the state-form, the capitalism system, and the ubiquitous institutions and ideologies that de/re-territorialise these structures into a control society. The habitual neoliberal order must be destroyed through an overcoming not merely of our social circumstances, but of the physical world—an overcoming of modern epistemology. We deny not only social laws, which we see as corrupt, stifling, and transient, but moral,
physical, and perceptual laws as well—we envisage a mode of existence no longer tied to the stimulated desires of socially subjectivised individualism.

i. Knowledge as Epistemologically Anarchic

Like the Dadaism that we draw from, this anarchistic epistemology resists congealment into any single programme, including its own. Feyerabend: “To be a true Dadaist, one must also be an anti-Dadaist,” (1975:266). Given an aim, we may approach it with help from organised groups or more dispersed collectivities—we may use reason, emotion, ridicule, even ‘an attitude of serious concern’ to confuse rationalists by inventing compelling reasons for unreasonable doctrines.

There is no view, however ‘absurd,’ we refuse to consider or act upon—no method is regarded as wholly indispensable. The one thing we oppose positively and absolutely are universal laws, universal standards, and universal ideas such as ‘truth,’ ‘reason,’ ‘justice,’ and the behaviours they bring along. Following from the *reductio ad absurdum* of Feyerabend (1975) and others, we take great interest in procedures, phenomena, and experiences which indicate that perceptions can be arranged in discombobulated and unusual ways, and that the choice of a particular arrangement as corresponding to ‘reality,’ while not arbitrary—it always depends on traditions—is certainly not more ‘rational’ or more ‘objective’ than the choice of any other arrangement.

Since absolutely nothing can be predicated with any certainty as to the ‘true nature of things’, all projects, as Nietzsche (1882) points out, can only be founded on the ‘nothing.’ Yet *there must be a project*—if only because we ourselves resist being categorised as ‘nothing.’ Out of nothing we make something: an uprising, a revolt against everything which proclaims to know the nature of things. We disagree, we are ‘unnatural’—out of nothing, techno-anarchic epistemology provides a means to imagine new values, and by this act of invention, move to create unfamiliar worlds.

No systematisation, according to a technanarchic epistemology, has a legitimate right to ‘exist.’ All ontological claims to a metaphysical transcendent are spurious, except the claim of chaos—which however is undetermined. Egalitarian forms of large scale governance are impossible, for as Bey (1987) points out, any form of ‘order’ we have not imagined and produced directly and spontaneously in sheer ‘existential freedom’ for our own celebratory purposes—is an illusion.

Underneath this shifting and ephemeral un-positioning lies the staunch conviction there are no exception-less methodological rules governing knowledge and information. For as Feyerabend (1975) reminds us, the history of knowledge is so complex and convoluted that if we must insist on a general methodology which will not inhibit the fluid and chaotic nature of existence, the only ‘rule’ that it can contain is the epistemologically anarchic proposition that ‘anything goes.’

Such dispersed and post-representational conceptions are loosely assembled by the realisation that we will cease to be enslaved by the cautious conformisms of traditional
organisations of knowledge and information only when we render immanent our most fundamental categories and convictions—including those which allegedly make us ‘human.’ Thus the realisation that reason and anti-reason, sense and non-sense, design and chance, consciousness and non-consciousness, intentionality and un-intentionally all flow together as co-constitutive parts of an informational assemblage are vital points in all epistemologically techno-anarchic approaches.

ii. Anarchic Subjectivities as Fluid, Dispersed

Whether in its conception of politics—Who is the ‘subject’ of politics? Who can change things?—or in its radical nature—Who can rebel? Who can liberate themselves, and liberate themselves from whom or what?—epistemological anarchism conceptualises subjectivity as multiplicitious.

For a techno-anarchic epistemology, fixed ‘subjects,’ meaning ‘individuals’ as free, unchanging entities who are responsible before themselves and the world, are a most primarily repressive ordering of things: from that of Plato and the forms, Descartes and the cogito, and Kant and the transcendental subject, to that of liberal humanism, the Enlightenment and French Revolution, of the ‘the rights of man and citizen,’ of Adam Smith and the ‘free market’, law, modern, secular morality and the hollowed out nature of what we presuppose to be representative democracy.

