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Many Gods, No Masters

Reflections on the intersection of anarchism and
spirituality

Anonymous

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We dedicate this zine to all Palestinians, including those who are fighting and resisting with the help of their God.

Note on how we came to write this zine

In 2023, a small town in the Swiss mountains was taken over by thousands of anarchists to learn, have fun and conspire together. It was the 150th year anniversary of the founding of the “anti-authoritarian international” in Saint Imier, which was an important marker in the anarchist movement.

The gathering was a big, beautiful and disappointing mess.

Grandmothers stopped to chat with punks on the streets, asking them what “anarchism” was, expressing gratitude for the new liveliness in the village. French insurrectionists tagged “Fuck the orga” when they were asked not to walk on the train tracks to spare the organizational team thousands of euros in fines. Anarcho-communists and neighborhood organizers dreamt up the next steps of our movement. There were workshops about Rojava, disability politics, security culture, and anything anarchist. People got confused about who the fuck was erasing their tags for Palestine, not having met the Germans yet. People got drunk, created kids’ corners, made spontaneous parties and night-marches. Queers tried to fuck in a church, got evicted, fucked in the back rooms of an icehockey rink instead.

There were lovely moments. But it was fucking weird. Almost everyone was white. There was no broader collective strategizing. Everyone felt lost, learning about diverse subjects without actually addressing what we needed most to be talking about: what the fuck are we actually doing as anarchists today? In the end, important conversations did happen, and many people ended up finding their little corner where they would connect with new comrades, conspiring about what steps they might take when they left this strange town.

Some of us found our little corner on a hill talking about spirituality and anarchism. We were ten to fifteen people who shared frustrations and sorrow about the hostility we've experienced towards all things religious in our movement, about the lost potential of the ways spirituality could empower our anarchist practice. We slowly and cautiously revealed our diverse spiritual traditions. We sang songs about God and revolution and found solace in each other.

It's been one year since we sat on that hill, and we are finally publishing a zine which was inspired by the conversations we had in Saint Imier. We thank each one of our comrades we met there for the inspiration to write this zine.

Reflections from the Saint-Imier anarchist gathering of 2023

I.

At the Anarchist Book Fair in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in July 2023, there was a banner at least 3 meters long and wide that read: "Religion is stupid". As a teenager, with my typical French atheist upbringing, I might have thought the same thing. Today, I look at this banner with my comrades and say: "This banner is stupid". More than stupid, it invisibilizes my comrades and I for whom the anarchist vision and their spiritual practice are inseparable. How did I get here?

When I was five years old I stood with a small green leaf in my hand, contemplating its existence. The slow movement of its life was invisible to my eyes but I know I experienced a sacred presence. I clearly had a relationship with some kind of God. My parents called me from afar to join them as I was far behind in the forest. I spent the rest of my life unlearning that faith, disenchanting my relationship to the world.

topic so we can expand this bibliography. Please email: anarchistspirituality@proton.me

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We can do it too.
We are good, we are flawed,
We are the breath of an imperfect God.
There have always been people fighting
Changing history's course
There will always be people fighting
It's our time to carry the torch
Fight with me, I'm a speck of dust
Fight with me this world was made for us
Revolution is possible,
May it be so
Healing is possible may it be so
And we believe that what we need most
Are the hearts of each other right here
I believed in solid ground
Until I saw the Earth in motion
In the wind of steady change
And in the everrolling ocean

Thank you to the writers and composers of these beautiful prayer songs: We are good, we are flawed by Batya Levine If the seasons change by Flip Blessed Motion by Annie Zylstra People Fighting by Abby Let my people sing You can email us at anarchist-spirituality@proton.me for more recordings.

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Our intention is to start a collaborative bibliography, based on everyone's contributions. We haven't read everything on this list, but collected ideas from different places, friends and comrades. We strongly encourage you to send us recommendations of literature or other resources on the

My white family, fervent believers in the all-powerful science to explain our world, laughed at and caricatured people who believed "like sheep" in a God. So I also learned to associate religion with naivety, credulity and passivity. I told myself that it was a way for religious people to reassure themselves, but that the truth lies with those who could see that the world was material and material only. This was the tradition of my family, and we didn't see that we were the ignorant ones. And we were believers too. We believed in something else, something that was strongly supported by the 21st century western paradigm of the bourgeoisie. We laughed at those who believe in a white guy in the sky who tells them what to do. We ignored the very definition (or definitions) of God by so many other spiritual practitioners, as the force of life and nature that transcends the material world and therefore cannot be explained by it. God as the word for what we have no words for — for some a personal God, for others a vague but definitive sense of the divine. We criticized people who told sacred stories. Now I know that these stories are myths that try to convey meaning about our world and the divine, rather than historical stories to be taken literally. We believed we had proof that there was no sacred presence. Now I know that it can never be proven, only experienced.

These days, I remind myself of the small leaf and its lesson : everything is alive, connected and generally a mystery to us. Today, I'm relearning to make space for mysticism in my life, as "a state of experience that attenuates or blurs and interweaves and undoes (or in a word, dissociates) the boundary between the self and the other, the world, God, nothingness, grace, love" (Johanna Hedva). I wake up every morning in wonder that things are, and that they could not have been. I wake up every morning remembering I don't know why things are, but I am thankful for them. Or at least I try to be.

In the European anarchist scene, people are often assumed to be atheists. And if they have some kind of spiritual practice, it is assumed to be secular. It makes it difficult for people who do have

a spiritual practice to speak openly about it. I see my friends silencing themselves. When I announced our conversation on spirituality and anarchism at the St Imier gathering, someone rolled their eyes in disgust. I'll always understand the reluctance and aversion some people have to religion, especially queer people, when they've grown up in conservative religious environments. I understand how balkan anarchists comrades, after a history of genocidal wars based on ethnicity and religion in the region, would put up such a banner. But I feel sad about the lack of nuanced critique of religion in our anarchist spaces. Can we critique hierarchical and patriarchal religious institutions, while recognizing that there are many beautiful, radical and liberatory aspects of these religions? While acknowledging the millennial history of diverse cosmologies and animistic ways of relating to the Earth and gods that were erased by colonialism? Claiming that only secularism can be radical invisibilizes the history of queer and anti-statist spiritual traditions that existed long before christian hegemony and are still alive today. We invite you to learn about jewish, christian and islamic anarchism. We invite you to rediscover the mystical beliefs of your pagan ancestors. We invite you to learn about sufism and buddhism and taoism and see the deep intersections of our politics with other world views based on love and interdependence and mysticism. We cannot let modern churches define our relationship with the material and non material world.

Compulsory secularism was imposed by the West on the rest of the world. Assuming secularism is the only way to relate to the world upholds a colonial narrative that resulted in the erasure of a plurality of ways of being, praying, believing, communing. From the witch hunt in Europe that killed women who had systems of knowledge based on earth and spirit, to the massacres of indigenous civilisations all across the Americas, the philosophical turn of the Enlightenment took hold. A single narrative was imposed: the real thing is the world's materiality, which we can only understand through science and reason. There is nothing less anarchist

humans”, do you see how this statement carries Truth, with a capital T? It is not a falsifiable observation, it is not science. But it's also not the point. It carries Truth. It is meaning-making. The fight dissolved, our bodies softened. Looking out the windows at the earth, I felt the magic. I suddenly understood their argument. My eyes didn't leave the face of the tree.

With a worldview that trees are sacred beings who know more than us, we are more connected to the earth and therefore more inclined to protect it. Inside a worldview that trees are a means of production, we extract from forests and further destroy our environment. Exploitation follows absence of wonder and humility. Which truth matters more? What is more true?

M.

Conclusion

It requires a lot of bravery to be religious or spiritual given the current culture of far-left spaces in Europe. But we invite you to try it out : host a ritual, sing a song, meditate, read a spiritual text with your comrades. Call your anarchist, queer, feminist, witchy ancestors with you into the room. I promise it's worth it. You will feel more alive. And maybe, in small moments, through your embodied connection with the land you are on and the comrades that sing with you, anarchy will feel more alive too.

Song lyrics

If the seasons change
And forests grow then
We can do it too.
Slowly but advanced.
Together with the land.
We can build the world we dream of seeing,

and skepticism. I smiled internally when she said my grandfather, who had just passed away, was here with me, caring and looking after me. Amused, I was imagining him being completely appalled by the kind of superstition I got myself into and couldn't help being frozen by his unexpected apparition. But then, I remembered death is the greatest teacher. I imagined him smiling at me and saying: I should have been more humble. Maybe science does not hold all the answers. I would have said: I miss fighting with you, I love you, but I changed. Can I tell you about my relationship to God? And maybe him being there as a ghost, supposedly dead yet talking to me, would have opened his mind enough for him to listen.

M.

What trees teach us about T/truth

We are sitting in my car watching the landscape as the evening emerges and the sun sets. Everything is pale but potent with color. The leaves of a tree move subtly in a wind that we can't feel. We have been meaning to leave the car but we are stuck in an argument. This disagreement is soaked in so much fear. Fear that our differences will create a gulf too wide for us to reach across when we need each other most. So much fear, because as anarchists, we need our closest people to affirm our fragile and subversive epistemologies.

The fight is about science and rationality. I defended science in these conversations, clinging to my secular education. While sitting in that car with dimming light, I tried my hardest to make a point about the danger of relativism and the value of evidence-based knowledge production.

We both felt that we would burst. We could not hear each other.

After some very long moments, D. pointed at a tree and said: maybe we are fighting over a definition of truth. If I point at this tree and tell you "This tree is a sacred being that knows more than

than the imposition of one single way of being and thinking. An anarchist world is a world "where many worlds fit" (Zapatistas), a world of plurality, of coexistence, of an infinity of possibilities.

Of course, as our group gathered in St Imier, we understood the need to remember why our anarchist ancestors who gathered 150 years before us on the same land proclaimed: "No gods, no masters". Hierarchical structures like churches and rigid belief systems imposed their conservative views on people for centuries and still do. It was instrumentalized as a driver for war, capitalism and colonization all over the world. That's why we need to meet at the intersection of anarchism and spirituality. Not one without the other. We won't accept the authority of any church or any fixed book, however sacred. Rather than "No gods, no masters", we can say: "Many gods, no masters". No institution can mediate our relationship with the divine.

II.

We are not only writing this zine to say that anarchism and spirituality are not inherently incompatible, but also to show that bringing spiritual practice into our anarchism has a tremendous revolutionary potential.

Spiritual practice — through singing, rituals or meditation — brings us into connection with something bigger than us and brings us into connection with each other. Our movements can be very heady. Talking and working are at the center of our gatherings in anarchist spaces. Spiritual practice brings us together in an embodied, relational and emotional way. Revolution won't happen without our bodies and spirits, and spiritual practice can bring all of those parts of us together — not only the brain, but also the body and the heart.

Spirituality connects us to the world, or nature, or "God's creation", so that we feel wonder and awe at things simply existing. It connects us to each other, reminding us of the miracle of existence.

It enchants our world. A new relationship to the world and each other, filled with wonder and contemplation and desire to protect, rather than entitlement to use, extract and exploit – is precisely the anarcho-communist and anti-capitalist vision we need for a revolutionary praxis. Johanna Hedva even came up with the term “mystical anarchism” : “If the self is destroyed, the notions of me and you, mine and yours, vanish. No private property, for one thing. No violence against an other. Because that would be a violence against the self, which has been obliterated, so is now in communion with everything. So violence against one is violence against all, literally. What binds such a community together is solidarity against the patriarchal institutions of church, empire, law, and corrective morals, which is why it’s anarchistic. And crucially the community is bounded together by love. Love for God, or whatever you want to call the force that is bigger than you, but specifically the love that has become the force of your own body, mind, and soul. So love as both the self and other, and a politics of love”. We are not advocating for anarchism as some type of religion, or trying to convert anyone through this zine. But we do want to show, not only that there is no inherent contradiction between the two, but that there may be a beautiful convergence to explore.

M.

Blessing for an anarchist world

Holy God, may there be infinite worlds anew
may we have the knowledge to know what to burn
down
and how to build a garden in the wild
May we have the discernment to know what risks are
risks worth taking
may we have the courage to take them
Dear God,

nicus brought us closer to interpreting the divine intentions behind creation, not further away? The world wasn’t made for or centered around humans, but created as an infinite number of galaxies and creatures whose purpose isn’t to exist merely in relationship to humans, but in connection and interdependence to them. Science can inform our cosmological visions in transformative ways. A deeper knowledge of the material world is a gateway to a deeper understanding of God.

I actually loved my grandfather’s rants about science. He taught me how science is a powerful tool, because our senses and intuition offer us a limited access to reality. Our senses could easily make us believe the Earth is flat and the Sun goes around the Earth, if it wasn’t for our use of the scientific method. I cannot see atoms or protons or electrons with my eyes, yet scientific experiment allows me to know they exist and marvel at how complex creation is at a micro scale. If I am sick, I want to know what treatment is more likely to be effective and science is good at giving us that information. We are both informed and deceived by our senses all the time, and science is one tool among others to sort out all of that information.

Our issue as anarchists shouldn’t be with science but with capitalist, colonial and patriarchal science. Similarly, our issue shouldn’t be with spirituality, but with hierarchical and conservative religious institutions. If we dismiss science and spirituality all together, or if we dismiss one in favor of the other, we miss the opportunity to try and imagine another science – free, liberated, decolonial, spiritual. We are so far from that vision, and I know how hard it is to not let ourselves be brought down by cynicism. But let’s at least not oppose things that don’t have to be opposed, and do the work of reconnecting with the revolutionary potential of learning about the world and being humbled by its divine mystery.

Shortly after my grandfather died, I went to see a psychic. It was my first time and I was torn between excitement, openness

tradict with the divine. When Newton described the behaviors of planets and their orbits, or apples falling from trees, his understanding of where those laws came from referenced God. Einstein believed in a beautiful and mysterious order underlying the world, a “subtle, intangible, and inexplicable” force. Many scientists who lived in a less secular society than we do today did not see religion and science as contradictory, but rather complementary.

When I came out as queer to my grandfather, he cried. I didn’t want to come out to him. I knew whatever scientific beliefs he had about men, women and homosexuality wouldn’t work in my favor. Years before, with a subtle air of triumph, he made a point of telling me homosexual scientists failed for centuries to identify the “gay gene”. I wasn’t sure of the relevance, or why that was any type of victory for heterosexuality. But I knew to keep silent.

He didn’t cry because I was gay. He cried because for once I didn’t leave him the opportunity to fight me. I closed the door to any conversation, any debate on whether my transmasculine partner was a biological woman, whether my lesbianism was natural. A year later, he asked me to explain everything to him and I did. Knowing how to talk to him, I referred to new scientific discoveries attesting to the immense sexual diversity in the natural world. He nodded and shrugged in acceptance and curiosity at our ever changing paradigms.

Maybe you would remind me of how repressive churches have been against scientists who dared to publish results that would go against religious consensus. Of course, at many points in time, religious institutions have felt threatened by scientific discoveries. When Copernicus discovered that the Earth revolved around the Sun, the Church panicked, denied the facts, and responded by imprisoning him.

But it is possible to cultivate a spirituality secure enough to shape itself in relation to our understanding of the material world. A strong connection to the divine doesn’t fear new scientific discoveries, but is enriched by them. What if the new paradigm of Copernicus

may the Government buildings not just crumble
but regrow into graveyards and museums that remind
us of what
we will never be again
Dear God, let us forgive ourselves in our imperfections
let us abolish punishment and bring forth the most sincere
apologies
Dear God, are you sorry?
we are so sorry
we can multiply our apologies into a grief and anger
that builds the greatest revolution
Give us the clarity to see, God
where life is sacred life is sacred
and freedom is a place
made holy by your name.

Prayer for the Atlanta Forest

This prayer was written for a ritual that my dear friend F. and I hosted in the Atlanta forest. We created it to honor the life of Tortugueta, an indigenous anarchist who was murdered by police while defending the land in early 2023. It is meant to be read out loud in a group, where the lines of the prayer are repeated in any order, and the voices spontaneously interrupt each other. The blessing creates a chorus of words that changes from moment to moment.

May you be surrounded by wild forest
May you have the space to grieve
May you find your rage
May you incite the joy of abolition
May you have the capacity to dream of different
worlds
May you know love, camaraderie and friendship

May you be inspired by the wisdom of those younger
than you
May you be blessed with days that are more and more
free
May you breathe clean air and drink fresh water
May you have the courage to defend what you love
May you channel the fearlessness of Tortuguita
May you act with the swiftness of a deer
May you fight with the ferociousness of a wolf
May Tortuguita be a flame that burns down every
prison & precinct
May their memory be a blessing that frees us all

D.

A Short Reflection on Non-Violence

When we say we want to bring spirituality and anarchism together, but not one without the other, we mean it. Reading “Mindfulness for managers” while continuing to exploit your workers isn’t exactly what we are going for, even though I personally believe anyone going deep enough into spiritual practice should end up at a politics of liberation.

Spirituality isn’t passivity. It’s all too easy to say “Everything is love”, “Love your enemies” and “We are all humans” to justify inaction in the face of poverty or white supremacy. If your notion of love doesn’t include fighting the police, maybe it is time to expand it. There is no “radical acceptance” when it comes to the state of our world. We are not going to meditate ourselves out of this mess. It may sometimes help us cope. It may help us feel our rage and face the reality that we live in a world where some of us are free while others are sitting in prisons. But it won’t bail them out. Thus, burning a police car is an act of love.

In 2019, I got a call from my grandfather that his house was raided. Along with one hundred other elderly people, cops invaded their homes and stole a small potion that was very precious to them — a death potion. This small vial of pentobarbital gave them peace of mind — my grandpa told me — and cops violently took that away from them. I was both admiring and worried he would go to jail. My grandfather was behind the clandestine network importing euthanasia medication from Mexico. He wasn’t worried. Hearing about his actions and confidence, I felt proud. I felt close to him and his willingness to break the law for higher moral and political purposes.

I still feel proud. Growing up in an apolitical family, I didn’t have many role models of adults standing up for what they believe in in the face of state repression. Today, I don’t know how I feel about euthanasia in a system that makes us believe we are not worthy of living if we aren’t physically able, coherent or independent. I do not want to live in a society that disposes of the elderly. But I can’t help being amazed by the calm attitude my grandpa had toward death. Somehow, believing a grand and infinite nothingness was on the other side of life was a relief to him. When he died, his last wishes were for us to not make too much of a ceremony, not come from too far away, not care too much. He was dead anyway. But I cared. And maybe I want to believe his spirit is still somewhere.

I know what you would tell me: there is no evidence for the existence of God. But Grandpa... Using the methods of science to disprove spiritual matters is missing the point. Science is continuously trying to better understand how the material world works, by a trial and error process of making temporary theories based on gathered evidence. Spirituality is known through mystical experience: it cannot be measured by the instruments of science.

Not so long ago, before the XVIIth century, religion and science weren’t opposed to each other. Scientists understood that their discoveries of a more accurate description of the universe didn’t con-

ing from his very narrow vision of what God is, from a sense of superiority that a European colonial mindset conferred to him.

This is my lineage. The one of a grandfather who went to Algeria to empty the houses of French colonists during his military service, who said there was nothing in Algeria before they arrived. Nothing. And that when they left, people were too incompetent to even care properly for the orange trees. When I come from such a history of violence, of denial of other people's existence as real, when I come from a history of erasing people's ways of knowing the land and the divine, what can be my own relationship to spirituality?

The main reason why he hated religion, like many white European anarchists today, is that it supposedly contradicts science. As a teenager, I believed him. Now I know better, but he's dead. I never had the opportunity to fight him on this. But the love language of my grandfather and I was always to fight. I won't stop loving him now.

Grandpa, the more I learn about how plants grow through transforming light, the more I learn about the infinitely small particles and the infinite number of universes, the more I learn about quantum equivalence or the theory of relativity, the more I believe in God.

As a physicist, you know stars are massive balls of gas made of hydrogen and helium. You taught your students how stars are born and how they die, how they are held together by their own gravity until they explode and turn into black holes or nothingness. What if your knowledge about the different chemical and physical reactions that stars undergo doesn't dismiss mystical experiences or beliefs related to stars, but rather expand them?

Science gives us food for thought and mystical experience: it gives us more reasons to look in awe at the night sky, look at flowers budding, look at the vegetables emerging in your garden, know a bit more about the complexity that those processes hold and feel the depth of their mystery.

So if I am facing a cop, an abusive man, an exploitative boss or any active perpetrator of harm, I may have to resort to force to stop the harm from happening. What my spirituality calls me to do isn't non-violence : it is harm reduction.

I believe in the power of an essential love that embraces even our enemies. I don't sing or graffiti slogans like "Kill cops" or "Un flic suicidé, à moitié pardonné" and I know that our communities can romanticize violence. Because even as I recognize the necessity to use violence or force, I see it as a tool we use to stop harm from happening, not as an end in itself. It's actually the opposite. I do believe in a politics of love. But it's not a fluffy, permissive love. It is a love that says : I want you to be free from the suffering you impose on others and yourself, and I believe in your ability to change and reconnect to your inherent goodness. But I will burn your car and fight you in the streets until you give up that uniform. It's an abolitionist love.

M.

Blessing for a black bloc

Blessed is the black bloc
that brings dignity to the underdog
with each window that shatters from love
sings the song of limits
sings the song of not one more life
blessed be the homeless man who joins
spontaneously, whose face is exposed
fearless, convincing, nothing to fucking lose
in the crowd of well masked protestors
blessed is the man who drags trash cans into the streets
and shouts
come on now, we're not afraid of nothing
blessed be his bravery

and his life which gave it to him
blessed be the burning flags
and the teenagers smile's who light the flares
as the energy begins to rise
blessed be the love that smokes and burns
blessed be the growing sounds
fire crackers like an orchestra
atmosphere of courage
blessed be the ambiguity
the risk, the every moment
matters, blessed be the let's do it anyway
blessed be the looted liberation
of liquor and clothes
and the delight they bring to the people
blessed be the puncture in that storefront
that separates us from what is already ours
blessed is the fearlessness of the takers
blessed is the fearlessness of the givers
blessed be this momentary lapse
this co-created space-time
which gives birth to solidarity
before the police come with batons
& sound grenades penetrate our orchestra
blessed be the people who stay
to fight the police
blessed be the wait in their cells
as we pray
for their release.

D.

D.

Beyond the forever conflict between science and religion: *For spiritual sciences and scientific spiritualities*

At the end of his life, my grandfather would spend a lot of time in his big and beautiful garden in the south of France, tending to the many flowers and fruits, resting in his caravan. I loved to spend time there when I visited him. Having had a grandfather I fought with so often, gardening was something we could share. He would dutifully care for his strawberries, look at them with awe, amazed at all the fruits that emerged in the short time since he left his garden. A gift from God, I thought. For him, nothing more than mute biological mechanisms. Nevertheless, he looked amazed. Joyful. I know he felt the magic I felt, though we had different words for it. There is nothing like plants growing to make me marvel at the presence of God, at existence, at the movement of life. Their slow growth inspires emotion. He could have bought his vegetables and fruits at the supermarket and wasn't putting all of that work in to save money. He didn't do it for the crops. He did it because it's beautiful. It would never have been his words, but I like to think he was driven by his awe at the inherent mystery behind the aliveness of plants, by the divine spirit behind that aliveness.

It would never have been his words. We're sitting at a cafe table when he says to me : religious people are irrational, superstitious, fanatic. What stupidity to believe in any kind of God. I am mad at him. I am still an atheist but I am struck by the level of contempt. Later, I would be reminded many times and repeatedly disappointed to realize how colonial of a worldview he had, a world divided between the rational and the irrational, the civilized and the non-civilized, the objective and the subjective. He was speak-

that threatens them
like a bird taking flight
may our fantasies be free & roaming
may we touch our entire bodies
cry out into the empty bedroom
fuck
yes
may we forget the violence
which has flooded our consciousness
violence charged with sexual
potency that we now resent
may we forgive the violence
of our imaginations
may we simply embrace
all which we can't forget or forgive
and may it bring us to the most
powerful of orgasms
like a much needed heavy rain
God will you take away this pain?
cast us from the garden of eden
plant us in the holy dark room
where we are touching ourselves
in unison
where we are looking
into our God's eyes
where there is no such thing as words
like queer or kink
because heterosexuality
is not in our vocabulary
there is only wonder
and bottomless bottoms
desire and your own right
hand guiding you
home.

On Balancing Tradition & Ancestry with Creativity & Renewal against new-age liberalism, for syncretic spiritualities

“There is a want for that depth of cultural tradition,
there is a want for lineage, there is a want for the holy
rooting into place. Foundering in the waters of deep
longing for lineage and context and cultural anchor to
place, lacking it, seeking it, not wanting to appropriate
other traditions, not feeling quite at home. I'm trying
to patch a wound that is so ancestrally vast, it's almost
impossible. Who am I in that modern sea of cultural
fall out?

What am I?

What is my lineage?

What do I call home?”

Joshua Michael Schrei

When I was in University, my best friend and partner at the
time, A., seeking connection with their Jewishness and longing for
something more meaningful than anarchist university organizing,
hinted at a new category of political organizing which would or-
ganize us by cultural traditions or spiritual groups. A. was nam-
ing something that our anarchist world was not ready for – that it
was the traditions of our ancestors that might give our movements
more meaning, sustenance and power. It was a nice thought and
still holds true. But the reality was, and still is, that so many of us
don't know what those traditions are, much less their texture and
the capacities they have to change our lives.

Western culture is homogenizing and effacing in its very nature.
It steals the specificities of our lifeways, it steals our prayers, our
connection to time and place. It thirsts on futurity and placeless-
ness. It subs in capitalist-christianity where there could be sacred

cosmologies. This is something Black and Indigenous people, Pagans and Jews have repeatedly articulated.

Understanding anarchism and spirituality is as much an excavation of the ancient as it is the creation of something new. Sanctity is both an affirmation and an invitation. God is play-space, spirituality is a question. And yet there is wisdom, profound wisdom, in what has been passed down and maintained, sometimes against the odds of empire, through ritual and song, through Talmud and folklore. Through holy characters scribbled on the inner sleeves of people evicted from their lands hundreds of years ago, having absconded with the truths that would arrive in my spirit today.

Anarchist subcultures have often reminded me of religious spaces in subtle and overt ways. Anarchists are united by belief in something greater than themselves. The anarchism that we experience is always ephemeral and place-specific, much like how disciples experience their Gods. Anarchism can feel like an impossible want and our protests can feel like prayers. There are rituals that are nearly ubiquitous to anarchists, like community dinners or black blocs. Social centers are our churches. Our camaraderie runs deep and our sense of devotion to each other can feel like religious tribalism.

The aspiration towards anarchism is beautiful, mysterious and worth celebrating. But anarchism also evokes and emits secularism. It's common for anarchists to reject or condemn our collective pasts that feature animism or religious tradition.

"Small a" anarchism is not original to anarchists. It's an articulation of a politic that people and the land have practiced across history and time, showing us that life is sacred, that freedom is our birthright, that every single living being has creative power coursing through their veins, and everyone matters. Institutional religion and even indigenous lifeways have in many instances been harshly patriarchal, hierarchical and gotten a large part of this equation wrong. We can't idolize our ancestor's pasts. Instead, we should know that they had wisdom, and so do we. Our

we are still haunted
(but there was beauty)
tell them of the sapphics
that licked each other until morning
(committed to pleasure)
and the faggots that nursed
each other on their dying beds
when the world decided that some
forms of love were punishable
by pandemic & death
*(the queer world has already
arrived somewhere)*
May it be so
all of our descendents
are genderless and shaking
their hips on the way to the river
all our descendents come
from a kin interweaved
with flower crowns
and violence
May our descendents hold
onto each other in the ways
we never could

Blessing for masturbation

May masturbation be a widening
that dissolves
boredom & self-hatred
a storm of pleasure
warm hands
intermittently delicate & fierce
may our desires be free from the shame

nothing pure, I would think, and forgive myself. There is God, and there is beer, and there is our friend's dead body found on the highway, there is a history of colonialism that we are bound up in, endless erasure, waterfalls of tears, unimaginable despair, and our third-floor window, the light dancing at dusk, the hands in my hair as I close my eyes to sleep.

This utter connectedness led me back to the sense of awe I had as a child, knowing that our worlds were as vast as the sea, that it's okay to feel the grief. I'm not sure that I've yet been there, but now I do know; God is a place, a very queer place, a prayer room, the backyard of a punk house, where everything is for everyone. Yes, there is a kingdom of God where freedom is tangible, where the kingdom is not so much a kingdom but a commune.

D.

Blessing for a queer world

May we gather all of our descendents
and let them know that they come
from an anatomy of injustice
where the architecture of our cells
and something we called "hormones"
dictated everything
May we tell them that we chewed that shit up
and spit it out into each other's mouths
Gathered saliva and kin
asked each other where
do we begin?
May we gather all of our descendents
and when they ask
who is marriage?
tell them of the monster
that stole our names and bodies

politics can complement theirs. Together we can create something beautiful.

While people of all races can feel disconnected from their ancestral lineages for a myriad of reasons, there is a particular whiteness known in the placeless, timeless communities of new-age spiritual seekers. While anarchists sufficiently critique the capitalist appropriation of yoga and dreadlocks, I fear that a spiritual anarchism bereft of tradition could leave us a not-comfortable-enough distance away from the new age liberal — rootless. I regret the depthlessness of our white anarchist communities. I have shame about my ancestors converting from Judaism to Catholicism to modern-secularism. And I do not have a spiritual home in any of these traditions.

