

The Unspoken

Anarchist Tranny Against Civilization

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Social dislocation is a fundamental aspect of trans experience. Some of the most notable characteristics that trans people share are a product of the passive and active social exclusion that pervades their life, both before and after coming out. In the closet, even the closet of denial, the gender roles we're forced into feel like a cage, and as with any cage one is birthed into, it is difficult to conceive of anything beyond the bars.

That dislocation has a common side effect of making the social structures that pervade our lives more obvious. These structures quietly reinforce social roles along the lines of race, class, gender, ability, and any other number of categories that define who is a full human being in our world. There are some things that are far easier to fully understand through experience; e.g as a white trans woman I can have sympathy for, and an intellectual understanding of, the social abjection, social death and totalizing violence that defines the black experience, but I cannot know what that feels like.

It is also impossible for the cis to fully understand the degree to which the most restrictive aspects of gender define their behavior on both social and individual levels. The oppressive ideas and behaviors that I was raised into were engendered through whiteness, or maleness, or any number of other defining hierarchies. Unlearning those things (a continual process which will never be finished) has been both about addressing the things that I say, or think, which were put in me by indoctrination into anti-blackness, or misogyny, and also about the words and expressions that are off limits.

When I talk about the unspoken, what I mean is not the invisible, or the unknown. The unspoken is that which is communicated without being said; the unspoken is the thing that everyone knows, but no one will say.

Gaslighting is a potent example of how someone can use the unspoken to control someone else. In a gaslighting scenario, both parties know what the 'truth' is. But one of them is actively causing the other to doubt their perceptions.

Here, the Unspoken isn't the lie that is being told by the gaslighter, it is the unsayable truth of the power relationship; the unspoken pattern by which the gaslighter is always right and the gaslighted always wrong. This is foreshadowed by the nature of the relationship itself. These

patterns often follow relationships of hierarchy: Cis men over people who aren't cis men, white people over black people, the boss over the worker. The self deception of gaslighting is only possible where there is internalized oppression.

The abusive boyfriend gaslights his partner with lies, but they believe the lies, even against their own perception and knowledge, because of the unspoken relationship of power. "He is right, I am wrong. Even if I am right, Him being wrong is more dangerous than me being wrong." Even if one does not start doubting themselves, the constant social reinforcement, the microaggressions, or simple ignorance around you has a cumulative effect.

It is a manifestation of, not only the subtle degradation of any oppressed person's autonomy and sense of self, but of the unspoken and ever-present possibility of violence. If you are a woman it is in your best interest to assume that any man could kill or violate you. If you are a black person it is in your best interest to assume that any white person could kill or violate you. If you are a trans person, it is in your best interest to assume that any cis person could kill or violate you. This isn't only because of the frequent reminders, frequent murders of black people, queers, women and trans people; but because of the constant silence.

These most heinous examples of the unspoken are illustrative, but they are not as unique as we would like to think. The behavior of abusive cis men is not a far cry from the behavior of feminist cis men. Same goes for white people and racism. The unspoken is a glue holding together our social structures, and to a certain extent, one's ability to perceive those unspoken rules without expressing them to anyone else too loudly, is the litmus test for inclusion in a social space.

Our feelings of affinity, and comfort with others, are often influenced by their ability to adhere to the unspoken requirements of behavior that define our specific social situations. There are things which are universally present (a priority for whiteness and masculinity for example), but each social situation has it's own unspoken rules and functions. We shift our behavior and mirror individuals and groups who we like, behaving more like them, picking up their speech patterns; these are things we all do (whether aware of it or not) that allow us to integrate into the social patterns of others. Social subgroups are rife with unspoken social rules that the members of the group could articulate in more or less accurate ways, but which are inaccessible to people on the outside.

Hypothetically one could have unspoken standards of kindness and egalitarianism, but the simple asymmetry of information creates a hierarchy when the rules aren't known to all participants.

The social laws are not a product of the state, or corporate influences, or class, though all of those structures reinforce the same hierarchies. Perhaps they go unquestioned because they are rarely vocalized by people who aren't violated by those unspoken taboos and social requirements of white cis-iety. Whether it is denial, lack of visibility, or true ignorance, the quiet social oppression of unspoken requirements of masculinity, or femininity, or 'politeness' are all constantly shaping our interactions, and in and of themselves create conflict, and destroy some of the liberatory aspects of movements and social formations.

To survive the coming flood, these unspoken mores, and hidden rules, have to be examined and broken apart.

Not all gossip is a product of the unspoken. Most of human communication appears to be ‘gossip’. Despite this, Gossip is a venue for the expansion of dynamics of the unspoken into individual social conflict. People are often unwilling to voice their concerns and annoyances with the people who annoy them or offend them. There are good and bad reasons for this. Gossip does not have to come from a place of malice to have the same detrimental effects. Sometimes we gossip because we are trying to get social safety and support from others rather than having to confront an uncomfortable situation on our own, sometimes we are accruing social capital, sometimes we are trying to talk about an issue and spare the feelings of the social offender, and sometimes we are simply seeking comfort.

