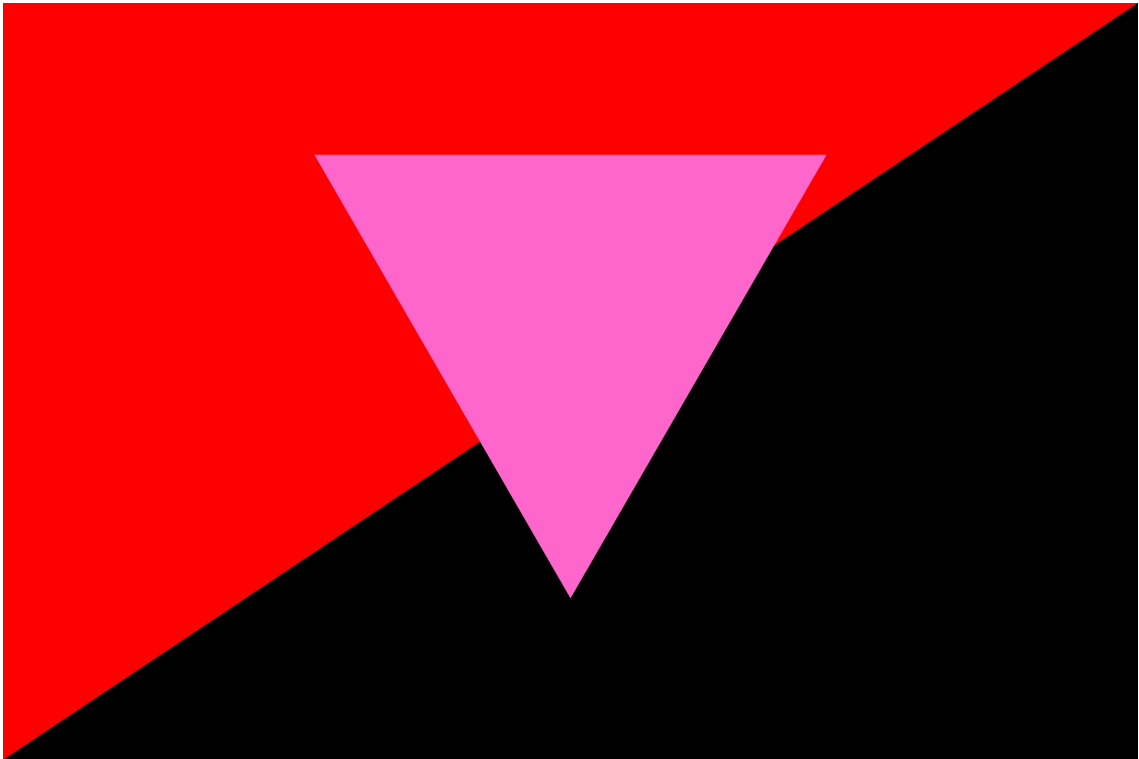


Queer Social Anarchism

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Contents

Introduction	3
Part 1: Overview of Queer Anarchism	3
Part 2: The Basics of Especifismo	5
Part 3: A Queer Social Anarchism	8
Conclusion	10
Further Reading	11
Queer Anarchism	11
Social Anarchism	12

Introduction

The current crises that are happening in the queer community within the United States are absolutely astounding. It pains me to see such an acceleration in terms of the threats that our community is facing. When I published *Queers With Guns*,¹ I had no idea about the sheer amount of reactionary violence and bills related to the trans community, but also the queer community in general, that would happen in the months that followed. It has also been painfully obvious that the current way that the LGBT+ community has organized itself within the US empire is not equipped in any capacity to deter the fascist threat that is on the rise, something that I had written about in my first essay. Within the essay itself, I had only given a broad idea as to what we can do outside of the current liberal order to defend ourselves and our community. It would be greatly recommended that *Queers with Guns* be read before reading this essay, as the ideas that are expressed here are not as accessible without the context of reading the previous essay. There is clearly a hunger within our community for a well-defined political framework from which the queer community can organize itself in a new direction against the fascist threat, while also building the new world we wish to create in the here and now. This is exactly what will be explored further in this essay.

More specifically, I will be laying the groundwork for a *Queer Social Anarchism*, as opposed to the more atomized and purely negative queer anarchisms that have dominated queer anarchist organizing and radical queer communities for at least 15 years from the time of this essay's writing. It is clear that the queer anarchist community needs a new direction in terms of its theory and practice, and needs to regain what especificist anarchists call the "social vector" of anarchism that made it so famous and infamous in the first place. In other words, anarchists need to get back with the public and the social fabric. In order for anarchists to be popular again, we need to start building positive programs and structures that can positively, as well as negatively combat the current regime that occupies our communities.

I intend to help introduce this lost side of anarchist politics to people within the queer anarchist community and queer radical spaces in general with the writing of this essay. This essay's purpose is not to explain every minute detail of how a queer social anarchism or social anarchisms in general work. Its purpose is simply to help juxtapose this ideology against the previous iterations of queer anarchist organizations and ideologies within the US, and help make clear a modern construction of social anarchism that also intersects with the queer community's context and fulfills our collective needs at this time. I will reference sources throughout this work, and at the end of this essay, that talk more in depth about social anarchism that I highly recommend looking into.

Part 1: Overview of Queer Anarchism

Before getting into any particular social anarchism, let us start by very broadly going over the vast, complicated landscape of *Queer Anarchism*. This is being done so that we can have a better idea as to how a *Queer Social Anarchism* could fit within the broader *Queer Anarchist* movement. Most would assume that there would be a subsequent list of different tendencies within *Queer Anarchism* in a neat, ordered list with clear and distinct explanations and definitions. The reality

¹ *Queers with Guns* – Elisha Moon Williams

of how different frameworks of theory and practice interact, intersect, and contradict one another within the umbrella of Queer Anarchism is sadly not that simple. The best description I can give is one that involves broad categories. These broad categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and often intersect in different ways depending on which Queer Anarchist you read or talk to.

Just like Queer peoples' lives, ideological beliefs within Queer Anarchism are very often interconnected, messy, and confusing on the surface to most people. One should take note that these broad categories are not an exhaustive list within Queer Anarchist writings or organizations. These categories are drawn for the sake of simplicity and clarity for those who are not familiar of this landscape. They come from the most popular and widespread tendencies within this umbrella as interpreted by the author of this essay. One should be encouraged to read the sources within Queer Anarchisms beyond the description laid out below.

The first major category to be mentioned is Queer Insurrectionary Anarchism. This is the most popular category within the queer anarchist movement as a whole. Queer Anarchism would not be where it is today without the involvement and development of insurrectionary anarchism within the queer context in the late 2000s to early 2010s. Insurrectionary Anarchism is an anarchist ideology that is oriented around the joy of struggle within the present moment, and having informal horizontal organizations called Affinity Groups independently collaborating on attacking the current system. These affinity groups are mostly focused on fostering quality over quantity when it comes to organizing around certain actions or goals. One of the main reasons for such affinity groups is that they are formations that do not seek to perpetuate themselves. Insurrectionary Anarchists have a much greater emphasis on organization based on goals achieved within the present. They tend to focus on direct attack against the systems of capitalism and the state as their primary course of action, seeing this as more effective than building social organizations, which they think focus too much on creating popular support for anarchist ideas and projects. As stated in the essay "Archipelago:"

"We think that archipelagos of affinity groups, independent one from the other, that can associate according to their shared perspectives and concrete projects of struggle, constitute the best way to directly pass to the offensive. This conception offers the biggest autonomy and the widest field of action possible. In the sphere of insurrectional projects it is necessary and possible to find ways of informally organizing that allow the encounter between anarchists and other rebels, forms of organization not intended to perpetuate themselves, but geared towards a specific and insurrectional purpose."²

Another major category that is very influential within this network is Queer Nihilist Anarchism. Nihilist Anarchism is often interconnected with insurrectionary anarchisms because a lot of their conclusions come from the same philosophical foundations. Many insurrectionary anarchists also consider themselves nihilist anarchists, and vice versa. Not all insurrectionary anarchists are nihilist anarchists, and not all nihilist anarchists are insurrectionary anarchists. Nihilist anarchism as a category takes what insurrectionary anarchists promote — organizing within the present, building organizations that don't seek to perpetuate themselves, attacking/negating the current system as the primary goal — and takes them to their furthest extent. Nihilist anarchists believe that anything outside of pure negation with the express goal of destroying the current structure is not enough to truly uproot it. They believe that any attempt to try and antic-

² Archipelago – Anonymous

ipate or prefigure the new structure would inevitably be influenced by the current structure and therefore turn into another form of that structure's oppression.

Social Anarchism is a category of anarchism that is not broadly understood within the queer context. Social Anarchism as an ideology has these three words as their foundation – Freedom, Equality and Solidarity. None of these words are given individual priority over the others, and are all emphasized together. Social anarchists are not trying to extend freedom to the greatest extent for the sake of expanding it. Neither do social anarchists want to extend equality nor solidarity to the fullest extent for their own sake. Rather, social anarchists seek to emphasize all three values to their furthest extent at the same time and build organizations and a future society that reflects that.

Part 2: The Basics of Especifismo

Before undertaking the task of trying to connect social anarchist ideas to the needs and context of the queer community, we must start with at least a basic understanding of the kind of anarchism that's being discussed. This will outline a very broad overview of what especificist anarchism is, where it came from, and how it works. This is not an exhaustive layout by any means, and more clear details can be found within the sources cited throughout and at the end of this essay.

The basic ideas surrounding what is called “especifismo” (translated to “specifism” in English) comes from Brazil and Uruguay around the turn of the 20th century. It is an ideology that places emphasis on what is called the Specific Anarchist Organization (SAO) and the Popular Organization. These two concepts work in tandem with each other, taking the concept of the SAO that has been implemented by social anarchists for decades and seeks to help integrate them back into the fabric of social movements, something that previous social anarchists (platformist anarchists in particular) have been criticized for losing touch of in the past with their SAOs.

The SAO, to put it simply, is a political body that upholds, shares and believes in a clear set of anarchist principles laid out within a charter and in points of agreement as well as having a unity in strategy and tactics. This is not unique to especificist anarchism by any means, but what makes this formation different is how this organization is structured in a reciprocal relationship between the minority anarchist organization and the broader social movements. The main structure of an SAO consists of different levels of committed militants and supporters who participate in actions done by the anarchist organization.

There are three groups that are considered when talking about the SAO: Committed Militant, Militant, and The Social Movement. An especificist group in Tulsa, Oklahoma called Scissortail Anarchist Organization uses the terms: Radical, Adherent, and Collaborator. The Collaborator is the most outward of the categories laid out here. These folks aren't considered members of the organization, but they have shown interest in the group's principles and social work and participate in the organization's public events. Because they are not members of the SAO, they do not have voting power within it, but they can seek to enter the organization after showing interest by whatever metric the organization deems fit for membership.

The next level that an SAO may have is Adherent. These are newly inducted members of the organization who would likely start the process of entering via interview with Radicals within the org, as well as a full recognition of the points of agreement. In some organizations, it might

not require full commitment to the points of agreement to become an Adherent, but with disagreement an explanation of their differing or critical points can come forth and the existing Radicals can decide whether or not that perspective falls in line with the goals and strategies of that organization.