In contrast to this static notion of the modern subject as unified, continuous, and homogeneous—existing in one form, duplicated by as many copies as there are individuals—epistemological anarchism conceptualises a radical subjectivism, fluid, dispersed, and chaotic subjectivities that are multiple, changing, and heterogeneous. Their forms vary constantly in size and quality. They are always collective, and regard the individual, in the commonplace sense, as a largely illusory figure—a manifestation of capture and control that takes on many convincing metamorphoses.

Technological anarchism seeks to counter the micro-political controls over life through a coming together of subjectivities working against a myriad of subjugations. We are not at all groups of individuals, we are assemblages of enunciation—non-denumerable units of desiring-subversion, which cultivate our preferences for randomness, fluidity, hybridity, and a repudiation of vanguard tactics. As Guattari (1989) continues, we are a deepest affinity for affinity, for non-universalising, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based in a commitment to chaotic dispersion. What we deploy is difference, the project of working ourselves towards affirming a groundless ground.

Although thinkers such as Nietzsche (1878, 1882), Foucault (1966, 1969), Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) do not explicitly identify as anarchists, their ideas are of great importance given the post-representational nature of their thought. Through them, the grounding for epistemological anarchism comes in to view: an anarchism of becoming, which does not have an eventual goal, nor does it flow into ‘being,’ it is not a final state of development, nor is it a static form of society, rather, it becomes permanent only insofar as it continually represents a means without end.
Thus when thinking through the vital nature of reality, epistemological anarchism points to the ongoing process of ‘subjectivation,’ to the ‘plane of non-consistency’ through which fractured, dispersed, chaotic, and anonymous subjectivities can be (re)formed. As Colson (1996) points out, such epistemologies are neither an ideal, nor a utopia, nor an abstraction. Epistemological techno-anarchism is neither a program, nor is it a catalogue of regulations or prohibitions. It is a force common to all beings which expresses the immanence of the possibilities all these beings contain, a living subjectivity which, in certain circumstances, takes us outside of ourselves.

III. Technology and Technoanarchism

As we move deeper into a highly technological regime in which the infrastructures surrounding us become more complex, it is increasingly apparent that the epistemologically techno-anarchic subjectivities operating on a plane of non-consistency can never be conceptualised in isolation from various systems through which we are in constant and constitutive interaction. The notion of ‘human agency’ as paramount is illusive. We reject such anthropocentrism by recognising the distributed nature of subjectivity among human and non-human entities—certain technological, biological and social processes predispose and channel more traditional ‘human’ actions.

i. The Potentialities of Integration

Philosophers of technology such as Simondon (1958) and Stiegler (1998) assert that humans have always been integrated into their environments and have co-evolved with them. In their form and operation, information technologies have always constituted our social, political, and economic relations—they are not mere coefficients, but direct effectors of the territorialisations of capitalism. In other words, technological mediums constitute a global society, not merely by the messages and signifiers they deliver, but by the characteristics of the mediums themselves—the integrated meanings of technical forms are inseparable from the forms’ social content.

The present form of information thus induces a certain type of social relation—assimilative to that of the capitalist mode of production. What is new about the present moment however, is the unprecedented degree with which we can actively build and change these relations. With such developments in mind, technoanarchism points to the the fact that these technologies also contain, by virtue of their co-constitutive structures, an immanent, multiplicious, and anarchic ‘co-logic’ of communication—energy and information systems as co-subjectivations with the potential to break precisely from the politicised opposition between consumption and production.

In other words, by enabling new feedback loops and new forms of amplification between human evolution and technological developments, the Internet simultaneously constitutes the possibility for implementing new distributed and decentralised networks of
subjectivities—the potential for a plane of non-consistency that dissipates the reductive hyper-industrial binaries of input-output.

Think of the massive drop in the cost of the production of technologies, data transactions, and the replication of technical materials—both analogue and digital—as Stiegler (2014) points out, this has given contemporary society the ability to acquire ‘new practical competencies,’ but also ‘analytical and reflexive competencies,’ which are essentially the possibilities of those situated outside the nexuses of power to develop skills, abilities, or functionalities—different modes of dispersed subjectivation—that had previously been restricted to more exclusive social spaces.

