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Boundaries

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My Own #11

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In recent years, I've heard a lot of anarchists talking about the need for boundaries. It's pretty tiresome: "Abolish all borders, but don't you dare challenge *my* sacred boundaries!" I was attracted to godless anarchy those many years ago, not just because it was sexy, but also because it *challenged* boundaries of every sort. Freedom for me is the endless expansion of myself and my possibilities. And such expansion requires this challenge.

Besides, you really don't *need* boundaries. All of us already have them in abundance. They seem to be a part of existing in a world with others. So the question I ask myself is: how do I view these boundaries?

Those who say "we all need boundaries" seem to see them as rigid borders between themselves and the outside world, borders that they need to defend and that others need to respect. This idea of respecting other people's *boundaries* is a bit odd in itself. Maybe the little people of this pathetic society no longer perceive *themselves* as worthy of each others' respect (and they might be right about that), so instead they come up with this abstract concept of *boundaries*, sacred barriers that I am to respect. Such boundaries

are walls for them to hide behind. That might be fun in a snowball fight, but it's not the way I'd want to live my life from day to day.

These boundaries are limits an individual puts on her own free activity, ways of policing himself and others, because she is afraid, because he feels that he is too weak for certain encounters, and that she *and others* should accept such weakness rather than challenging it and seeking to overcome it. They are the very opposite of the stiffening of *oneself* against another that Stirner talked about. This stiffening has nothing to do with an abstract boundary that I expect others to respect. Rather it is the assertion of my strength and confidence in a specific situation of conflict. Boundaries, conceived as strict borders that people are to defend and respect, are ways of *avoiding* such conflict, ways of cowering back from the real, practical meaning of freedom as self-ownership and self-creation.

But there is another way to conceive of boundaries, a fluid way, in which boundaries are the places of encounter, where the individual meets her world. When she hides within these boundaries, treating them as protective walls, he loses touch with his world and so also with all the things and beings through which she can create herself. And so he becomes rigid, stuck, incapable of growth and expansion, trapped in a straightjacket of his own making. This is because the boundaries have been reified; they have ceased to be meeting points for interaction and have instead become fortress walls blocking interaction.

So challenging boundaries - especially those to which you or I feel most attached - is still central to the anarchist project. That project is still one of going out and confronting the world, facing and overcoming your limits, breaking down the walls that keep you in your place. Only in this way can an individual take the world into herself and expand herself in a process of endless self-creation and self-consumption. This process is an endless overcoming of boundaries, an endless stretching beyond. Here and now, we have to break down the walls formed by the institutions: the state, the economy, religion, law, ideology, technology, etc. But even af-

ter these are gone (should that day ever come), every individual who desires the fullness of his freedom as his own being will have to continue challenging her own boundaries (and welcoming the challenge from others). Boundaries will always be there, and so the challenge must always be there as well. This is the practice of freedom, because it is the practice of being one's own.