

Tools to Capture, Tame and Restrain

Against the IT-giants and their world

Orkanen

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In terms of language, there are sometimes words that mean more than one might think at first glance. Take network, linking and connection, for example, words that we use everyday without wondering about their actual meaning, words that indeed represent our way of life in the age of the internet. All these concepts describe tools to capture, tame and restrain – maybe it's not a coincidence after all.

The similarities don't end with the language. The internet consists, despite its ethereal appearance, of a network of cables and wires. This infrastructure is maintained, developed and controlled by states and international IT-companies like Facebook, Apple and Google – companies who work their way towards an omnipresence in our lives, and thus are enemies of freedom. In time, they might also replace the traditional authorities in favour of their smart world, where everything is determined by algorithms, while control is ever so present and no authorities are in sight.

Such a nightmare will probably be applauded by certain 'anti-authoritarians', who haven't understood the connection between freedom, body and individual. I am nothing without my living, pulsing body, whose limited expiration date creates the frame around my existence, a frame that can't be replaced by a virtual identity. Freedom is to be who you are, and to be yourself, you also have to be lonely. Only in silence and darkness, face to face with yourself, you'll be able to look deeper into yourself and make crucial decisions. Free association, which is fundamental for me as an anarchist, is also the freedom to discard association. With an internet connection you are never alone, but always a little bit at work, a little bit together with family, a little bit under surveillance (by your 'friends', police, or commercial companies...). If you finally succeed in turning your eyes from the screen, you'll see your fellow human beings chained to their phones, always connected. Who can still deny that this network really has captured us?

In Foulum close to Viborg* the American technology giant, Apple has begun to build a new data centre which is supposed to be finished in 2026. There is also a plan for erecting a centre in Aabenraa, where the first part of the construction is estimated to finish by 2019. Both centres will be around 166.000 m², and are thereby amongst the largest in the world. In Odense, Facebook plans to build a data centre of 55.000 m² which is supposed to be fully done by 2020. In Fredericia, Google has bought a piece of land of 73.000 hectares, which will possibly be used for a server complex. The centres are going to support the European markets of these companies.

According to an estimation from energinet.dk – the public company which controls electricity and gas – three of such centres will together consume an amount equal to around ten percent of all of Denmark's consumption of electricity. The fantasy surrounding the green digital society cracks down in the face of such numbers. To run and build the necessary infrastructure demands enormous amounts of energy and exploitation of people and natural resources.

The internet is obviously not a 'free' space, but a product of concrete and specific exploitation. Hidden behind a stylish touch screen. It is no more egalitarian and 'environmental' than the factories where people drag out their lives by producing computers and smart phones.

In connection to the centres, Apple will finance wind mill parks to produce enough electricity for both of theirs. Facebook, too, talks about renewable energy, but it is less clear where the electricity they need will come from in reality. Is this all about appearing 'green' in the eyes of the consumers (legitimized by useful idiots such as Greenpeace)? No, it is most likely a question of the guarantee of supply. Today, the rich and powerful are dependent on the energy that runs through the existing cables. With an ominous transition looming on the horizon, the most prudent agents move toward renewable energy sources, so they don't lose their grip. In this transition, which involves a certain insecurity, a potential for rebellion lies, but as always, crisis and states of emergency also give the rich and powerful an opportunity of consolidating their power. The green and plugged-in society of the future is a totalitarian and collectivist dystopia that has nothing to offer the individual longing for freedom. A life that is lived in constant connection is not worth living. In untamed freedom and immediate rebellion, one finds a self-explanatory joy.

But why has Denmark, of all places, been chosen as a construction site for these IT-giants? Among other reasons, it is due to the political stability, guarantee of supply, the cool climate, the highly developed renewable energy infrastructure and, of course, the direct fibre optic connection to the US. Denmark is an important junction for the transatlantic communication, which flows through the cable TAT-14. Through this cable, data is transported between the European countries and the US, and its landing site is a small red building in Blåbjerg, in the municipality of Varde (Jutland, western Denmark). Thus, the omnipotent and unfathomable internet consists of some very concrete locations, which are crucial for it to function.

The data centres, which are now being built, are important junctions in the network that holds us captive in the order of hierarchy, but they don't stand alone. They need unlimited access to energy, and they need stability. As control is divided up, possibilities of sabotage and attacks are created all the time for everyone who keeps their eyes open. The grid is tightening around us, but its individual components are still vulnerable and easily accessible.

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* [Places mentioned in the article are provincial towns and cities of Denmark.]

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