Indeed, according to Marx’s (1939) analysis of the division of labour—the division between the professional and the non-professional, between the master and apprentice, the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and so on—in a pre-digital, pre-Internet system, the possibilities opened up by the spread of information were far more limited. Thus technoanarchism points to the fact that the fluid nature of socio-digital technologies creates new, dispersed channels of meaning-making.

What is necessary, is therefore to create systems for producing metadata that organise and create political technologies based on, not just collaborative bottom up systems—as these can be essentially top-downed by the culture industry—but genuinely heterogeneous and anarchic methods through which the existential articulation of differing perspectives and critiques can be rooted—one that moves through the systemisation of a hyper-industrial, consumerist, capitalist epoch, in order to reach new anarchical modes of existence—modes that enable our multiple expressions of subjectivity to establish new forms of analytic critique through which the digital realm can start to separate from the spectre of the hyper-industrial capitalist political economy.

ii. Technogenesis and Nonconsciousness

Digital technologies have vastly expanded our ability to communicate, research, compile, share, and organise information while newer interfaces continue to techno-genetically integrate us into these processes. Take the techno-genetic mutation of human attention. As Hayles (2012) points out, humans are equipped with deep and hyper attention. Deep attention has a high threshold for boredom and enables engagement in a specific task or problem over an extended period of time, while hyper attention requires constant gratification and yet enables the quick scanning of significant amounts of data in order to gain an perspective overview or identify certain problems.

Now, with the development of our ubiquitously networked digital devices, we occupy a socio-technical environment that systematically privileges hyper attention. This has profound effects on cognition, and as Hayles (2012) notes, such an ontogenetic adaptation actively reconfigures the technical environment in a direct way that requires more hyper attentiveness—we invent things and they invent us, we co-evolve. If we think of this process in terms of what Hayles calls technogenesis, we can see there is not necessarily a
change in the biological structures of the brain, but an ontogenetic change through which technologies rewire subjectivities as we grow.

With digital technologies we have the capacity to capture and process unimaginable amounts of data—from a technoanarchist perspective, this has both advantages and disadvantages. While events like the *Snowden Affair* have made it clear that these technologies enable new forms of surveillance and control that were unthinkable prior to the emergence of the Internet, through processes such as technogenesis, we can see the re-coding of socio-biological assemblages in exciting new ways. For example, beyond merely altering attention spans, as Guattari (2010) and Lazzarato (2014) point out, in order to filter the increasing amounts of information we are forced to process, we are seeing a very drastic expansion in our techno-cognitive nonconsciousness.

Such non-conscious processes—distinct from the unconscious defined by psychoanalysis—filter the enormous amounts of information coming from the body and the environment through sensory perceptions. Recognising patterns, drawing inferences, adjudicating between conflicting and ambiguous information—as Hayles (2012) observes, we are learning that increasingly, our bodies react entirely non-consciously to external stimuli, a behaviour that we share with many contemporary technical systems in a technogenetic feedback loop of informational production.

In approaching questions of knowledge, subjectivity, and integration from the perspective of this technogenetic feedback loop, technoanarchism highlights the ways in which, as Guattari (2010) claims, we are living in a techno-centric universe—where the semiotic machines of economics, science, technology, art, and so on, function in parallel, and non-consciously as they produce or convey meaning—in this way, they bypass anthropocentric significations and representations.

The existence of such technogenetic processes means that we can no longer employ more traditional models of communicative and information theories, in which exchanges are realised between individualised subjects through emitter-receptor/sender-receiver analogies. Instead we must think in terms of ‘inputs and outputs,’ ‘machinic assemblages,’ ‘technogenetic mutations,’ all of which have less to with ‘human’ and more to do with our technoanarchistic subjectivations.

IV. Politics and Technoanarchism

Epistemology as anarchic, subjectivity as multiplicitious, technology as co-constitutive, humanity as technogenetic—running through all of these seemingly dispersed rhizomatic outgrowths is a subterranean technoanarchistic co-logic, a non-reductive monism that moves to un-ground the ideological and material assumptions underpinning the apparatus of the autonomous humanist liberal subject. What this un-grounding attempts to open up is a space for a new kind of techno-anarchistic meso-politics—a networked, anonymous, and de-individualised space where the pragmatics of resisting the terrain of capitalism are alive,
vivid, and much more difficult to co-opt or destroy than they are at the micro (i.e. individualised) or the macro (i.e. globalised) register.²⁰

i. The Pragmatics of Resistance

As techno-anarchism insists that we cannot know in advance which way a line of flight is going to turn, we see politics as a speculative process of active experimentation. This spirit of ongoing experimentation is our grounding, our means to an endless end. We are not interested in the militant elitism of vanguardist politics. Instead, in establishing a nuanced pragmatics of resisting, technoanarchism moves to spread the seeds of rupture that trigger uncontrollable moments and deterritorialisations of the dominant political paradigm by way of contagion and propagation.