While racial capitalism has extracted endlessly from the global majority in order to benefit the global minority in the material plane, it has also spiritually impoverished many of us, and especially white people. I am inviting all of us to feel into this loss. To feel into this longing. To feel into the knowledge that is in our ancestral lines. May we discover it through religious study, through meditation, through writing a new ritual, through exploring the geographies of trance, through witchcraft, through experimentation. May we feel into the myths that have already been written, the ones we could be writing. I am not offering answers, or proposing that anyone has them. I am attempting a dialogue — between our politics and our religions, our ancient spiritualities and our budding cosmologies.

We must remember the lessons of the old world while we build the new.

And it's already happening. I have witnessed the ways that indigenous and jewish traditions increasingly influence anarchist spaces in the United States. We enact rituals that we name as rituals when our comrades die. We make grief altars. Indigenous friends lead us in song. We write and learn and conjure melodies in moments where we need them most. I have so much gratitude for the

Black and Indigenous people on Turtle Island that are helping to guide us back to ourselves. In European anarchist spaces, there is awkwardness and resistance to such offerings. People are disconnected from their bodies and hearts and I want them to know there is so much more available to them.

I hope that this zine opens up a conversation that gives space for the messiness, the awkwardness, the pain and the loss that lives in the threads of these topics. I hope there is space for forgiveness and for rage. For apologies and responsibility. For the joy of abolition and anarchism. For the playfulness and depth of God.

D.

Dancefloors During Genocide

I couldn't stop thinking about Palestine on the dance floor, they say. the combination of drugs was psychologically and spiritually exalting, but the bass sounded like bombs, the treble – screams. terrifying, i say. i'm lost in this madness now, they put their head in their hands. this is more than a drug come down. i know, i say. more parties next weekend, it's Berlin, yeah.

people i love move their bodies to loud bass on a dance floor in berlin. children i don't know, who i want to love, shake their bodies to bombs falling in Rafah. at some point there isn't enough shaking that a single body can do to metabolize genocide. at some point a child must cycle the violence that has been cast upon them. i worry about the future. at some point, for the young, vengeance is the song of songs.

at Magic Dyke, I'm amazed, almost relieved. relieved in a way I have been waiting to be relieved my entire life – by the beautiful representation of queer masculinities. it is so fucking... erotic? in here! I whisper to my friend. the performers strip and we cheer and laugh. they glue watermelon stickers to the props they hold while

people who told one story loud enough, a school is a building for storytelling so that children grow up and continue to tell the same stories, the stories that uphold business as usual.

Much of this is an intuitive process – I had already deconstructed parts of the world that othered me for being so visibly queer. As a queer and spiritual child living under heteropatriarchal capitalism, I had an instinct for loss.

Something about this deconstruction, this grand disillusionment with the way things were, allowed me to reopen and yearn for connection. On pilgrimages across Pittsburgh's enormous steel bridges, I tried to conjure my great-great-grandfather who was a Rabbi in Kiev before leaving Europe for the state where I stand. As I looked across the brown water with condoms floating beneath me, I craved to know this water, this land. This land that is not my own. I had an instinct for loss but I could not build my sanctuary alone on stolen land. There was nothing that I could do then, or say here, that will soften that original wound. But a life of alienation is not the only option.

Soon, I am quite literally saved by friends and lovers who invite me into practice. In the backyards of punk houses, we ritualize our dedication to each other and our budding politics. We rehearse freedom, approximate anarchy, try to abolish property, renew the religions of our grandparents and share all of our drugs, food and tears.

As I entered my twenties, I sat with new friends in the crevices of our rust-belt city, asking. What is our relationship to this land that is not our own, this land that we try to commune with even so? We abided in the questions. We sang Shabbat prayers and reclaimed our relationships to Judaism while wax melted on our mantles and fingertips. We wrote songs to sing every Friday night. If the seasons change and forests grow then we can do it too.

More than once, under cloudy Pittsburgh skies, I was surrounded by what felt like love, with forty-ounce plastic bottles taped to my hands in some ridiculous drinking game. There is

By the time I arrived in Pittsburgh, the ziplock bags smelled like terrible fish. The sea was rotting inside the plastic. I could not bring the sea to Pittsburgh, but I could try to carry the feeling everywhere I went.

My mother attempted to inscribe love of God and prayer into my childhood. Not so much through scripture but through a little blue room on the third floor of our house. We'd go there to sing songs about God and write prayers in magic marker on big blank pages. Make me an instrument of your peace. She burned incense and found Buddhism in the same way that many grief-filled lefty Catholics do. When looking back, I have a felt sense of discomfort when remembering our times in "the prayer room." I felt exposed, knowing that I needed to hide some things – if I could only figure out what they were. But I also craved meaning, answers, and the connection that the prayer room supposedly offered. I was both afraid that there was a God who could penetrate the cavern of my queerness and afraid that there might not be a God, abandoning me to my own devices. With puberty, I distanced myself more and more from all things religious, forgetting the sea.

It took me eleven queer years to come back to God. It was terrible to be an unresourced queer child, but it is also painful to linger in the pain of human ambiguity. Not unlike my grief-filled mother, my search began in the pits of a mental health crisis. At 19 I was weeping on the phone with a Christian youth group leader after taking too many psychedelics. I have a hard time discerning in essence the difference between myself then, and a brokenhearted monk on a voyage to an unknown holy place, looking for answers.

While searching for God, rapid and consecutive political realizations strike me – that the history of our world was one of indescribable violence, pain, brutality, slavery, extraction and enclosure. That no ambulance could save me from the inevitability of my own death or sense of loneliness.

The stories which carried me to that day were just stories. As fictional as the God of my mother. A church is a building made by

they give each other lap dances. did you see the sticker? she asks me. that's so cool! i say.

butches and trans daddies with massive, unashamed tits fight each other on stage, shake their asses in our faces. i wade in the sea of endless dykes with expansive genders and it is fucking divine.

towards the end of the show they shout "Free Palestine" from the stage. the crowd cheers. we shout "Free Palestine" back before the beat drops and then we grind on each other.

Thousands of Palestinians move from the tents they've been sheltering in. It's the first night of Ramadan. They move to the ground next to the rubble of the mosque and recite Taraweeh prayers. They hope for enough pause inside the orchestra of war to get through the first passage. Do they have doubts as they bow? Their heads touch the ground. They see God in the sky when they rise. Their city is in ruins but their faith is maintained. God draws close to those who suffer, and abandons to their own hell those who torture. Where do we stand, white queers making out on the dancefloor, somewhere in between?

our god keeps dying. over and over. our god dies in an oil spill. blood spills and fills pools in our dreams, in our parties. our god pours lighter fluid on me in my sleep. laughs while he waits for me to light a cigarette. our god is hung in an upside down cross and his bones are falling out of his skin. our god's skin stays in the nails. our god is taxidermied. our dead god lives in the eyes of the deer on the wall in the country rental in tennessee. our dead god certainly did not create the chemicals that add up to the equations which construct quadcopters. how precise god's technology. such exactitude in his body. god's technology can take out the floor of an apartment building while leaving the rest of the building intact. but gaza is bonedust and rubbles. organs belong inside of bodies. organs do not belong under soldier's boots. if noah has an ark, why is there not a ship of gazans on their way to the land of their god? because they are already there. walls through their land like scars on the body of their god. they are already there.

For twenty nine days people will keep Ramadan, refraining from eating by light. For 155 days they have been starved, bombed. It's the third day of Ramadan and we watch Instagram reels of children desperately searching for bags of flour to try and cook some bread by night. A people should choose when to fast for their God, not be starved in the names of our own.

we were young once. believing that the worlds we built in basements had the power to topple not just walls, but empires. even without gods, we believed. genocide ages everybody. cynicism isn't wisdom but i can't hold all these walls up anymore. and walls of guilt are worth nothing. walls like regret and paralysis. walls of sound. the deafening stillness of just after the party. tinnitus is the living reminder of what you've heard in the past. we carry in our ears the volume of drum and bass, the measurement of TNT, the tenor of the scream. ears ring at the same resonance across the sea.

our perspectives were short sighted then but our power is less since we've left the basement – dispersed across the western world, in universities, on dancefloors. shake my body to the beat, think about Palestine, promise to never again feel free, not another day in my life, repeat. try to change a little piece. bodies stuck under concrete in gaza while my words are written on concrete in europe. "Free Palestine." red and black ink. walls and walls and "our worlds can topple empires" whispered in a dream. we were wrong, we were wrong, we were wrong.

I couldn't stop thinking about Palestine on the dance floor, they say. from here on out we will always be in a state of mourning, i say. sort of, they say. yes there's laundry to do, groceries to buy. we go to the demos, we laugh with our friends at the demos as the sun peeks from behind the clouds. we are queer and it is not important. i am still seeking joy while resenting us for having it.

D.

God is a place, a very queer place

When I was eleven years old I was in love with my best friend. I knew without words that this was a queer thing, a secret thing to be held deep inside me. This is the age that I wrote "I hate God" in large bubble letters in my hot pink notebook. Instantly regretting it, I scribbled over the letters repeatedly so it could never be read again. I was terrified of what I had written. I sat in my childhood bedroom which was painted with rainbows and clouds, feeling like I sat in God's sky rather than my own, ashamed at what I had done, anxious to hide. How to hide the writing on this piece of paper, my crushes on girls, from God's supposed omnipresence, which I understood to be immense, even as a child? I hate God, I wrote and then trembled with fear.

In February of that year I went to Alabama to visit my conservative grandparents in their rental beach house. I loved the sand and salty water and jellyfish and sea shells. I felt the ineffable as I stood at the edge of the shore. That hard to name feeling of enormity, or is it minuteness? The feeling that children are so in touch with, which adults replace with the certainty they crave. Mysticism is inherent to the child's experience. Children feel the questions. Why am I here and how can I play with this here-ness, with my feet wet in the ocean?

In the Alabama sand, I wrote big messages with a stick I'd picked up in the shrub. I wrote my name over and over. I wrote the names of the people I loved. I wrote God and I wrote my name + Jimmy instead of my name + Jackie and waited for the waves to wash my prayers into the sea.

I gathered large amounts of sea-stuff and zipped it into three plastic bags to fly with me back to Pittsburgh and give to Jackie, my best friend-crush. My father cautioned against this, "You can't bring the sea to Pittsburgh, sweetie." I was determined to prove him wrong.