The court of whispers has no written rule book. A legitimate concern that might be resolvable in short order, can become something much larger through refusing to address it in person (or getting someone else to).

The echoes of domination show themselves in these tendencies. This is likely true for other marginalized identities, but I can only speak to my experience as a trans woman. Being trans in a cis space means discomfort and anxiety. The gastric feeling of discomfort and trepidation strikes even before entering these spaces. The unspoken is one of the main factors in this discomfort. The truth that ones voice will not be heard, or will be heard only in part, infects every interaction. Once that sneaking suspicion has been confirmed by the action or inaction of your comrades or friends there is no recompense. Finding a resolution to the feeling of dislocation, and separation from a social structure is something that could only come from the breakage of these unspoken truths.

The frustration of having your ideas put forth as someone else’s; of having your words fall on unhearing ears; it interrupts your ability to fully engage in anything that is going on. There are already so many social rules that you are trying to adhere to, actively changing the way you speak, wondering if you’re sitting right or making the right gestures, wondering if performing gender more effectively would resolve the deep disconnect that you feel; that is at the root of all social interactions we are taking part in. The clear, true, and yet unacknowledged fact that those around you are operating without the same set of burdens operates as its own form of social gaslighting.

There may be places or groups where this is not the case, but I have yet to find them. I feel anxious when I am going into organizing spaces, even with people who have been my friends and comrades for years. I feel anxious because I know that my needs are not important, and stating my needs will be an uncomfortable experience which changes nothing. When I have tried to speak the unspoken, call out the straightness, cisness, or lack of willingness to address the nature of our social relationships, the most that I have ever gotten is lip service.

There are people I organize with who I no longer trust. They may have only said something once; may have only shown their lack of desire to work on the social fabric that so determines our ability to act in a single instance; but I now know the unspoken truth that they are not on my side in this, or interested in challenging their cis-sexist and patriarchal tendencies pervade everything else. It is almost impossible to fix these things once they have come into being. It is a feeling of insult and powerlessness to be reminded that your ongoing advocacy for changes in our social relationships, and examinations of our internalized biases came to nothing.

Many groups break apart because of conflict, usually interpersonal, and usually about some category of identity to which one belongs. A cishet couple breaks up and the group divides, or someone’s concerns about the underlying racism in someones behavior are left to fester until the

only option is expulsion. The inability to speak about these social forces is a constant barrier to liberation.

In the case of gender, it's possible, even likely, that the cis people around me just don't know how their interactions are replicating the transphobia and misogyny in the outside world. That seems almost worse than it simply being a product of unacknowledged social norms. It seems worse because of people's fluency with feminism, or their ability to gender you correctly. I don't know how cis people think. If by some miracle these unspoken tendencies that rob me of autonomy in an ostensibly anarchist environment are just results of ignorance, or a lack of self-awareness, then speaking about them and bringing them into the open would be a sufficient step towards fixing the toxic nature of these social spaces. That it isn't suggests more than just ignorance, but stubbornness and willful action or inaction.

Trying to find a way to exist within these spaces built on a lie of equality is a daunting task. I don't know if it's even a worthy task anymore. Almost daily, I consider telling the people I organize with that they can assume I'll be absent until they give a fuck about trans people and the patriarchy. I haven't yet because building something that doesn't labor under the weight of unspoken social oppression seems like a distant dream that requires a much greater amount of groundwork.

I don't want to just write about these forces that prevent me from being engaged in liberatory work in the way I was before transitioning. I want to destroy those social conditions. But write I must, because without speaking the unspoken, it will continue to rule me. This deep tension will break apart our groups, and founder our movements unless we fight it.

One of my frustrations with the writing on gender that I've encountered is a lack of concrete and effective ways to act. I don't want to replicate that failing. I do not know how to break this pattern in the groups that I currently work with. I don't know if it's possible when the norms and social relationships have ossified so. That leaves me with fewer options. In short, I must fight alone, or find the others.

Addressing these tendencies early and often is a fundamental requirement of any other organizing I take part in. The deep discomfort I feel may be allayed only slightly by starting or being in a group which is actively taking part in transforming our social relationships into something genuinely revolutionary, but having no serious action toward that goal is nearly unbearable.

I have been in spaces where we have talked extensively about creating a revolutionary way of being and interacting. So far it has been nothing but words. That is because of both ingroup/outgroup phenomenon, and because of a constant focus on the next problem. It is easy to avoid resolving the problems in your own domain when you are spending all of your time addressing the problems of others or of the world.

There is a value to something like the consciousness raising groups of the seventies (a la tiamat), but that too is insufficient for the creation of the real abiding solidarity that we need if we are to fight the seemingly omnipotent forces that assail us.

The unspoken will never become word without a multitude of voices spreading it; Many people thinking about what is unspoken in their own relationships. It is an assimilationist mistake to assume that doing this in the context of cis organizers will bring you any more than a sliver of liberation, but at the very least they need to feel uncomfortable with the way that their actions are preventing any kind of freedom for anyone who isn't them. How are we to change something if we can't even talk about it? What unspoken rules are *you* following? What is unspoken in your life?

When will you speak it?

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