The innermost level within the organization is the Radicals. They are considered the most committed members of the organization who are the most able to effectively understand and promote the ideas and principles of the SAO. They are expected to help interview prospective Adherents who are interested, as well as mentor new Adherents. The aspect of who has voting power in what bodies and where pertinent decisions should be made is something on which different especificist groups can differ. This is an area of experimentation at the current moment. I advocate that the role of Radical should have equal voting power within the organization, it should entirely be a category of delegation and commitment. This role would most likely be fulfilled by people who voluntarily commit to more participation within meetings or events, people with more experience in those matters in both theory and practice alongside regular commitments that Adherents make, or people with both a higher commitment alongside a more clear understanding of the organization's goals and ideology.

This clear choice to make Radicals and Adherents have equal individual voting power within the organization reduces the risk of such an inner group of Radicals becoming a top-down power in its own right. This is something that can be seen within other organizational models like a party cadre, for example. Anarchists should not seek to create another cadre or vanguard structure, even if it is done inadvertently or accidentally. I believe there is flexibility in how organizations can be run in regards to anarchist practice. This general model is intentionally very loose in how things can be done from place to place and time to time, but that cannot mean that anarchists should put their principles at risk by not putting clear checks in place against hierarchical power forming in the organizations we build.

We have had enough cadres, vanguards, parties, and "advanced sections" that try and fail to activate working class people from above to build the communist society they seek to promote. They do nothing but alienate themselves from working class people and put freedom even further out of our reach. We cannot reproduce that same logic in our organizations. By doing so, we both morally and organizationally become no different than them, a vanguard party with anarchist aesthetics.

Minimizing and seeking to eliminate hierarchical power building internally is not enough to separate ourselves from those parties, however. If we build these organizations and only do actions amongst ourselves as if we are fundamentally separate from the working class, we also fuel another key component that causes vanguard structures to fail. This is where working groups and social insertion come into play.

The way in which these SAOs organize and interact within the larger social fabric is just as important as how the organization is structured. You may have a sound organization ideologically or even practically, but if you do not apply that organization in an effective way and do not sufficiently integrate that organization in the broader population's lives then it would be completely wasted. Working groups are a wonderful way to allow members of the organization to struggle with the masses and practice what is called social insertion within broader social movements and organize on that basis internally. Before we start talking about working groups and how they are used to help facilitate social insertion, let's go over what social insertion is and what especificist anarchists call the Popular Organization.

Social insertion is one of the more novel developments within especificist anarchism. To start with the definition, let us begin with what social insertion is **not**. Social Insertion is not entryism. Entryism usually seeks to control or engulf other social movements or organizations for their own organization's political gain. This is often done by top-down political organizations or parties when they start to join and gain influence within the power structures of social movements surrounding broader social issues. By gaining ever more influence within these social movements, they seek to take over that organization within its leadership or lead people towards their political organization and away from the original organization they were a part of. This often drains the organic life from a movement by sputtering it to a halt for the sake of another organization's numbers. This is not what social insertion seeks to do. Social insertion does not seek to create social movements or make existing social movements overtly anarchist in ideology, nor does it seek to try and drain social movements of its numbers to pour them into the SAO from the top-down.

Social Insertion seeks first and foremost to work with the masses within these social movements as equals and offer our services and help. We cannot and should not see ourselves as higher than our fellow human beings who are also struggling against the consequences of the systems that we as anarchists seek to abolish. Although we do not seek to take over or co-opt a social movement into an ideologically anarchist political program, we do openly discuss our anarchist principles whenever possible and when asked, help these broader social movements organize in a more anarchistic direction. This could be done by observing how these social movements are organized, how decisions are made, what values they seek to promote or what kind of practice the movement engages in. This is all in an effort to help facilitate or create what is called a Popular Organization.

A Popular Organization is an organization, usually within a larger social movement, that can be either created or influenced by members of the SAO. It has neither the same structure nor the same ideology as the SAO. It may concur on a lot of practical and political points such as direct action, confrontation with the state, direct democracy, mutual aid networks, lack of top-down leadership, etc. These movements would be organized by and for a multitude of political ideologies coming together for the sake of a certain intersection of struggle. Things like protecting the homeless from violence, squatting, LGBT rights, feminist causes, disability justice, abolishing the death penalty, etc. The Popular Organization can be a place where anarchists help promote their ideals and practices, while also not imposing the ideology of anarchism from above onto the population through dishonest entryism. Especificist anarchists fundamentally do not believe that social movements, in any form, can be of any single ideology, whether it be Marxist, anarchist, liberal, or any number of ideologies. There will always be some mixture of ideologies, experiences and backgrounds that will have people synthesize their ideas and practice to help solve broadly felt problems within society. This is where anarchists help to contribute in this process.

Now that we have a broad framework of what social insertion and the Popular Organization are, we can get into detail about how the SAO can employ what are called Working Groups and how they relate to the broader social movements as a whole. Working groups are subsections within the SAO that are dedicated to discussing and organizing efforts of social work in regards to a specific social movement. There is no set number of working groups necessary within an SAO, nor any preset criteria of what those working groups are that will work in every situation or at any time. For example, an SAO in Los Angeles might need a housing justice working group while one in Kansas City might not necessarily have or need such a working group to function

effectively. I will be exploring possible ways in which SAOs can better involve themselves within the queer community, and will advocate that they have a queer self defense working group and other ways SAOs can better involve themselves and intertwine with the queer social fabric later in this essay. For the most part though, working groups are an interchangeable node of organizing within the SAO and can be formed and dissolved at any point by the members of those groups. In many instances, actions by members of these working groups may require no approval by those outside of the working group in order to be executed. This grants these working groups a level of autonomy from the rest of the organization at large, and follows the principle that many anarchists promote: Those that are affected decide. This autonomy can have its limits, however, if the actions that these working groups do make collectively or individually involve the promotion or involvement of the organization as a whole, those things would likely have to be voted on in the same way that other broad decisions would have to be made.

Part 3: A Queer Social Anarchism

How can especifist anarchism be intersected with the needs of the queer community today? We will start to use the tools laid out previously to help deal with the current situation that will be explained in the following paragraphs. We will also contrast these tools with the tools used by previous queer anarchisms to better understand why this new framework is necessary. We need to talk about the previous queer anarchisms because there are problems that we face today that their frameworks are not equipped to solve, or solve effectively.

One of the main ways in which especifist anarchism could very clearly be intersected within the struggles that queer people face is with having not just a working group dedicated to social insertion within LGBT social movements, but to help build queer self defense organizations as Popular Organizations. These could be something as simple as Gun Clubs, Group Workout Sessions, Group Self Defense Courses, De-escalation Groups, Queer Partisan Militias, or any pertinent groups and combination of those listed. Building Queer Self Defense organizations is critical to the survival of our community in the coming years within the United States. As the rise of overt fascism continues to become more apparent, especially on the streets, people need to know in some sense how to defend themselves. These skills are sorely absent within the queer political sphere, and anarchists have a keen responsibility to help these skills become more prominent within the broader social movements.

As I have said previously about Popular Organizations, these self defense organizations should not be ideologically anarchist as they need to appeal to a broader spectrum of queer folks outside of anarchist social circles. Again, with this in mind, we should help influence how they operate either in conception or in discussion. By doing so we can really help prefigure these self defense organizations into something more than hobby groups and into a social and political force against fascism.

Other Queer Anarchists have approached this issue quite differently. In 2019, an online campaign started to gain traction within social media under #ArmTransWomen. This campaign has been started by trans women who are more individualist anarchists, whether they be egoist, post-left or insurrectionary. The goal is quite simple, popularize this hashtag as both a slogan and a rallying cry to have trans women (and other trans people) start the process of community defense by individually arming themselves.

