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Butchanarchy full live reading of “Betrayal: a critical analysis of rape culture in anarchist subcultures”

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February 22, 2023

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Retrieved on 22 February 2023 from
patreon.com/posts/butchanarchy-of-79062750

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Hey all! If you haven't caught it on twitter I just finished a live reading of the zine Betrayal. And I'm making the full text of my summary available publicly here. Tbh, I have no idea how I managed to do this for the entirety of the COIN manual a couple of years ago. Perhaps it was easier because the COIN manual was so dry, whereas with this text, that I adore, it feels wrong to leave anything out! So I likely won't be doing something like this again, but I hope you all get something out of this one at least, and I cannot recommend reading the full original text strongly enough!

Link to text: <https://www.sproutdistro.com/catalog/zines/accounta>

Link to thread: <https://twitter.com/butchanarchy/status/162809467>

Thread:

Note before we begin: while it is my goal to effectively summarize the content of the text, such a project will ultimately be

filtered through my own judgments about what the most valuable takeaways are, and therefore is not/cannot be a total replacement for reading it yourself!

Additionally, as I have done in the past, I will be including my own responses and analysis to aspects of the text, which may or may not include tying in recent events or discourse that the text itself does not refer to. I will, however, endeavor to make clear when I am doing so.

The text begins with a set of disclaimers even as they are admittedly “fucking sick of disclaimers” because they “resent having to provide apologies and justifications for our words before we even speak them.”

The writers profess that while trigger warnings are valuable, it is frustrating that “fanatical” attempts to avoid triggering each other often pushes discussions about interpersonal violence and trauma to the margins, where they can be more easily ignored.

“If we only speak of our oppression from the position of safety, we’ll be forever silent.” Is a striking quote to me in this section. The struggle against interpersonal violence cannot be had from places of safety, and we have to be able to speak about our own experiences.

However, the authors recognize that we do not live in the ideal world in which we don’t need to place our speech about our own experiences under a disclaimer, and so they offer one to the reader anyway in an attempt to avoid potential harm.

The authors of this essay are survivors, but recognize that they cannot speak for all survivors, or even most survivors. When they use the term “we” they refer to those who agree with their statement and those who see themselves as a part of the struggle against rape culture.

“We do not see our own experiences as exemplary of the experiences of all survivors, or even most survivors. They do, however, provide examples of how Rape Culture has materialized in our own lives, a point we thought worth sharing.”

This essay is focused on the anarchist milieu, & the authors resist expanding beyond their experiences within it. However, they believe an anarchist analysis of power provides a useful framework for deconstructing Rape Culture, and that these dynamics are echoed in other milieus.

Additionally, the authors acknowledge that while there *are* patriarchal structural dynamics of interpersonal violence, they choose to use gender neutral language in this text not to erase that reality, but to make sure not to alienate survivors of all genders who read this.

“It would seem that throughout the anarchist milieu, wherever you turn, there is a community being ravaged by rape, by sexual assault, and by abuse.” This is not new/unique to anarchists. But is it not surprising that anarchist scenes *aren't* better defended against it?

The thing that ties anarchists together in communities is, supposedly, a shared politics and political analysis. Yet, despite this, anarchists “often depoliticize interpersonal violence and divorce it from its roots in systemic power.”

This is a question I frequently reflect on. And it is my belief that it is ultimately the expression of a consistent breakdown in anarchist values in our communities. Folks will name authoritarians as the enemy and overlook those who act as authoritarians in personal life.

The authors take aim at the constant reliance on “accountability processes” which narrow our focus and allows us to believe (incorrectly) that we can confront vast systems of power that enable and construct interpersonal violence by dealing with individual instances.

Our attempts at accountability, they argue, relies on “liberal-bourgeois notions of choice” without responding to the material conditions that create and strengthen people’s feelings of entitlement to control over others.

“It is these conditions that, when viewed from the terrain of struggle, must be recognized as what they are: enemy territory. It is from this realization that we must attempt to launch our attack.”

Rather than shift responsibility for interpersonal violence away from individual perpetrators, recognizing the structural nature of interpersonal violence can help illuminate the social networks that enable their violence and avoidance of accountability.

We’ve reached the end of the Disclaimers and are on to the next section: Silencing the Struggle.

“Silencing” has been popularized with a limited definition, to refer to people actively calling a survivor a liar, shifting blame, and victim blaming. However, the authors suggest this undergo silencing to be incomplete at best.

They list many other kinds of silencing that is rarely recognized as such: writing off the struggle as “drama,” withholding support from survivors, people attempting to be centrists who can see “both sides” or refuses to take sides altogether “as this wasn’t a fucking war?”

“If we broaden our definition of what is ‘silencing’ to mean everything that works to maintain silence, then we aren’t merely defining a few grossly insensitive remarks. Instead, what we’ve implicated is the totality of our culture.”

Normalcy is maintained more “through the complacency of the masses than through the brutality of their masters.” The shared experience of violence can draw clear lines of conflict and create bonds of solidarity, and normalization works to undermine this by making it invisible.

There are obvious apologists that go out of their way to viciously attack survivors, but the more “sophisticated” apologists share space with the perpetrators of interpersonal violence without ever saying a single word about it, and thereby normalize its presence.

Okay, before moving on to the next section, I just have to express my love and appreciation for the one we just worked through.

Few anarchists, the authors argue, understand the interconnections between building community and attacking systems of oppression, even those who do often make the mistake of conceptualizing targets of attack as only being “outside” of themselves.

“Rather, attack is the process through which we recognize the forces which oppress us and seek to destroy them.” We have to not only attack external systems, but oppressive systems even as they manifest within ourselves. “It should be this choice that defines the anarchist.”

End of Zine!

