

Understanding Anarchism As Queer

a warm invitation

Traylor Sparks

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While I have been thinking about wanting to do this piece and workshop for a while,
I had a hell of a time to find the right place to start
because having to begin and to end is linear within time
so my first words to you, dear participants would be: let's end linearity.

Understanding anarchy as queer will start again
after it has started already
from 3 different places:

- definitions
- history
- praxis

I could not have reached any of these places without my network of trust and love
and texts and thoughts by thousands of other people that have said and done
smart ass, beautiful, hot, crazy, amazing things
despite
or because
of the heteronormative, cis centric, patriarchal, white supremacis, ableist, capitalist, statist
civilization that not only surrounds us
but is inscribed into every single one of our movements.

I wanna start again
over and over
a revolt against a revolt against a revolt
continuity is not possible
yet: seeing myself positioned in history
is necessary.

So let's start again
with binaries.
man — woman
heterosexual — homosexual
cis — trans
inter — dya / endo
binary — nonbinary
genderfluid — agender

- this list could go on and on.
we lived in a gendered binary world
where everything I do or say is being put into a category.
what we have heard in the audio play in the beginning where the voices and words of
Jack Halberstam and Paul Preciado — two queer scholars —
and an anonymous antispecieist publication
all of them breaking out of the shackles of these binary oppositons.
this is the queer perspective:
to not identify in such a way.
there is no binary opposition to queer.
you are queer if you decide to be and do queer.
now this also goes along with relating in a certain way
or, rather: to put relating in the center of everything.
in case you were ever wondering why gossip is that important:
it's a form of communication that centers around relationships.
but I'm getting off track-

binary thinking is at the very core of power.
without a man-woman binary or a god-human binary or a culture-nature binary
states could not exist and power becomes really, really fickle to uphold.
thanks to peter gelderloos for the book *Worshipping Power*.

marxists and other post-hegelian thinkers would go about with their dialectics to talk about
power relations.

I oppose this kind of thought out of pure, lived queerness:

Dialectics is just another way of binary thinking.

thus, it can not break with power structures.

I myself have broken many relationships by falling into the trap of binary thinking and thus
imposing power over others.

as an anarchist I have learned that many things are just, well, complicated
and can more easily be navigated by making mistakes, doing, learning, failing, loving
than by trying to fit things or relationships into categories.
anarchist practice and thinking does not start with the binary. it starts with relating.

here I would like to quote an long dead german-jewish anarchist, Gustav Landauer, because
I really liked his perspective on what "the state" is.

"the state is not something with can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain
relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour: we destroy it by contracting
other relationships, by behaving differently."

and with these words, the connection between queerness and anarchy, to me, is pretty clear. it's about how we relate and behave.

I will start again. This time with anarchy.

What is Anarchy. In my definition, anarchy is centered around three simple principles:

- free association
- decentrality
- solidarity

(do I need to explain this further??)

As an anarchist, it is my interest to further these three principles in every aspect of life in order to dismantle power wherever I can. As a queer person, I need to destroy what destroys me in order to survive. Thus I work, or rather, play — to put it with the words of alfredo bonanno — towards the end of civilization however I can — through and with these three principles.

Association is not only being policed by borders, property and law, but also by principles of relation. Who is accustomed to relate to whom in what kind of way? Free association is policed by the normality of family and reproduction.

Solidarity is being held back and broken by installed models of identity and relationships — a painful experience I am sure many of us have made already: (f.ex. “female solidarity”) and relationships (f.ex. prioritizing care work for romantic partners over care work for partners in crime)

Only if we start relating differently to each other, queerly, not based on identity politics but working through our learned lenses of seeing and judging, we can play towards anarchy.

In practice this could mean — beyond classical stuff like revolting, reading, squatting, stealing and so on — to start self-organised fucking sessions with your friends or to create affinity groups for emotional and physical care or maybe start with something as easy as a regular cuddle puddle or massage saloon.

Yes, this is the point in the talk that is directed mainly to people who have not found yet how to deal with the strange desire to be queer, yet. those of you who look at us with shyness or jealousy.

the formula is easy:

Say no to the things you think you have to want — this can mean anything civilization puts upon us: you don't have to kiss or have penetrative sex or invite people for dinner or have a career or drive a car.

