

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



For Anarchist(ic) Relationships

Mutual Aid in Daily Life, Care & Emotions

Nicolas Richen

Nicolas Richen
For Anarchist(ic) Relationships
Mutual Aid in Daily Life, Care & Emotions
May 2026

Texts: Nicolas Richen I am a healthy, cisgender white man from Western Europe. I grew up in France and then in Quebec, where I experienced various forms of exclusion and harassment during my teenage years, especially because I didn't conform to certain norms of dominant masculinity. I participated in the massive student movement in Quebec during the Maple Spring of 2012. My militancy in Athens, and in Exarcheia specifically, began in 2020 when I took part in the squatting movement and self-managed kitchens. Edition: George V. Drawings: Léo Poisson (@lou_peis) May 2026, Athens

theanarchistlibrary.org

May 2026

Ricordeau Gwenola (2019), Pour elles toutes, Femmes contre la prison, Lux Editeur.

Contents

1	7
2	8
3	10
4	11
5	13
6	14
7	15
Further Reading	17

and mental health professionals to address trauma—especially patriarchal violence.

Let us open ever more gaps, possibilities, and doors. Let us open borders, windows, and our hearts even wider so that life may flourish like wild grass and spreads everywhere, in all its forms.

Further Reading

Blais Melissa (2008) « Féministes radicales et hommes profémunistes : l’alliance piégée ? » publié dans F. Dupuis-Déri (dir.), Québec en mouvements, Lux.

bergman carla et Nick Montgomery (2021), Joie militante, Construire des luttes en prise avec leurs mondes, Éditions du Commun.

Dorlin Elsa (2017), Se défendre : Une philosophie de la violence, Zones.

Dupuis-Déri Francis (2014), « Petit guide du « disempowerment » pour hommes profémunistes », Revue Possibles, 38(1), p. 79–96.

Dupuis-Déri Francis (2019), Les black blocs, La liberté et l’égalité se manifestent, Instinct de liberté, Lux Editeur.

Drullard Mikaelak (2025), “The Problem of Travestis is Entirely Colonial: Rehearsing Fugitivity”, The Funambulist, Issue 62 “Building Trans Communities”, pp 75–83.

hooks bell (1984), Men: comrades of struggle», bell hooks, Feminist Theory from Margin to Center, South End Press.

hooks bell (1999), All About Love: New Visions, Harper.

hooks, bell (2004), “Feminist manhood”, bell hooks, The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love, Square Press.

Koutsougera Natalia (2025), ““Tell the cop goodbye”: Women and LGBTQ+ in rap scenes of Greece”, Global Hip Hop Studies, 6:2, pp. 165–87.

Rancière Jacques (1995), La Mésentente, Galilée.

relationships and create self-organized spaces with them, not just for them. Isn't that, ultimately, the deep roots of solidarity and mutual aid ethics?

Thank you for helping me breathe
In this world that steals my oxygen
You became my hand and broke my chains
After I lay down on my guillotine
Let's go
We circle around the moon
And we stick together with rap and the people we love
— “Ταξίδια γύρω απ'τη Σελήνη”, Sponty

It is often easy to identify what we are fighting against, but ultimately, what kind of society and collective organization do we propose as anarchists and anti-authoritarians? And since we do not believe in a “Great Night,” what other forms of relationships are we already working toward in our daily lives? While breaking free from all authoritarian and oppressive logics remains an ideal—a constant and complex process for all of us—this effort must not prevent us from appreciating the imperfect, and liberating beauty of our DIY spaces and everything we've already managed to build, nurture, create, and cultivate through our solidarity and mutual aid relationships.

