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Cate Moses, Artist and Housing Advocate

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April 23 2024

MK: Hello and welcome to *THE CHILD AND ITS ENEMIES*, a podcast about queer and neurodivergent kids living out anarchy and youth liberation.

Here at *THE CHILD AND ITS ENEMIES* we believe that youth autonomy is not only crucial to queer and trans liberation, but to anarchy itself. Governance is inherently based on projecting linear narratives of time and Development and gender onto our necessarily asynchronous and atemporal queer lives, and youth and teens are at the center of this form of oppression.

Our goal with the podcast is to create a space by and for youth that challenges all forms of control and inspires us to create queered, feral, *ageless* networks of care.

I'm your host, mk zariel; I'm fifteen years old, and I'm the youth correspondent at the Anarchist Review of Books, author of the blog Debate Me Bro, and organizer of some all-ages queer spaces in my city and online. i've organized with anarchist archives, all-ages punk venues, feminist mutual aid collectives, zine distros, neurodivergent art spaces, trans media

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projects, teenage anarchist support groups, the occasional political campaign, and oh so many trans meetups. With me today is artist and activist CATE MOSES!

CATE: (please list your pronouns, affiliated groups, any relevant organizing experience and anything else relevant to our discussion) Cate Moses, she/they. I'm with several groups in my city for liberation and justice in Palestine, and the anarchist artists group where I met mk. Also Once a Forest, a local group working to stop the US Forest Service from burning up and clearcutting our forests in the name of "fire prevention." The US Forest Service and the US Park Service intentionally started the three worst forest fires in New Mexico history in high winds as "prescribed burns." We seek to end those. And I work with various nonhuman animal rights projects for the liberation of other species.

MK: So you founded a program for unhoused and unstably housed youth and their families at a public school in your city that serves mostly Spanish-speaking immigrants—I'm curious what it's been like to organize for housing and immigration justice within a fundamentally statist education system. Do you view your organizing as changing compulsory education from the inside, or resisting it in a more overtly anarchic way?

CATE: Neither. I work quietly, in the ruptures of the system's web. In a cave beneath the system. Our program, called the Casa Program, exists in a space between the state public education system, the nonprofit/NGO structure, and anarchy. I am literally in a cave, a partially walled off hallway that many in our school do not know exists.

MK: Can you talk a bit more about this program, and how youth are involved in supporting one another in accessing housing?

CATE: It is youth centered and youth-need driven. Every public school in the US is required under McKinney Vento Law to provide equity for unhoused and unstably housed youth. I mention the law because youths should be aware of it in ad-

ing diatribe for Palestine. That's the direction we need to go in. Disrupt and occupy the ruptures.

MK: I love the idea of art as youth liberation, and housing advocacy as central to these tendencies—this kind of disruptive queer anarchy is so meaningful. On that note, any shameless plugs?

CATE: Read David Wojnarowicz's *Close to the Knives*.

MK: Thank you so much for sharing your youth liberation journey! And also recommending us theory:) I'm mk zariel, this has been Cate Moses, and you're listening to THE CHILD AND ITS ENEMIES.

MK: So what would have made organizing spaces more accessible for you at that age?

CATE: We were organizing and enacting mutual aid without having the words to call it that. Again, I credit my parents. They were hella organizers. Their tentacles reached way beyond our backwoods area. Without the internet. So I actually did know at an early age that resistance was not only possible but necessary. When the school told us asinine things like girls can't wear pants or salute the flag or there are different rules for poor and less poor; for different colors, when we figured out that our local volunteer fire dept. was the KKK, I knew what to do. Organize and fight back. Burn the flag, walk out of school, stand up on a desk and yell, sing, take to the woods with your comrades. The possibilities are more numerous today, with digital media to amplify us, and youth so savvy and informed and using it to organize.

MK: I love that vision of youth liberation so much—the autonomous organizing, the genderfuck, the inherent jouissance of it. Thank you so much for voicing all this. What advice would you have for kids and teens who want to get into housing advocacy or art?

CATE: Make art. Every day if you can. Whenever you can. Withhold judgement of it. Find art materials in the junkyard. Read and learn about other youth advocates/strategies. Read David Wojnarowicz's *Close to the Knives*. He was a hella advocate for queer unhoused youth—and for the raw benefits of the queer feral unhoused experience. And art in the service of revolution.

We have to get more radical with housing advocacy. Asking nice and signing petitions and waiting for the state to build housing got us where we are today: in a housing situation that is imploding as capitalism devours itself. We need to up our game. Build it ourselves. I don't have to say youth will lead us there because they are. Today I saw a 12-year jump up on a stage and face down ten cops and deliver an absolutely wither-

vocating for equity. However, the public education system is inherently inequitable, rooted as it is in capitalist linear narratives of development, gender, and "success," so we have to support and take care of one another in accessing housing and other needs. Youth bring their needs and their comrades and we work together to meet those needs, Youth sometimes share housing and I figure out ways to pay for it, outside of the state shelter and foster care systems. We know that those do not serve the needs of youth. We work together to identify and remove barriers to equity, housing, and transportation. The priority is to put direct material assistance and decision-making power in the hands of youth, with as few strings attached as possible. Youth decide what will be available in the food bank in our cave. Anyone of any age can access the food bank. Parents, school employees, and community agencies are involved to the degree that youth want that.

MK: This ethic of mutual aid is so inspiring, and exactly what adult solidarity with youth can look like—rather than a hierarchical Parenting dynamic, people with adult privilege can provide us material support and emotional care as equals. So speaking of hierarchy and lack thereof..you self-describe as a "recovering former academic," how has that shaped your journey as an organizer in a society with compulsory education? Do you think academia can be youth-liberationist, or is it inherently ageist?

CATE: I worked as a low-wage teacher in public universities for 10 years. I was offered tenure, in a place I did not want to live. It felt like a death sentence, so I chose life outside of academia, and eventually found my way to serving youth in a 7-12 school. I attended a radical student-centered alternative public high school, so I knew that the possibility for doing youth-centered advocacy might still exist.

Can academia be youth-liberationist? That possibility exists, but student-organized mutual education networks that include trades-learning offer more possibility.

Higher ed is more about class-based exclusion and student debt loansharking than ageism. Roughly 75% of college teachers in the US are adjuncts: low-wage workers who qualify for food stamps and other public assistance and are burdened with huge course loads. They are not young.

Students living in poverty and those working to support their immigrant families are largely denied access to higher education, or saddled with huge debt.

The private, public, and for-profit university systems discriminate in different ways. Private academia caters to rich white 19 year olds, who actually have some power in that system, where education is a consumer-driven product, and keeping the customer happy matters. Poor folks and POC are largely excluded.

In state-run public universities, there is less class-based exclusion but more state control. And more possibility for student organizing and meaningful advocacy.

For-profit colleges exist solely to defraud students and saddle them with debt.

There is anti-teacher-ism on the part of the state, which is also invested in controlling youth. When students and teachers unionize and work together, there are possibilities for liberation.

MK: I love the emphasis on how labor and the treatment of teachers affects youth—the school system is full of people facing governance, and sadly there’s a real dynamic of counterinsurgency, in which teachers don’t realize that students are similarly governed and thus don’t build networks of solidarity. On another topic, you also mentioned that you’re into creating art; how would you say that intersects with your organizing?

CATE: That’s what I ask myself. I’ve always made art, mostly in a silo. I’m a painter. I like working alone. I have moved consistently toward abstract art. How does that lend itself toward social justice and anarchy? My work has always been about animal liberation, water protection, and social

justice, but how make it more overtly so, and in collaboration with others? I am leaving my school job this year to find out.

MK: Can you tell us more about the plans for you once you leave your current job?

CATE: I plan to make art and raise hell. I want to study print-making, which lends itself nicely to hell-raising street art. I am getting more involved in collective art making with other anti-fascist activists, and I’m seeing possibilities there. I have found some great all-ages groups that are disrupting the state-ist quo weekly. We will fight for justice and land back for Palestine—and everywhere—and continue the work I mentioned above, and the housing advocacy I won’t be doing at my job any more.

MK: Were you into art, housing justice, or anarchism, as a teenager? If so, how did you like to organize?

CATE: Yes. All of the above. I was raised by anti-war activist parents. In the summer, we went to activist camps where the adults were in organizing meetings all day and the youth were an unsupervised pack. It was liberating. Much of my youth was spent in the woods with a feral pack of kids. There was not much youth organizing happening. We lived in a high poverty rural area, where parents did not helicopter. Through my parents, I became aware of housing and other social justice issues, and I was frequently involved in street-level activism with them. One of my earliest memories is of ice cream cones melting in our hands while my little brother and I watched cops beat the hell out of our dad. So I learned how to organize. We staged walk-outs and protests in middle school over war and gender discrimination. I came to anarchism later; am still coming to it.

MK: You sound awesome as shit as a kid—and I’m so sorry your family faced that repression. Growing up targeted by the state can really radicalize a kid; I see this in queer youth spaces all the time.. I love that you’re “still coming to” anarchism. It is an eternal process not a destination huh?

CATE: Yas.