The authors note the complexity of Rape Culture that makes it difficult to fully explain and document, and individuals within the oppressive social structure often oscillate between roles, including some survivors repressing others.

“Rape Culture is [...] not merely a vague concept, but the concrete material conditions which lead people to conclude, consciously or not, that their interest lies in silencing a survivor, being complicit in their continued subjugation, or actively countering their struggle.”

This problem is articulated as people “just doing the easy thing” but the authors ask an important question: “why are our radical communities still structured in such a way that supporting a survivor is not ‘the easy thing’?”

The answer to this question provides insight into how our interests in radical communities are still in large part controlled and shaped by Rape Culture.

Frequently, the perpetrator has power within the community, power that rarely receives scrutiny. The correlation between power and interpersonal violence (itself an expression of power) is strong, yet often overlooked by anarchist communities.

The authors argue that a meaningful analysis of Rape Culture must include an analysis of the relations of power that persist in interpersonal life, including the ways those power relations are replicated in the anarchist milieu.

Final Section- The Image of Community

Anti-violence activists “begin from a precarious presumption of community” that a survivor can supposedly turn to for support, even as “community” is defined nebulously or even not at all.

Often what is referred to as “the anarchist community” is transient and temporal, and frequently dominated by people compromised by their own positions of privilege (class, race, gender, etc.) that they end up more subservient to certain systems of power than they attack them.

The expansion of the concept of “silencing” is especially important imo.

They point out that the survivors who get as far as to openly call out their perpetrator are in the minority of survivors in general, because there is a massive social system at work that functions to keep survivors silence before we ever even try to speak.

The way that people treat abusers in our communities is a *clear* message to all survivors that speaking up will result in suppression and further alienation rather than accountability or change. Silencing is *everything* in the social system that maintains and enforces silence.

Next section- Unleashing Repression:

“For a survivor to speak openly of their experiences in such a climate can only be understood as an act of resistance, and as with all acts of resistance, repression is a likely outcome.”

While repressive forces against survivors can be/have been in the form of police/soldiers, the agents of repression against survivors are also frequently our comrades & friends. There’s less need for state involvement when so many anarchists “are willing to do the job for free.”

Communities that are turned to by survivors with the hope of support are much more frequently mobilized *against* survivors. All aspects of a survivor’s life are put under scrutiny as a means of discrediting them and protecting the perpetrator.

This dynamic, even when it is not fully successful in discrediting the survivor (and it frequently is) ultimately succeeds in forcing them out of the community as their personal life is treated as a source of discussion and discourse.

When the normalization and silencing ruptures, anarchists frequently turn to liberal politics to restore the status quo by claiming that the resulting “divisions” are hurting the movement.

“Of course, such divisions are never blamed on the perpetrator or their actions, but on the survivor for insisting that the trauma they’ve experienced cannot go unanswered.”

The survivors, then, are blamed for undermining “the struggle” which indicates that those who make such an argument ultimately see “the movement” and the needs of survivors as diametrically opposed. This makes them active defenders of Rape Culture.

imo this last point cannot can't be emphasized enough! When radicals flee to the excuse that having conflict about abuse “divides” the movement, & yet stand in complicity with social systems of silencing, they reveal their ultimate allegiance to the continuation of rape culture.

Next section- If You Can't Beat 'Em

One of the biggest contradictions within Rape Culture: “that the very violence it relies on to reproduce itself also reveals its true nature for all to see.”

Apologists within radical communities attempt to resolve this contradiction by co-opting survivor support and language about accountability in order to ultimately suppress survivors. Usually by limiting the possible scope of survivor response and undermining their autonomy.

One of these methods of is the way that false supporters restrict the language survivors use to name perpetrators. Pushing away from using rapist or abuser to watered down terms like “person who causes harm.” Keeping the fight on language rather than addressing violence.

Another method is the way that perpetrators refusal of accountability is often blamed on the survivor's response, and great efforts are put towards not making an abuser or rapist feel defensive without ever asking “in defense of what?”

Accommodating defensiveness, and using defensiveness on the part of perpetrators to limit the actions of survivors, shifts the discussion away from the survivors needs and back to the needs of the perpetrator.

False supporters constantly reassure that they don't have a problem with a perpetrator being called out, just the way they were called out. The survivor speaking of their experiences is

frequently framed as more violent than the violence of sexual assault and abuse.

How radical communities deploy accountability process can also ultimately maintain the power dynamics of Rape Culture: centering the needs of the perpetrators and sidelining the needs of the survivor.

Among anarchists it is frequently acknowledged that demands for accountability are mostly useless w/o an accompanying threat of force, yet this logic is rarely extended to dealing with perpetrators of interpersonal violence, where accountability is framed as the *only* option.

Rather than centering the survivor and their autonomy, false supporters create accountability process that mostly serve to rehabilitate the perpetrator's public image and continued participation rather than survivor's safety and liberation.

This dynamic reproduces the power of the perpetrator and they use that power to set demands and criteria on their own accountability processes and even go so far as to “call out” survivors who are too “unruly.” What is “restored” is the same power dynamics of Rape Culture.

Next Section- Bad Apples:

Sometimes rallying behind a certain perpetrator would so blatantly contradict their self-image as anarchists that some will scapegoat an individual perpetrator to avoid structural analysis of Rape Culture in general.

They may use their disgust and ostracization of a single perpetrator to boost their image as anarchists, without doing any meaningful survivor support, attending to the survivor's wishes, or engaging in any direct confrontation with the problem.

The authors argue that this, scapegoating a few perpetrators while leaving the oppressive social structures intact, ultimately protects Rape Culture, and is used by individuals to deflect analysis of their own role in the social relations that produce perpetrators.

Next Section- Waging War on Culture: