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## Peter Ludlow (Hg.): *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias*

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**Peter Ludlow (Ed.): *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias***

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2001, 485 S., ISBN 0-262-62151-7, \$ 60.00

In *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias* Peter Ludlow offers various writings – by among others journalists, professors, cypherpunks, underground figures, and science fiction writers – that mirror the eclectic nature of the internet. The main aim of the book is to indicate and scrutinize emerging governance structures that appear within online communities and increasingly loosen themselves from terrestrial legal authoritative powers. The book is organized in five parts. The first section focuses on the issue of sovereignty of the internet, section two deals with the possibility to communicate and interact anonymously on the internet, outside of the purview of nation states and other powers, while the third part focuses on increasing e-commerce which raises questions regarding legal jurisdiction and taxation with an eye to physical boundaries of nation states. The fourth part then shows various experimental forms of law and other governance structures on the internet, while the last section takes (anti-)utopian visions for cyberspace into account.

Sovereignty of the internet is introduced by laying out the foundation of emerging cyberstates where a particular sovereignty has emerged and has led to self-sufficient structures of governance, outside of geographical boundaries of offline states and community formation. Thus, cyberspace as an independent and real place with its own laws and regulations, as declared by John Perry Barlow (1996). Immediate questions are raised and developed throughout the other chapters whether Barlow's declaration can be taken seriously at all. Main point of critique is that Barlow's ideas are too far-stretched and totally go beyond real political issues such as internet accessibility and censorship. This first section then shows exactly those opponents and supporters of Barlow's manifesto together that have opened doors for discussion about the consequences of our ways of thinking about sovereignty and social constructs that govern among others, politics both on and offline.

The second theme of the book is centered around cryptography which is the science of the making of ciphers and codes. Various authors study the accessibility of programs and other resources to encrypt online data. Especially with an eye to economics and politics: for instance, increasingly business transactions are encrypted beyond the control and legislative authority of nation states (think about consequences for commercial infrastructure, digital currencies, and for

taxation enforcement and the like). Thus, this possibility of crypto anarchy, a concept introduced by Timothy C. May, raises questions regarding the inevitability and desirability of encryption technology. The main concern discussed here is „key escrow encryption technology“ which is a type of encryption that allows government authorities to decipher all forms of encrypted communications. This door to private and sensitive information such as finances and politics, could end up in the wrong hands and cause inconceivable loss of security. However, the latter is subjected to discussion as well, since even if one would prefer strong governmental control, could law enforcement authorities really provide that sense of security, untied from crime?

Cyberspace and (physical) borders are scrutinized in terms of loss of revenues and taxation, partly caused by crypto anarchy, partly by shifts in the relationship between state and local authorities. A crucial point made is that legislation in cyberspace can no longer be examined from the framework of terrestrial borders, since cyberspace means overcoming and crossing borders imposed by existing governance structures. Therefore, legal jurisdiction for online purposes – especially e-commerce – surpassing laws developed for geographical bound purposes, are asked for. Thus, anarchy, state and the internet are studied interdependently in order to give way to an insight into the needs and complexity of lawmaking in cyberspace.

Not only the need for legal online frameworks is expressed in the fourth section, various authors have given way to what such an online legal jurisdiction should look like. An interesting and important study is made with regard to MUDs and MOOs that offer online environments which can be compared to real cultures and governance structures. Thus, by studying these virtual cultures one can trace how power, authorities and crime function, how they are distributed among users and websites, and in which way they contribute to a formation of online legislation. Also it seems that online legislation will mainly come about in response to conflicts and disputes (for example between system administrators and users) and in consequence influence the nature of laws that arise. The discussions in this section point and contribute to the thought that the birth of online legislation might signify a transformation of law enforcement bound to geographical nation states.

The final section of the book „Utopia, Dystopia, and Pirate Utopias“ gives way to utopias regarding e-cultures as envisioned by people such as John Perry Barlow, Kevin Kelly, Lou Rossetto and Douglas Rushkoff. Supporters and opponents of these thinkers focus on aspects varying from the perspective of dominance of white men, browser interfaces, virtual communities, trying to improve the world by creating one online, to „Californian Ideology“ and „digerati“ (hi-tech artisans) and „Jetsonian“ utopias (interest in gadgets such as talking appliances and holographic assistants). Is utopian thinking in this book therefore pessimis-

tic? No, not necessarily. As a matter of fact, it becomes clear that from utopian critiques a rather positive opportunity is derived: by navigating online we find what paths to create which pave the road to utopian thinking that comes about through variation and experimentation offered by the internet. Think for example about online environments where genuine personal relationships exist as well as conflict resolution and online legislative forces. Instead of the rather old-fashioned visions that were just mentioned, Mark Dery and Hakim Bey among others, suggest that utopias are or should be community-based, dynamic, experimental and (perhaps) temporal. At least some of these ‚pirate utopias‘ can therefore function for a specific amount of time as an island that signifies a better world.

This book needs no recommendation for anyone who is interested in digital community formation, especially from the perspective of geographical boundaries of nation states, sovereignty, e-commerce, legal structures of the internet, and (anti-)utopian visions for cyberspace. The articles written by authors stemming from very different backgrounds show a great variety in internet users and interests among them and offer the reader a broad and interesting perspective on changing boundaries both on and offline.

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