In addition to systemic violence, rigidity, harshness and militant competition are driving many of us toward the abyss of burnout, depression, and for some, suicide. This is why it is so crucial to continue developing spaces for all forms of care: self-organized, free clinics with first-aid groups to better anticipate and coordinate our demonstrations and direct actions, as well as listening and mutual aid groups to address all addictions,

To all those who continue and make our struggles flourish in endless assemblies, at the forefront of demos, in self-organized kitchens, in DIY and boss-free renovation teams in squats

And to all those who carry on their shoulders — often behind the scenes of our direct actions — the invisible work of care and communication

To my partner

To Cindy

To Ginz

To my feminist and queer comrades

To all the lives shattered by systemic violence

To sociology

To my therapists

To my sister

This bilingual fanzine emerged in Athens from a series of friendly and militant encounters, as well as from practical internationalist solidarity initiatives with refugees and against Fortress Europe and its deadly borders. It also stemmed from the frustrations—and even violence—we have experienced within our radical spaces, which are sometimes permeated by deeply entrenched authoritarian, patriarchal, racist, and ableist logics. However, our networks of radical solidarity and mutual aid also provide precious spaces and times, without which, decisive encounters and relationships of camaraderie and care would not be possible. Anti-authoritarian, anarchist (or at least anarchistic) relationships that are already transforming and liberating our lives, here and now.

Yes, our determined efforts to build a society without police, without a state, without classes, while defending a self-management ideal and anti-authoritarian relationships, are

already changing our material daily lives, our ability to help one another, to connect with others in the struggle, to care for ourselves, to become aware of our collective strength, and to project ourselves toward an ideal of a society without an end point, in constant motion. This effort also leaves painful traces in our collectives, our relationships, and in our own minds and bodies. How can we keep our struggles alive amid militant withdrawal, growing frustration, and emotional exhaustion—as well as the traumas we face, including the psychological and physical violence we experience within our struggles and, more broadly, in our daily lives? How can we make our groups, assemblies, and activist spaces something other than a machine that grinds us down and generates unhealthy conflicts and violence against ourselves? Radical feminist, trans, and queer theories and practices certainly offer us tools to answer these questions. This zine presents stories from our struggles to further these.

Through conversations with comrades in Athens and collective experiences during assemblies, demonstrations, and collective renovation works in squats, the issue of emotions in our radical struggles, of burnout and militant sadness, came up repeatedly. What emerged was a need to speak out, to politicize our emotions, to find words to describe our experiences in order to better protect ourselves from systemic violence (racist, ableist, gender-based, class-based...), state violence, and violence within our own radical movements. A vital need to ensure the continuity of our common struggles.

Starting in 2016, I built militant and friendly relationships in Greece, before settling permanently in Athens in 2020, where I joined self-managed kitchens and became involved in the life of certain squats, particularly alongside refugees. As soon as I began getting involved in these solidarity networks and entering spaces that were illegalized and repressed by the state, I remember often seeing unwelcoming faces, suspicion about my presence, the difficulty of getting to know my comrades and building relationships

In such time-spaces, “there is no such thing as an ‘artist’ status, and anything can happen on the street,” as a punk-rap group once told me. They also embody a symbiosis—our collective strength, and the political creativity we are capable of—by relying on mutual aid and self-organization rather than on leaders and heteronomous institutions. Splendid moments can thus arise both physically and emotionally, to the point of feeling a collective euphoria similar to what one might experience at a sport gathering, demonstrations, rallies, or riots. At these DIY gigs, all together, we break through atomization; we symbolically crush power, the state, and the police, while also abolishing the separation between the “audience” and the “artists,” since there is often no proper stage. And what if this symbolic aggression could also be the spark that opens up the possibility of a real aggression against the oppressors, who suddenly no longer seem all-powerful to us?