We must always be wary of looming tendencies to congeal into fixed partisan movements that merely reproduce and expand the hierarchical inequalities and individualised subjectivities of neoliberal capitalism. Instead, to propagate a politics of non-co-optation, we must, as Simondon (1958) notes, prime our interventions within a dispersed and fluid state of transversal becoming.

Such interventions depart from the basic mantra that ‘information wants to be free.’ We assign this statement a deeper meaning beyond the simple observation that ‘information should be free.’ For techno-anarchists, technology possess an internal chaos, a potentiality, which makes it vitally incompatible with privatised and regulated notions of proprietary software, copyrights, patents, and subscription services. Channeling a technogenetic ethos, we see information as a dynamic entelechy, an evolving force that cannot be contained within any ideological structure.

This is not to say that the Internet itself currently has an anarchic architecture. There are many well cited texts in multiple fields charting the regulated nature of Internet protocols, (for example, Galloway, 2004). Moreover, the ways in which the Internet functions as an apparatus of the control society is becoming more and more apparent with every new surveillance revelation and Wikileaks cable. What technoanarchism gestures to is not some techno-utopian understanding of the Internet as an entirely free and open space, but to the ways in which epistemologies and subjectivities can operate anarchically on the Internet by engaging in techno-genetic means of becoming—subjectivities that establish dispersed and anonymous forms of expression through which the digital may be able to break from the social and machinic subjugations of capitalism.

For example, Usenet is one of the earliest applications deployed on the Internet, preceding the modern Web by over six years, it is a peer-to-peer network of open-source computing based on principles of net neutrality, open communication, and user anonymity.²¹ Like Freenet, Entropy, and the I2Ps that followed, Usenet has no central server or dedicated administrator, rather, it’s a constantly changing conglomeration of servers that store and forward messages to one another.
As a peer-to-peer network is designed around the notion of equal peer nodes simultaneously functioning as both ‘clients’ and ‘servers‘ to the other nodes on the network, this model differs from a client-server network arrangement, where communication is usually to and from a central server. For technoanarchism, such peer-to-peer networks embody the dispersed, co-constitutive and multiplicitious anti-logics of transversal communication—as a result, they actively alter the capitalist mode of production by breaking from the opposition between consumer and producer.

ii. Moving to Disperse the Datascape

While technoanarchism shares the same deep affinities towards net neutrality and free, libre, and open source software (FLOSS), it can be distinguished from other more libertarian forms of crypto-anarchism—which tend to emphasise personal privacy via encrypted communications between individuals. Instead of attempting to hide from surveilling and corporatising practices of the state-market assemblage—an unsustainable long-term practice as no level of encryption is indefinitely secure—technoanarchism is about creating new, open, accessible networks and communities of dispersed users based on the vital principle of a ubiquitous right to information.

Constructing a new pragmatics of the digital, one that deepens our techno-genetic mutations, requires more than just a commitment to privacy—a commitment which tends to be couched in a liberal humanist rhetoric of the individual: ‘my privacy,’ ‘my data,’ ‘my information,’ ‘my rights,’ and so on. In order to actualise the chaotic, multiplicitious, and co-constitutive nature of techno-anarchism, we advocate for a speculative meso-politics of ephemeral, contingent pragmatics.

- **Decentralisation**: following from the architecture of peer-to-peer networks, technoanarchistic acts are *decentralised*—lacking in central servers, leaders, or any dedicated administrators.

- **Open Source**: keeping in line with our deep commitment to drastically expand the presence of FLOSS, whenever possible, we utilise, advocate, and share *open source* software programs.

- **Anonymity**: drawing from our conception of subjectivity as anarchic and dispersed, we remain *anonymous* whenever possible in order to avoid being reduced to a single, static identification.

- **Contingency**: guarding against the temptation to congeal into fixed, vanguardist movements, we practice a politics of *contingency*, insisting that our actions disperse as quickly as they form.

- **Absurdism**: returning to our Dadaist routes, we deploy *absurdity*, parody, mimicry, mockery and other tactics to create ‘playful’ politics that may appear ‘harmless’ but are in fact very effective.
Such a technoanarchist politics draws from the tactics and theories of a number of anarchist and hacktivist traditions. Too many to name in their entirety, they include post-anarchism, the Situationists International, cyberpunk, schizo-analyses, Marxist autonomism, the Chaos Computer Club, and Anonymous. What ties these seemingly disparate movements together is their shared interest in combining new technologies with active experimentation in order to confront the violent territorialisations of daily life in a hyper-industrialised capitalist society.

These are not confrontations that are meant to take place in the shadows, on the peripheries. In order to spread the seeds of rupture necessary to trigger uncontrollable moments of resistance and realisation, the speculative politics of technoanarchism manifests out in the open, they are participatory, inclusive, and playful, contingent, decentralised, and anonymous— things that the structures, despite promises to the contrary, are not—and on present course, can never be.

Of course, these are not rigid dictums and this is by no means a final and comprehensive treatise. In keeping with the creative, contingent, and fluid departures of technoanarchism, we must always be questioning, amending, and improvising. Take these ephemeral pragmatics and collaborate, build, create, manifest, pull apart—then share it, disseminate it, throw away those neoliberal desires for credit and recognition. Make the action the return. For the ones who take up technoanarchism in it entirety, are ones who open up its pure potentialities in new ways.

V. Conclusion: Control and Technoanarchism

Wikileaks’ Cablegate, the Snowden Documents, the Afghanistan War Logs, the recent Panama Papers—if massive leaks such as these are any indication, we are living in a highly securitised and surveilled political climate—a diffuse matrix of new information gathering algorithms, where information is tracked and ordered into patterns deemed either acceptable or unacceptable.22

By rendering information in this way, our society of control maintains an illusion of freedom. We are ‘free’ to say and do what we want—within pre-circumscribed desires. Since the only forms of discourse prohibited in the media assemblage are radical indictments of our political system and calls to ‘terrorist’ or insurrectionary action, most of us fall within such parameters without even thinking about it, and so experience ourselves as free to express our views and live our lives.

When, like Aaron Swartz, we fight for increased open access publishing and creative commons licensing, or ‘simply’ attempt to dump publicly-funded knowledge into spaces where the public can actually access it, we see the true face of capitalism as unbridled control. It does not matter if we really are being watched at any moment, the point is to normalise the feeling we could be.
After all, we know that we are being tracked. Touch off enough markers in Internet activity by going to certain sites or using certain words and you will be placed on a ‘watchlist.’ Rather than being spurred to paranoia by this, we are encouraged to relax, while at the same time asked for confidence and endorsement of the idea that those who are breaking the rules will be caught. It is this latter idea—that ‘wrongdoers’ should and will always be caught—which technoanarchism forcefully calls into question in an attempt to pose a sustained challenge to the matrix of control.

Inadmissible behaviours are largely unrecognised as existing, or situated under the category of the ‘criminal,’ a concept we rarely take the time to call into question. As a result, a divide is created—a class that falls outside the ‘we’ who have freedom—and deep thought about the shared subjectivity of these ‘categories’ is strongly discouraged. We are under control precisely to the extent we think of those subjugated to the effects of power as anything other than ‘us.’

In reality, there is no grand authority to overthrow, no sovereign, not even an explicit disciplinary program—control manifests at the every day register. We are slaves to our desire—or rather, it is desire that is being enslaved. As Debord (1967) points out, resistance thus involves refusing to desire the forms of knowledge being sold to us. Desire must become open and creative—we need more differentiation, a rejection of binaries, and a refusal to separate subjectivities out into ‘Selves’—the ‘free’ populous—and ‘Others’—criminals, activists, hackers, immigrants, etc.

The challenge is how we imagine a world we inhibit. For technoanarchism, resistance comes through speculation, a *reductio ad absurdum*, a meso politics of immanence—taken up out of nothing, it momentarily fuses, ridicules, subverts, and dissipates just as quickly, before it can be monetised, stratified, individualised. Perhaps then, we can say that the contingent pragmatics which inform resistance are the most important part. After all, technoanarchism does not order the solution beforehand, but is committed to the disordering process of always working towards it—while simultaneously realising that ‘it’ can never be fully achieved—for ‘it’ must constantly be pushed further and further if we are to avoid simply reproducing the re-calcifications of control.

Endnotes

1 From a very early age, Aaron Swartz was involved in a number of projects which constituted many of the Web architectures we interface with today. Swartz was involved in the development of the web feed format RSS and the Markdown publishing format, the organisation of the Creative Commons movement, the website framework web.py, and the social news site Reddit, where he became a partner after its merger with his company Infogam. In January of 2011 Swartz was arrested after connecting a computer to the MIT network and setting it to download academic journal articles from JSTOR. Federal prosecutors later charged him with two counts of wire fraud and eleven violations of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, carrying a cumulative maximum penalty of $1 million in fines and 5 years in prison. Swartz committed suicide before his case could be brought to
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trial. For a further introduction to both Swartz and the seeds of this technoanarchistic ethos that he sewed, see Swartz’s ‘Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto,’ from 2008.

2 As an ethos, anarchy replaces ideology—the good sense and common sense of the dogmatic image of thought—with meta-modelling and re-singularisation on all scales. This is an ethos of deep assemblages of collective enunciation and creation, not communication. There is no morality here—and if there is any normativity then it is only in the sense of a meta norm preferencing conditions for a full unfolding of life.

3 For anarchists, everything is equal, but this equality is said of what is not equal, of being that differs from itself. An equality of unequals, we anarchists call it. As Deleuze (2001) says, equality lies in the ability of beings to go to the limits of their capacities, beyond their limits. This experimentation is ground, means to endless end. It is a recognition of epistemological anarchy—the fact that what returns is difference. Thus adherents to anarchism espouse a deep opposition to authority, similarity—from this we form arguments against tyranny, property, so-called liberal democracy, conceptions of justice, and capitalism, among other things. Moreover, the anarchist objection to law is not an objection to agreement, but an objection to the imposition of rigid interpretations of what qualifies as ‘right.’ A frequent characteristic of anarchism is the assertion that a only law that everyone should obey is a law stating that recognition should be lived up to, for recognition is, by definition, participatory. You must recognise an agreement in order for it to apply. But for disconnected, corrupted, and/or self-interested governmental institutions to interfere in the exercise of life deprives us of our Deleuzian equality of inequality. Though often taken to mean that anarchists dislike organisation in general, this is not the case. What anarchists demand is that any institution that seeks to exert influence over people should be required to prove its validity to the people it seeks to influence.

4 As D&G (1987) point out, deterritorialisation is the movement by which something departs from a given territory—from the perspective of social change, everything hinges on the kinds of deterritorialisation present. Thus if to territorialise is to assemble information in a specific way, and to deterritorialise is to dissemble previous territorialisations, then to reterritorialise is to re-purpose deterritorialised information, not in order to return to some previous social arrangement, but to open up new avenues of possibilities.

5 The word epistemology is derived from the ancient Greek epistēmē meaning ‘scientific knowledge’ and logos meaning ‘speech,’ or ‘word,’ in this context denoting ‘codified knowledge of.’ Thus the concept is grounded on a model of ‘ontology,’ to designate the branch of philosophy which aims to discover the meaning of knowledge, or how we come to know. Epistemological anarchism affronts such conceptions of epistemology because it points to the unscientific nature of how we actually come to knowing the world.

6 Dada or Dadaism is a form of artistic anarchy born out of disgust for the social, political and cultural values of modernity. It embraces elements of art, music, poetry, theatre, dance and politics. As art-factory (2015) points out, Dada was not so much a style of art like Cubism or Fauvism—it was more of a protest movement with an anti-establishment manifesto. See artfactory.org for a great introduction to Dadaism.

