An outsize barnacle clinging to the hull of Vortex
Another organ (without bodies) of the Experimentation Committee
A meditation on seduction, desire, and insurrection
The abyss gaping beneath each skipped heartbeat
Nomos
From the Greek νόμος, includes not only explicit laws, but all the unwritten rules and social constructs that stabilize and govern our lives. Sociologists describe nomos as a shield against terror, the veil between consensus reality and the chaos that lies beyond.

Tromos
From the Greek τρόμος, signifies terror: trembling in the face of the unknown, the timeless passport of all who cross the line.

NO NOMOS ALL TROMOS
against consensus reality · for unreasoning rebellion
against fixed identity · for desertion and disruption
I. CONSENT • SEDUCTION • VIOLENCE
I, THE MAYDAY DEBACLE

You know the story. Friends spread the word; others come in from out of town. Somebody puts up flyers and stickers: some might or might not have advertised it as a "queer dance party." Some idiot posts it on Facebook. There's a buzz. Last year it was cool, could have been better though; this year it's gonna get wild.

Boom. Ten minutes, eighteen thousand dollars in damage, eleven streets, thirty-five thousand dollars in bail. A week of frenzied legal support, counseling terrorized parents, borrowing respectable clothes for court, assuming every blue sedan is full of forlorn enemies.

We sit in a park in a tight circle, with an out-of-town facilitator in back holding a sign that says "we're really not going to vent, critiques to advance, defensive planning to do, One theme comes up again and again: it wasn't consensual. We didn't know what we were getting into, we didn't have any way to choose or to get out safely when we figured out we weren't into what was going on. And none of those of us who didn't go and had nothing to do with it have to deal with the consequences as a town. We didn't consent to this. What do we do now?

TRASHING THE BOOKFAIR

We're invited to make a presentation at the anarchist book fair, they schedule us at the very end of the last day. Brainstorming, we realize we can't just do another panel discussion after dozens of drumming sessions. Whenever we act, we set a precedent. If we're calling for people to interrupt the routine functioning of capitalism, we'd better interrupt the consumerist daze of the book fair. So fuck a well-meaned presentation.

Rumors circulate and the room is packed for us. One of the book fair organizers is there. I tell her that she'll be a little surprised, but not to worry, it's going to be fine. The lights dim and my co-presenter rolls in a shopping cart full of commodities. She pours wine into a glass as she begins her speech; she continues pouring when it reaches the brim and begins to flow down her arm and onto the floor. She drops the glass, then heaves the bottle aside and lets it fall with a crash. She repeats this with bottle after bottle, then sets about destroying the other contents of the cart.

Another book fair organizer runs in, distressed at the noise, but the first one quiets him, repeating my assurance that everything will be fine. Fleur fills the air, settling everywhere, like snow, turning to red paste in the wine and broken glass; smashed furniture and food and computers pile up in a tangled mess, liquid spreading across the floor; my comrade is cutting her clothes off with scissors, smearing blood across her face. I appear with a bullhorn; another friend is turning over tables and throwing chairs. The audience is paralyzed.

They give us two standing ovations. It takes us an hour to clean up—good thing we brought cleaning supplies. The organizer takes me aside: "That was great, but I'm glad you didn't ask permission. We could never have convinced to let it happen." This is strange: everyone is happy with what we did, yet no one would have permitted it if they'd had a choice. The organizers are liable for the space that makes them the Most Afflicted, the ones responsible anarchists believe should have the strongest voice in any decision. How can we justify side-stepping them? Our experiment is a perfect illustration of the maxim that it's better to ask forgiveness than permission—but isn't that contrary to the spirit of resistance?

And if this is complicated, how much more complicated is it when a few people like us start a real riot that no one would have consented to, but everyone is proud of afterwards?
So, we are anarchists. That is, we are a group of people who believe fervently and with good justification, that our political goals—including the destruction of capitalism, the state, and hierarchy—can’t be accomplished without strategies and tactics that are unacceptable to the majority of our fellow citizens. At the same time, we’re not socialists; we reject the notion of “leading” others or imposing our will on them. We are anti-authoritarians both in the world we desire to create and in the world we struggle towards them. How do we navigate this contradiction?

Also, we are sexual creatures. We want to love and be loved, and to touch and kiss, to subject ourselves to everyone to all sorts of horrid and wonderful desires and experiences. We want to do these things, and we want to do them in ways that strengthen rather than diminish, that respect the dignity and autonomy of our lovers while securing the same for ourselves. Yet we are immersed in a rape culture that discourages communicative sexuality and offers few tools for relating in mutually respectful ways. How do we overcome this?

We’ve developed a practice of prioritizing consent as a provisional answer to these distinct but overlapping questions. We seek to respect others’ autonomy by giving them the means to act on their consent—our own. This has shifted how we relate to each other on both sexual and non-sexual levels in many positive ways. Over the years, we’ve co-authored puppet shows and “lines on consent,” proposed policies for conferences and gatherings to promote consensual interaction, and facilitated accountability processes when consent has been violated. In spite of failures and limitations, and against the anti-PC scum who’ve opposed consent discourse for threatening their sense of entitlement, we see these developments as profoundly transformative, central to what we value most about anarchism.

At first glance, the notion of basing our political projects on the means for their realization to our consent—that is, by staying within the boundaries of others’ desires as they determine and articulate them. We reject coercion of any form, whether physical, verbal, economic, or otherwise, and assert our self-determination to participate in or abstain from whatever we choose.

Yet outside of the sexual realm, consent discourse doesn’t always offer a sufficient framework with which to evaluate direct action tactics and strategy. Whether an action is consensual may not suffice to indicate whether it is effective or worthwhile. Knowing that most people oppose some of our tactics, we don’t plan our actions on the basis of consent, yet we don’t aspire to become a vanguard either. Furthermore, since we can only desire on the basis of what we know, it seems likely that liberationism can only remain inextricably from fulfilling the desires we have now without changing the conditions that produced them. So how else might we conceive of our project as anarchists, if not through the lens of consent?

In a way, this essay is our worst nightmare. A close examination of this one is difficult to imagine, which ideally is not operating according to a logic of reduction rather than consent.

**IS CONSENT ENOUGH?**

In our subculture, we’ve seen a shift in our norms around sexuality due to courageous efforts—mostly by women—to create new standards of sexual interaction: rooted in consent, rooted in consent, and how it operates in our society and radical movements against it.

**CONSENSUS REALITY, NONVIOLENCE, LIBERAL CONSENT**

Power and consent are critically intertwined. Power imbalances make it difficult or impossible to give consent freely. Can a much older person engage sexual sex with a very young person? Can someone who is subjected to another’s economic control freely consent to that person’s desires? For consent to be meaningful, it must be possible to say no, any time, and for any reason, on one’s own terms. When the state monopolizes the force and the economy controls access to our means of survival, we cannot consent meaningfully. We call the boundaries excluding our ability to consent under these conditions consensus reality.