Children in Struggle

One form of domination that is often forgotten and remains a persistent blind spot in our radical collectives is adult domination: adultism. Adults repeatedly act and speak on behalf of children without giving them the space to express themselves. We also often render their social and political agency invisible. I will always remember this 11-year-old boy who lived in a squat for several years with his family and experienced not only the endless weekly adult assemblies but also the children’s assemblies, where he learned to share his ideas, needs, and desires with other children in the squat. That occupied building had become “his home,” and he would explain how it worked to newcomers. Speaking Farsi, English, Greek, and a few words of French, he was sometimes asked by adults to act as an interpreter and provide information about neighborhood life and mutual aid networks. Through their involvement in the squats, these children taught me how to build anti-authoritarian

As historian Marianne Enckell pointed out in a 2014 book on the topic, the Refusal to Succeed is a refusal to live and act exclusively for oneself, “to put one’s know-how and skills to work for the sake of solidarity” and the collective, rather than keeping them in the hands of specialists. For indeed, specialization implies heteronomy and thus a power dynamic, which is the opposite of DIY-DIT and self-management culture. In 1878, in the Revolutionary Socialist Magazine *Le Travailleur*, Élisée Reclus asserted, “As long as our triumph is not at the same time that of everyone, let us hope we never succeed.”

The Emancipatory Culture of DIY Rap-Punk Gigs

As state repression and the standardization, privatization, commodification, and surveillance of urban spaces bear down on our radical collectives—and particularly on campuses in Greece— I realize how incredibly fortunate I’ve been to have experienced, over the past 10 years, such spaces of freedom and self-organization as the many DIY concerts in parks, squares, basketball courts, squats, and universities. This was quite unique for a European capital—an “abnormality” the ruling classes sought to eradicate—especially since many self-organized, anti-commercial punk-rap gigs were held in full plain sight, in the heart of cities and not just in the suburbs and on the margins. Political events that still gather hundreds of people, but which just a few years ago regularly bring together thousands or even tens of thousands, as in May 2023 at the Agricultural University of Athens during a solidarity gig for imprisoned anarchists. The popular aspect of these DIY events is crucial, as there is no set admission fee but rather a pay-what-you-can or suggested donation. They also bring together queer, trans, and gender-fluid people, as well as those who have chosen non-dominant expressions of masculinity.

of trust, and a collective atmosphere that sometimes was bordering on paranoia. It’s a reality: in such tense environments, where eviction is a constant threat and where many comrades risk facing lawsuits or even prison, I quickly realized that trust had to be earned and could take years to build.

Party

A self-organized neighborhood carnival, a birthday party, circus performance, a wedding, the arrival of an internationalist solidarity convoy with slogans and smoke flares: all these moments of collective joy and creativity leave a lasting mark on anyone involved in radical struggles, and especially in the life of squats. They are precious for catching our breath, for easing the constant pressure weighing on people and spaces that are illegalized and targeted by state, racist, and fascist violence. These powerful moments in collective life also sometimes allow us to put our collective disillusionments and “failures” into perspective, at least for a while. Partying means strengthening our bonds of mutual aid, opening up to neighbors we only pass by, or to collectives we’ve lost touch with or toward whom we harbor unjustified resentment. Partying means remembering all we have built despite the ruins, repression, and depression : the places we bring back to life. Having a party is a also way to exist outside the formality of assemblies which are sometimes excluding for some of us. Ultimately, a grassroots, DIY, self-organized party is about shaping shared memories, a shared history, and strengthening a collective identity.

Our nights are more beautiful than your days,
Than your crushing light
Dance, don’t fall into madness
Dance, dance

To bring down their society

Dance, dance

To destroy the vile beast

Dance, dance

For every inch of freedom

Dance, dance

For the fighters of today and yesterday

- Nicolas Richen, « Tous victimes de la danse », May Day 2019, Bakirkoy (Istanbul) Des nuits et des étoiles, Feu et vagabondage dans la ville, 2022