7 A mode of argumentation that seeks to establish a contention by deriving an absurdity from its denial, reductio ad absurdum argues that a thesis must be accepted because its rejection would be untenable—a process of argumentation grounded in the absurd. When
thinking of examples of what this might look like, we point to surrealists and dadaists such as Breton (1924) and Artuad (1958), who conceptualise their works as politico-artistic performances realised in initiatives such as the conceptual art movement—a peripheral, temporal aesthetics that cultivates non-permanent art installations that expresses a politics that inherently avoids capture by its ephemeral nature, while also working to jar audiences out of their daily duties through the playful deployment of satire and irony as sites of socio-political commentary.

Hayles (1987) points out, the existing society is merely the current capitalist- scientific incarnation of an ordering ontology of information—demanding the reduction of the many down to the few—a move that can be traced all the way back to the Enlightenment’s stratified understanding of nature as a series of messages or codes that ‘man’ must decipher and order to realise his rightful domination of existence.

While anarchist critiques of democracy are far too numerous to be addressed here, Marlinspike and Hart (2005) provide a good introductory critique that can be accessed free online from The Anarchist Library.

What control produces are not so much objects, but rules (Burroughs, 1978). There is no real difference between personal affairs and politics— both represent the way control is invested itself in ‘the world.’ This is the concept of micropolitics—there is ultimately nothing that is not political as our economies of control are always scaled up to a broader social field. There is no Cartesian subject standing apart from the world—even our sense of personal identity is itself a product of control related to our broader social structure.

By the post-representational nature of thought, we mean that genealogical thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari push their critiques further than the representational notion of the individual. While many thinkers focus on the molar—individual, conscious, representational—natures of social subjection under capitalism, they fail to address the molecular—machinic, post-representational, unconscious—production of subjectivity. As Lazzarato (2014) points out, the post-representational pushes us towards the affirmative power of subjectivity because it is not only interested reconceptualising the individualising processes that equip us with a subjectivity—assigning an identity, sex, body, profession, nationality, and so on—but also how the individual is constituted as a machinic component or ‘dividual’ in financial, media, and state-form assemblages in a technical system in which subjectivity constitutes inputs and outputs.

The practicing of privileging ‘becoming’ versus ‘being’ is grounded in the tradition of process philosophy, a tradition in which Nietzsche (1882), Deleuze (2001), and Guattari (2010) are all connected. Process philosophy is based on the premise that being is dynamic—becoming—and that the dynamic nature of being should be the primary focus of any comprehensive philosophical account of reality and our place within it. Even though we experience our world and ourselves as continuously changing, Platonic metaphysics—and essentially Western metaphysics—has long been obsessed with describing reality as an assembly of static individuals whose dynamic features are either taken to be mere appearances or as ontologically secondary and derivative. While process philosophy insists that all within and about reality is continuously going on and coming about, importantly, it does not deny that there are temporally stable and reliably recurrent aspects of reality.
Rather, we take such aspects of persistence to be the regular behaviour of dynamic organizations that arise due to the continuously ongoing interaction of processes.

What we refer to as the plane of consistency is a founding concept in the ontology of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987)—they call it a plane of immanence. Immanence, meaning ‘existing or remaining within’ generally offers a relative opposition to transcendence, that which is beyond or outside—as we mentioned: Plato’s forms, Descartes’ cogito, and Kant’s transcendental subject. This plane is pure immanence, an unqualified immersion or embeddedness, which denies transcendence as a real distinction—Platonic, Cartesian, or otherwise. Pure immanence is often referred to as a pure plane, an infinite field or smooth space without substantial or constitutive division. Technoanarchism conceptualises the plane of immanence as plane of consistency because as a geometric plane, it is in no way bound to a mental design but rather, following from the anarchical nature of epistemology, an abstract or virtual design—a formless, univocal, self-organising process which always qualitatively differentiates from itself.

These technological, biological and social processes are contingent assemblages of ubiquitous elements that include: activists, intellectuals, institutions, networks, bodies, practices, traditions, norms, behaviours, structures, signs, organisations, and informational technologies—all of which, through a loose but nonetheless coherent constellation process of territorialising past, present, and future as knowable in a specific way, flatten the amorphous multiplicities of subjectivity into static identities and objects.

Following from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1983), we take territory/terrain to be an assemblage of customs, habits, behaviours, practices defined by the functions of information. Importantly, territory is not universal. According to D&G (1987), it always has edges, ways to move through it. Yet these so-called edges cannot be thought of solely in spatialised terms—space itself cannot be conceptualised only in terms of a physical plane. For this project, what really matters are the ‘edges’ in terms of the meaning of signs, markers, gestures and sounds—as assemblages of a specific reading of information, these edges have specific meanings in a territory, but can be deterritorialised to take on other meanings elsewhere.