Many of the advocates' approaches to organization have been to refuse any political prescription or refiguration in regards to this campaign. Many folks within this movement have said when asked that the question of organization would be dictated entirely by the conditions of that area and that prescribing anything would be pointless and even expose risk to authority counter-intelligence. Although it is true that prescribing examples will not apply to every place and time, this does not mean that anarchists should refuse the work of advocating a framework in their opinion and discussing it with others. The experimental work that is organizing as an anarchist cannot be done entirely spontaneously or individually within a certain context. At the very least, you need to start with a hypothesis if you can't find functioning examples in the physical world. You do not impose anything on others by advocating a clear set of theory and practice.

Do folks who have this mindset view all people as so ignorant and incapable of thinking for themselves? Do they see a person's framework and mindlessly apply it to the letter with no adjustment for their own context? This is a gross misunderstanding of how top-down structures take hold within people's minds and thinks that having an ideology in itself imposes some sort of unjust power over people convinced by it. This infantilizes them in my view. We cannot reject the practice of introducing other people to anarchist ideas, as influencing others through discussion and debate can be incredibly healthy when done well in social spaces.

Not having any political prescriptions can have disastrous consequences for the campaign and organizations that spawn from it. As a result, these organizations could be co-opted by right-libertarians for their own purposes. There is a real risk of this very simple hashtag being reduced to "Trans People Get Guns," and stopping right there. The self defense organizations that arise from the campaign would be breeding grounds for more of the same kind of gun clubs that have been prevalent within queer gun culture for decades. I have talked about the issues with how groups like the Pink Pistols and those like them perpetuate a very hyper-individualistic view of gun culture in regard to defense and ownership. I don't see this campaign doing much to deter such a conception.

Having popular organizations and social movements with a variety of political views does not mean we should let anyone co-opt our struggles in opposition to the goals that anarchists have. If this right-libertarian streak were to metastasize within this social movement, it would be much more difficult to join in struggles for black/POC liberation, indigenous liberation, disability justice and many other issues that right-libertarians are comically bad at addressing. This rejection of co-option is not one for the sake of ideological purity as some might suggest, but is on a practical basis for how coalitions would need to be built between marginalized social movements in order to survive.

On the topic of ideological diversity, this is an opportunity to address some of my suggestions for an organization to queer gun culture at the end of *Queers With Guns*. When I was speaking about how an organization could do all of those things, I did not have an especificist anarchist perspective in mind and didn't have as much knowledge about organizing as I do now. My initial conception of a single, overtly anarchist organization akin to the Black Panthers hosting not just self defense but also queer health clinics, safe houses for homeless queers, etc. is something that I wouldn't agree with now. I would still wish to create an armed self defense organization as well as the aforementioned programs. However, I would say that those organizations and services should be provided by popular organizations within social movements instead of being made an overtly anarchist organization, as I had previously thought and alluded to in *Queers with Guns*.

These organizations should be gateways towards anarchist practice and ideas within the general public as much as possible, not made into an overtly anarchist ideological program.

With that being said, the service that could be next on the list of importance is access to Hormone Replacement Therapy outside of the current market in preparation for or in response to the repression of trans healthcare. It is a proven fact that one of the cornerstones for the survival of the trans community is access to hormones. With the shadow of state repression of these drugs looming over our community, we need to start preparing for when, not if, the state starts to hammer down on legal forms for all trans people to have affirming healthcare. The foundations for an underground trans healthcare network needs to be built now in order to be the most effective when current conditions become drastically untenable. Of course, when dealing with this possibility, you are going to have to work within very precarious legal grounds. In order to build and maintain this kind of service effectively, a much tighter security culture is going to have to be put in place to keep you and the people you're helping safe. For more detailed context on security culture, I would recommend "What Is Security Culture" by CrimethInc.³ Many of the prescriptions made by this pamphlet can not only be applied to these actions, but to all actions you do to keep you and your fellow organizers safe.