Boys' Club, "Man-Anarchism" & Toxic Masculinities

"Masculinism" should be like "right-wing feminism": an oxymoron. Everyday sexism—and even misogyny—remain deeply rooted in our radical circles, our groups, and our prefigurative spaces. We must acknowledge that, no matter what we write on our flyers, our banners, and the front door of our squat: "No sexism, racism, fascism, or transphobia here," the system of domination in which we are all entangled do not magically disappear. Our spaces and groups, often self-proclaimed as "safe" (which cannot actually exist), are nonetheless places where forms of exclusion exist and where sexist and transphobic assaults—even rapes—are perpetrated by "comrades." I've sometimes heard people around me say: "I'm an anarchist, so I'm a feminist because I see you as my equal." Or the classic: "The main thing is the class struggle; let's deal with the other struggles later." And even worse: "New feminism, gender theory, and queer theory corrupt feminism"—the kind of discourse that quickly turns into hatred against trans people.

Anarchistic Practices, Skepticism Toward Labels

If we consider anarchism as a daily practice, we should keep in mind that mutual aid and solidarity existed long before the theorization of anarchism, socialism, and communism—especially in non-Western societies and among many Indigenous peoples. We should place greater importance on our practices than on our political labels—which can hide the misery of our practices!—and engage with the pragmatic reality of the here and now, alongside existing collective forces. By showing solidarity with a squat where refugees live, for example, we learn to build self-organized spaces with non-militant and even non-anarchists. And it is sometimes under such conditions that the most emancipatory and enriching reciprocal relationships emerge.

Above all, it is important to encourage other groups to join us—or for us to join existing struggles—even if those struggles do not always align with our usual militant norms. It is also essential to build spaces and collectives that are more open and less intimidating for young allies who want to take action, or for people with no political experience who are seeking to learn more about our radical ideas. We're thinking of self-organized kitchens and vegetable gardens, collective and militant libraries, sewing and linocut workshops, or workshops on how to hack an electric meter or support people who have experienced sexist and sexual violence.

Opening up possibilities for a variety of forms of involvement in which everyone can find their place. This also means rejecting validist attitudes—such as refusing to wear a mask or get vaccinated, for instance—as well as the image of the gloomy self-sacrificing militant and the hierarchical ranking of certain actions or tasks over others. And to strive toward rejecting privileges, distinctions, and individual promotion, whether activist, "artistic," or academic.

works in squats—which, by definition, are spaces for DIY-DIT (Do It Yourself & Do It Together) practices, constantly being tinkered with and rearranged to meet the needs of the inhabitants. Such initiatives can be seen as moments of collective care for several reasons. First, they involve sharing practical knowledge and skills to avoid relying on specialists—often cis men—in plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, and so on.

As well as fostering political autonomy, these mutual aid practices are a way to improve daily life in precarious living conditions and to provide a degree of privacy for people who are often deprived of it. Being able to make abandoned spaces livable, only with recycling, self-reduction, and our solidarity networks, is a way to test our collective and individual strength by transforming our spaces—and our relationships—here and now toward an anti-authoritarian ideal. The aim of self-organized and collective organization is truly to build spaces and relationships that protect us as much as possible from systemic violence. Moreover, a building is often squatted by people at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression (ableism, racism, patriarchy, ageism, classism). People for whom mutual aid and the slogan “We have only each other” are already daily realities.

“Political activity is that which shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes the purpose of a place; it makes visible what was not meant to be seen, makes a discourse audible where only noise had its place, and makes audible as discourse what was heard only as noise.”

- Jacques Rancière, *La Mésentente*, Galilée, 1995, p. 53.