The hyperlink, for example, allows all ideas to be networked—even connected with a proper systems theory management—it does away with a need for references or sources, all ideas can be hyperlinked. If we recognise the products of consciousness not as products of our ‘self’ but as interconnected products of the sharing of information across computational networks of subjectivity, we do away with the need to reference authors—we build upon ideas themselves. This changes the relationship between producers and consumers of information—information now exists in a less fixed fashion, it can be accessed by more than one person at any time, and shared between anyone. While this was still possible for books, it was much easier to keep information hidden, and much harder to share it freely. Of course, IT still reflects the social structures of capitalism—think of the sharing economy—but hyperlinks, among other technologies I will explore—meshnets, intranet, open-source software—do open up new de/reterritorialising possibilities.

Conceptualised by Frankfurt School thinkers Horkheimer and Adorno (1944), the culture industry thesis proposes that popular culture is akin to a factory producing standardised
cultural goods—films, radio, magazines, etc—that are used to manipulate society into passivity. Consumption of the easy pleasures of popular culture, renders people docile and content, no matter how difficult their economic circumstances.

18 In psychoanalytic terms, the unconscious does not include all that is not conscious, but rather what is actively repressed from conscious thought or what a person is averse to knowing consciously. Non-consciousness on the other hand is an ongoing processing of information beyond the conscious register.

19 If we take techno-genesis seriously, then we can no longer employ traditional models of communication theory (Shannon, 1948) in which exchanges are realised between individuated subjects through emitter-receptor analogies—to go beyond an anthropomorphism we must instead speak of ‘inputs and outputs.’

20 We bring up the concept of the meso-political—what D&G (1987) would call thinking through a ‘middle,’ through the milieu (par le milieu)—because we fear that if we are content with the opposition between the individual and the global we are almost inexorably led to maniacal modes of differentiation where the issue is always designating paths of salvation or perdition. With the meso, it is necessary in each instance to redefine topically how the relations between the micro and the macro are assembled. In other words, it’s about everything that the macro does not allow to be said, and everything that the micro does not permit to be deduced. The meso is a site of invention where the pragmatics of the question is much more alive, vivid, more difficult to forget than the micro or the macro—the meso must create itself, and each time it creates, de-creates, and re-creates itself, the meso-political affirms its co-presence within a milieu.

21 Peer-to-peer (P2P) computing or networking is a distributed technical architecture that partitions tasks or work loads between peers. Peers are equally privileged participants in the application. They are said to form a peer-to-peer network of nodes—a rhizome of inter-connections that move through the meso-level, through the middle. Peers make a portion of their resources, such as processing power, disk storage or network bandwidth, directly available to other network participants, without the need for central coordination by servers or stable hosts. In contrast to the traditional client-server model in which the consumption and supply of resources is divided, peers are both suppliers and consumers of resources.

22 Massive leaks such as the Panama Papers—which consisted of 2.6 terabytes and over 11 million records of compromised confidential information from the law firm Mossack Fonseca detailing suspected cases of money laundering and tax avoidance scheme are significant—are highly significant because they point to the larger control apparatuses operating just beneath the surfaces of popular culture, media, and democratic rhetoric. Some journalists and scholars refer to this as the ‘Snowden Effect,’ where direct and indirect gains in public knowledge from the cascade of events and further reporting that followed from Snowden’s leaks of classified information about the surveillance state in the US and around the world have sparked public debate about the intersections of security, privacy, and anonymity that were not taking place the years prior, but should have been. For techno-anarchists, what is even more unsettling that the previous lack of debate however, is the resulting lack of political and institutional response.
References


About the Author

A.T. Kingsmith is a PhD candidate in the department of political science at York University, Canada, where their research interests frequently (re)oscillate between cyber culture, ontological anarchism, social movements, and the transformative relationship between activism, affect, and aesthetics. A.T. is also affiliated with the androgynborg, an open, post-art collectivity based in Toronto as well as a founding member of the Console Cowfolk Computer Club (C4). For more, visit their website: https://adamkingsmith.com.