Another way in which these organizations can help work within the struggle for queer liberation is participating in the housing of homeless queer people. The rate at which trans people especially have been made homeless was already bad enough. With this current spiral of violence and fascist mobilization against queer people in general, the reactions towards newly realized queer people is going to be more severe. This will likely cause an increase in homelessness within the queer community due to rejection by their families and friends. This work, like the work related to HRT, is going to involve preparation for a tsunami of despair and need. Before we can think of laying the groundwork to help address a drastic increase in queer homeless people, we must involve ourselves within the work associated with housing people right now. We cannot possibly seek to prepare for an intensified crisis of homelessness within our communities without working with current social movements for the homeless. Gaining those essential skills will be necessary to address much bigger issues later.

All of these prescriptions are not an exact guide that SAOs should follow or implement in that order. Although I stress the importance of building the foundations of queer self defense first, the context of your situation might not allow for such building to form a foundation. One might have to start off with a simple reading group or some other small project within the queer community as an anarchist organization. One might not even be in the position to make an SAO, and can only socially insert themselves into social movements and do the ground work of finding those that have common values, talking to them about anarchist ideas and practice. I only hope that whatever you plan on doing, you can do so with a better understanding of how you can organize and connect with the people around you.

Conclusion

Regardless of your context, what I hope for folks to take away from this essay is that there is a different path to anarchist organizing within the queer community than what other queer anarchisms had already laid out for the past few decades. I hope some of my suggestions and

³ What is Security Culture? – CrimethInc

examples can help shine a light as to how we can not only queer gun culture, but queer all of society towards our collective liberation through social revolution. In more clear terms, us and us alone, within the most marginalized, can truly be trusted with the responsibility of building a better tomorrow, together. We must oppose the current system at every turn not just out of negation, but out of defense of a positive system of care, love, and struggle. We must attack the current system not just for the goal of its destruction, but to also cultivate the better world we seek with the seeds that we have planted. As the FARJ explain in “Social Anarchism and Organization:”⁴

“[...] destruction alone is not enough, since ‘no one can wish to destroy without having at least a remote idea, real or false, of the order of things that should, in their opinion, replace that which currently exists’”

We can’t be certain that we will even see the world that we want to build, nor can we know what it would fully look like once we destroy the current structure. We must have hope that through our actions this new world can be given room to arise from the ashes of the old one. As something a friend of mine⁵ once said:

“I do not know whether it is reachable or not...but I will do what is necessary to achieve it.”

We are the agents within this time who must safeguard and spread the seeds of this new world until the time is ripe for them to sprout in a spirit of freedom and resistance against this death machine. This meat grinder is chewing us up every day, and as queer people this will likely get worse. We must not only keep our community safe here and now, but we must also prepare for the coming time in which overt fascism might truly overtake the United States Empire and seek an exterminationist campaign against us. No amount of ballot measures, canvassing, voting, or posting on the internet will change this course. We must build the structures of care we need now before our entire community is backed against the wall and crushed, before liberal NGOs and nonprofits are shut down, before our healthcare is denied coverage by insurance companies, and we are chased back into the shadows of public life: we must act. I only hope we are ready for this total war against our existence. We have no choice: it is either total freedom or complete destruction.

Further Reading

Queer Anarchism

Criminal Intimacy – Mary Nardini Gang
Gender Nihilism – Alyson Escalante
Gender Nihilism – Automatic Writing
My Preferred Pronoun is Negation – Bash Back
Queering Anarchism – C.B. Daring, J. Rogue, Deric Shannon, and Abbey Volcano
Queer Insurrection – Lex B
Toward the queerest insurrection – Mary Nardini Gang
Whore Theory – Mary Nardini Gang

⁴ Social Anarchism and Organization – FARJ

⁵ Hope – Anark

Social Anarchism

An Anarchist Programme – Errico Malatesta

Anarchy – Errico Malatesta

Anarchism and the Black Revolution – Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

What is Communist Anarchism? – Alexander Berkman

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