This enables you to say yes to things you never knew you wanted.

the praxis is hard and painful and a continuous, never ending process of self exploration and re-connection to people.

queer is a practice of difference instead of identification.

and out of accepting this difference, we can relate.

It's time to talk about consent, I guess.

I love how I already feel like I am on slippery grounds...

In the current queerfeminist understanding, we have arrived at the point of “only yes means yes”.

In anarchist self-organisation, consent and consensus are something that is created, very often,

in a centralized decision-making process.

thank to some people at crimthInc and some queerfeminist friends of mine, I have come to understand these things from both sides — and have begun to see the problematics in this which I think can only be solved by thinking queer and anarchis thought together.

On one hand, centralized decisionmaking is a pretty obvious problematic that, I see, is being worked against or around in many anarchist groups — as hard as it is to get away from the idea that there is “one time and place” (often: the plenary) where decisions are made. To bring decentralized decisionmaking together with transparency and the possibility for people to not have their individual boundaries crossed, is the real big issue here.

Individual boundaries, however, are still discussed within the idea of “only yes means yes”. This also brings a certain complication:

Sometimes we are not able to say yes. Sometimes we are not able to say no. Because, this again, is thinking in binaries.

Consent can only be solved through relating. In a way, we need to learn to get away from the concept of decisions as something “you do” at one specific time and place. While at the same time being mindful to respect our own boundaries and learning to take responsibility.

ah well, this is going out of hand. I just really wanted to mention consent and consensus, however, this would be a 2 hour talk of its own.

Back to understanding anarchy as queer.

In history, there are so many examples of queer anarchists or queer aesthetics in anarchy, that I am currently obsessed with the idea that even historically, maybe more anarchists were queer than not — and it was just always erased from our very own history even, as queer erasure is a thing. If you are interested in queer anarchist history, I highly recommend the podcast Cool People Who Did Cool Stuff by margaret killjoy.

Why is it that every time I prepare to visit an anarchist conference or bookfair I believe there will be mainly old white cis men — and in reality, it’s mostly queer people?

I would like to quote the infamous queer nihilist journal Baedan at this place to come to an understanding how this might be happening.

Desire, not specifically homosexual, is the tendency within society which also figures its undoing. Desire is the polymorphous and perverse overflowing that refuses to be captured within Oedipal reproduction or locked up in identity. Queerness, in its association with desire, names the negativity which is the nightmare of the social order.

Desire, then, cannot be reduced to sexual attraction or orientation. Desire is a chaotic field which escapes representation, and so the repressive field of normative desire can only refer to it by the figures of those whose sexual practices are outside its matrix of intelligibility. The danger and fear associated with queerness are in relation to this unthinkability.

This fear of queerness, of submitting into desire and thus admitting that queer people exist or that we are queer, also has to do with who gets space in history and how it is told.

Anarchy is queer. There is little doubt about it, to me.

So why aren’t you?

This is the moment where we split up into work groups (you, dear reader, can totally do this yourself at home with your friends, lovers, comrades)

DISCUSSION GROUPS: (30 mins, groups of 3–5 ppl ideally) . the process of framed discussion is no focused on coming to a consent at the end of this workshop and bring out some kind of statement! the discussion is meant to help ourselves find words and affinities, that's why it's important that the groups are not too big! if you don't feel comfortable in the group, change it!

- sexually deviant practices / desire and perversion
- performing gender / subversion
- modes of relating beyond love and family / affinity
- establishing a consent culture instead of centralized decisions and the idea that people can truly say yes or no in an oppressive world / self-organisation
- getting out and not getting pulled back in / destruction and destitution

Cool things to read and listen:

- Baedan, Journal
- Peter Gelderloos, Worshipping Power.
- crimethInc, Terror Incognita.
- cool people who did cool stuff, podcast.
- Paul Preciado, Apartment on Uranus.

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Trailer Sparks
Understanding Anarchism As Queer
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a talk held at RIA 2023 in St. Imier
*this is the text without the audio collage in the beginning, quoting Paul Preciado, Jack Halberstam,
Sailor Uranus, Aunt Ida and some Antispecieicist Texts.*

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