

Arming Negativity: Towards the Queerest Attack

A Response to “Beyond Negativity: What Comes After Gender Nihilism?”

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“We are radicals who have had enough with attempts to salvage gender. We do not believe we can make it work for us. We look at the transmisogyny we have faced in our own lives, the gendered violence that our comrades, both trans and cis have faced, and we realize that the apparatus itself makes such violence inevitable. We have had enough.

“Rather, what comes after Gender Nihilism must be a materialist struggle against patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism which understands and is attentive to the complex interrelations between these structures and which refuses to reduce any one of them to any other.” We are not looking to create a better system, for we are not interested in positive politics at all. All we demand in the present is a relentless attack on gender and the modes of social meaning and intelligibility it creates.”

The essay *Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto* was an explosive reflection of my own experience with both “gender” and “nihilism”. As a queer who possessed no desire for queer recognition and societal assimilation, the quote above summarized a position of pure negation which I found exciting affinity with.

I wanted to write this essay, not as a critique of *Gender Nihilism* but as praise, and as a personal response to some of the questions posed in *Beyond Negativity: What Comes After Gender Nihilism?* In this essay I outline a few quotes from that piece and respond with my own gender nihilist perspective.

“As such we are left with the need for the abolition of gender, the need to push back against reformist projects that simply seek to make an expanded notion of gender. What remains to be created is the establishment of a path forward.”

I think it is important to acknowledge that many individuals craft their own paths of queer negation towards society and its projects of assimilatory reform. For me personally, a path forward means a queer nihilism armed, wild and ferocious against the social standardization of gender and industrial control. This includes but is not limited to an individualized path of destruction which targets the internalized governance and roles that define an assigned gendered identity. The personalization of this governance, which dictates the roles and behaviors of the assigned identity, surrenders the shapeless wildness of individuality to the solitary confinement

of politics. Towards the abolition of gender and against reformist projects, my anarchist war does not limit itself to the confines of politics. Instead, it includes a queer nihilist life-experience of becoming ungoverned by gender and any other social constructs intended to subjugate and discourage individual uniqueness. Beyond the limitations of theory, this also includes clandestine attack on the manifestations of society, negating the domestication of law and order.

“Only real, concrete, and organized struggle can move us forward. Mere negation, senseless violence, or embrace of unintelligibility cannot be enough. In short we must move beyond negativity. The project at hand is to adequately account for the violence of gender, the necessity of its abolition, and the strategies for achieving that abolition in material terms. Only then will we have the ability to not only achieve abolition, but to change the world.”

I believe real, concrete, and organized struggle is most powerful when orchestrated at the individual level. Since in daily life, it is the individual who experiences the struggle of survival in this gendered nightmare, no one other than that individual is most qualified to materialize that revolt. Gendered violence is unique to each individual who accumulates a history of struggle against it. Electing identity-based movements or organizations to represent individualized experience often flattens differences found between individuals, erecting a false sense of unity. This often leads to one’s association with an identity determining the legitimacy of one’s experience, rather than the experience being legitimized as individually unique. This point was eloquently summarized by Lena Kafka in *Destroy Gender*:

“My personal experiences with gendered violence are only taken seriously in light of revealing myself as a trans woman. Our theories should start from the ways we have experienced gender violence in our daily lives, not identity. Our relationships to each other should be based upon our affinities and similarities with each other, rather than based upon the lowest-common-denominator politics. Daily life is far too complicated to be reduced into two categories.”

From my own individualist perspective, nihilism is so much more than just pessimism, negation and violence; it is the personification of anarchy, the reclaiming of individuality and the embracing of ungovernable uniqueness. Queer negativity is hostility towards socially constructed expectations, those who enforce them, and is subsequently the emancipation of one’s undefinable “self” from gender conformity. This includes the expropriation of violence and the total abandonment of victimhood. Queer nihilism materializes itself as a declaration of war on society. For every possibility of sexual assault there is a blade being sharpened for self-defense. Dangerous spaces are personified, replacing the positive politics of safety. Armed queers don’t just make waves; they are tsunamis against the logic of submission.

“This means recognizing that these things can only be overcome by a communist politics oriented towards the future. Abandon nihilism, abandon hopelessness, demand and build a better world.”

My queerness is an experimentation that never ends. It is the totality of a life lived against the law, insubordinate and wild. It is not a communist politics but a nihilist negation to all systems that attempt to subordinate individuality. It is not the leftist politics of demanding and building a better world but an anarchist insurgency of reclaiming life day to day, and setting fire to its captors. Since gender is embedded in every fabric of this industrial, civilized society, I find no hope in salvaging any part of it—only joy in every second of its calculated demise.

“I think it’s telling that I am presented as the voice of the gender nihilism, when two of the other largest contributors are indigenous trans women. Their voices matter in this debate more than mine, yet people have completely and consistently centered my voice and perspective. This is harmful.”

Society and those who wish to preserve it require identity politics to categorize people based on socially assigned constructs. Identity politics is where individual experimentation goes to die. Like studying the bricks in a wall rather than venturing beyond the wall itself, identity politics, like all politics promotes the death of imaginative exploration. Politics represent the fixed ideological prescriptions of living, assigned to “the masses” who are treated as if they are incapable of thinking and acting as individuals.

In the realm of academic recognition, identity politics predetermines the popular narrative by reversing the hierarchy; those belonging to the marginalized category become the dominating group who then are given a pass to trivialize the experiences of those they view as opposite. But this hierarchical reversal doesn’t challenge hierarchy itself – it only reforms it in an attempt to create a power masquerading as equality. This power, composed of social capital, is then used as the power to ridicule, coerce and dominate others with impunity.

Anyone who presents a single individual as the voice of something as wide spread as gender nihilism is someone who interprets the world in terms of textbook definitions rather than the organic fluidity of free thought and social interaction. Quite simply, it erases all those individuals who had already discovered and lived gender nihilism but didn’t have the academic language or status to be credited and recognized in the mainstream. Alyson’s experiences with gender are not trivial to mine simply because I am a person of color. Their experiences are unique from mine, and far more complex than the oversimplifying measurement of social constructs and any theoretical analysis of identity and privilege. And it is this uniqueness of individual experience that gets lost in the homogenizing formations of identity politics. In my opinion, the harm here is the assertion that voices belonging to certain individuals matter more than others. Ironically, there is inequality in pursuit of “equality” and the common denominator is always a social construct in one form or another.

“Rather, what comes after Gender Nihilism must be a materialist struggle against patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism which understands and is attentive to the complex interrelations between these structures and which refuses to reduce any one of them to any other.”

Patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism have identity politics of their own. They each essentialize a role and behavior which reinforces their power socially. In addition to physically attacking these institutions, for me it is important to reclaim my self and emancipate from their mental captivity. This means refusing their language to define others, allowing others to define themselves beyond identity-based assumptions. It also means any positive projects that attempt to occupy space in the courtyard of capitalism compromises the integrity of their rebellion. The transforming of “queer” into another rigid, social identity by capitalism and liberalism is one of many examples. The positive politics of queer identity legitimizes the state and glorifies a civilized standard of submission. With the help of internalized and often celebrated victimhood, “queer” soon becomes another identity pacified and manufactured by capitalism.

This is why my queerness is not a positive project. It’s meaning runs contrary to the collectivized subordination in both capitalism and the left. Queer nihilism means arming negativity against the pacifying effects of positive politics, exploring the intimacy of criminal affinity with others, and arming individuality with the queerest savagery against domestication. The fire in my heart burns every gendered prison assigned to me. Queer is confrontation: my desire for freedom has intercourse with my hatred for civilization. What blooms is a lifelong dance that materializes the queerest attack on capital and social control. I find myself immersed in the chaos of bloodied weapons, broken glass and shrieking alarms. My body is a dangerous space of love and rage un-

governed by the morality of non-violence. With love, and in solidarity with the wild, and with all those who embrace queer anarchy with hysterical laughs of joy- towards the queerest attack upon the civilized order!

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