Despite all the privileges I enjoy because of my social status, a revealing episode profoundly shaped my militancy in Athens, my relationship with my body, and my understanding of toxic masculinity. I was at the bar of one of Greece’s most famous squats; I had met a few comrades there in the past, in an atmosphere that often resembled that of a “boys’ club.” A comrade I met a few times and interviewed for an anti-fascist radio program recognized me. He is a long-time member of this squat and one of the most well-known figures in contemporary Greek anarchism. He has a large number of followers on social media, speaks openly in various media outlets, and is regularly arrested by special police units; he has faced numerous trials and spent time in prison. An intimidating, burly man whose mere presence in a room has an impact. This comrade, whom I barely know, looks at my arms and says to me in front of other comrades who are translating for me into English: “You’ve lost weight—are you eating enough? You need to start doing work out.” In his eyes, I looked weak, even sick. That little comment really hurt me, because at the time, I was already struggling with eating disorders and I was ashamed of my own body. For much of my childhood and teenage years, I was repeatedly told that I was playing a “girl’s sport”—which meant “less virile than a real man”—and that I dressed like a “faggot.”

This small sample of sexist and homophobic violence I experienced gave me a bit of insight into the violence that trans-queer people—and anyone who doesn’t clearly fit into the gender binary—often face within our radical spaces. This is true even for people who are merely challenging gender norms in small ways. This shows why all these people often do not—or no longer—participate in our anarchist groups and spaces, and why they feel the need to create new places. This situation clearly highlights the tendency, still all too common in our circles, to view forms of domination as disconnected from one another, when in reality they are deeply interconnected. This is why it is so important to politicize the intimate and emotions—as radical

feminists and anarcho-trans-queer suggest, once again—not from a purely individualistic perspective, but as a starting point for moving forward collectively and forging healthy, subversive, and anarchist relationships.

So, outperforming dominant masculinity against our enemies—the state, its cops, and the capitalists—is something understandable. But among ourselves, let’s show more vulnerability and feel less guilty about revealing our boundaries. And to all the guys and girls who think they have the right to judge and hierarchize bodies and gender identities: go to see a therapist! And if you don’t do it for yourselves, do it for Anarchy!

Trauma from protest & mutual care

During an anti-fascist protest aimed at preventing a nazi rally in a north suburb of Athens, my comrades and I experienced traumatic police and fascist violence. Several friends and comrades suffered physical head injuries that night and faced legal charges. For myself, the consequences were psychological. For years, I was trapped in a cycle of hypervigilance: more sensitive than usual to police sirens and helicopters flying over the places where we live and struggle. I suffered from insomnia, troubled by flashbacks of the explosions of tear gas canisters, the sounds of batons striking shields and my comrades’ heads, shattering glass, and the screams and movements of the crowd. It took me a long time away from protests to overcome certain fears. Some of them are still there.

One of my most persistent frustrations is that we have failed to collectively create a space to share and politicize our emotions, fears, and traumas with the comrades and friends with whom I have experienced this state violence—however widespread and, unfortunately, ordinary this violence may be. As if these concerns were still taboo, not political, and not an integral part of comrade-

ship. As if it could even weaken the struggle by opening a breach of sensitivity, of fragility.

Looking back, one could say that the impact of this state violence—and even these state murders—on our lives has become so normalized that it has caused deep psychological and physical trauma and led us sometimes to stop our political activity. All that remains is a bitter feeling of having been wounded collectively and individually, both by state violence and by the refusal to acknowledge its consequences and to deal with it through mutual aid practices. This is further confirmation that patriarchal patterns of silencing—and, consequently, individualizing—people’s feelings, traumas, and emotions are repeating themselves.

Cut off the ‘darlings’,

Cut off the ‘bros’

Kicks in 12-inch heels and they will pay attention

This is right to make my appearance with a jimmy

My flow has reached a curt crescendo

My bum is from concrete mixer and cement

They call me sell out before the make a compliment.*

— “Lostos”, Dolly Vara

*translation from Greek to English : Natalia Koutsougera in “‘Tell the cop goodbye’: Women and LGBTQ+ in rap scenes of Greece”, *Global Hip Hop Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 2, juil. 2025, p. 165 – 187)

Collective Renovation Works

We foster mutual aid and solidarity amid dystopia. One of the most empowering experiences of struggle, I’ve ever had in Athens were the collective, self-organized, boss-free collective renovation