Consensus reality is the range of possible thought and action within a system of power relations. It is enforced only through traditional institutions of control—such as mass media, religion, and socialization—but also through the innumerable subtle norms manifest in common sense, civil discourse, and day-to-day life. It isn’t the aggregation of all our desires, melded together in a grand compromise that allows us all to get along. Instead, all these things would have it. Consensus reality constitutes the ruling class’s coordinated attempt to uphold their dominance and our exploitation as efficiently as possible. Capitalist democracy secures that efficiency; it is the system that currently provides the largest number of people with incentive to participate in their own exploitation. It offers a series of meaningless options to disguise a profound lack of agency over our own lives. The trump card of capitalist democracy is the idea that everyone’s consent is respected in a marketplace in which desires can be freely expressed and influenced. We can argue that this marketplace isn’t truly free—corporations can’t get more airtight than others, thus the consent is not fully informed—but this doesn’t get at the heart of things. Obviously, equal access to means of influence on a level playing field is impossible in capitalist society. But it is the systems of power, not just speech, that determine the framework within which we experience reality. All political systems—anarchist, fascist, and democratic—produce particular patterns of social relations. More discussion of these systems does not; it cannot transcend the framework in which it occurs. Free speech discourse offers each of us our own box of colored chalk to decorate the cement blocks around our feet, and calls on the right to walk can walk away doesn’t even enter into the picture. Our experience of what we are and aren’t able to do is determined by what is possible in physical frameworks, and not the ideas and discourses. To shift the boundaries of our imagination and desires, we have to find ways to make new experiences possible beyond the bounds of consensus reality.

Take, for example, the debates about violence and nonviolence that rage in every organizing coalition and Occupy movement. What is violence? At first glance, the term seems to have no more coherence than the Supreme Court definition of obscenity: I can’t define it, but I know when I see it. This makes it an especially dangerous tool when wielded by liberals to control group norms. But recalling that violence springs from the same root as violent helps us get behind the meaning behind the word is used. What is called violence is any violation of norms about legitimate use of force, norms dictated by the state and incorporated into our consensus reality. The debate about violence is really a
This is the risk of embracing a framework of political consent. Within this logic, the most moderate elements of any group or coalition will dominate by virtue of their alignment with consensus reality. What's OK for anybody is based on what's OK for everybody, which makes our strategies for changing this world look suspiciously similar to the world we're trying to change. If we do in fact desire a radical break with what exists, let's not just produce ourselves in a framework aligned with the systems we want to destroy.

Nonviolence is the only ideology that can encompass building the consensus reality with all its complexities and agonies, because anything else limits commitment to violence, non-violence and property, anything that could be construed as violent even within this liberal’s perception of right and wrong, whereas the evasion by both sides of coercion, it ensures that anything was violent enough to shock people across the political spectrum. How can we make sense of such seeming contradiction?

It seems that the meaningful sense of violence here is a rubric of consensus reality. This liberal wished to communicate that the building occupation movement was an example of this. It is not impossible to raise the stakes without the input of more vulnerable people who may be affected. Anarchists often counter that those stigmatized by violence are precisely those who should put their bodies on the line. But in large mixed-crowds with a potential for explosive conflict, the question of consent inevitably bears its head. Real violence is anarchism fails to assume that the purpose of insisting on the street is simply to "speak truth to power." But the rest of us have to grapple with how to precipitate conflict in ways that don't reinforce the wedges our enemies would drive between us as "professional" and our potential enemies.

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majority, imagining our chosen comrades to represent the most affected. Every anarchist has a preferred imaginary friend, whether the workers favored by IWW organizers, the West Virginia locals courted by opponents of mountain top removal, or the extras in hip hop videos that insurrectionists hope will join them in the streets.

This is not only tokenizing, but dangerous, as it can lead us to overestimate regular support for our actions. Yet it is supported by a variety of rationalizations: just because we don’t see public support doesn’t mean it isn’t there; the people who are most marginalized—who, we assume, are most likely to support our unpopular actions—are the least free to express support publicly, and so on. There is some truth in these arguments. But when we gamble on this imaginary-friend fantasy as an effort to weigh by proxy the consent of the unrepresented—now represented by our presumed affinity with them—we’re just deluding ourselves.

Decision-making must be broadened to include all the people impacted. Often, many of those who will be impacted are supposed to consensual decisions do not have appropriate leverage on them. For instance, the university’s board of governors can decide by consensus to raise tuition, but what kind of consensus is that without the participation of the students who will be paying it? If decisions included all stakeholders and elites couldn’t impose them by force, wouldn’t there be hope for a politics of consent?

Unfortunately, this framework is more useful for preventing actions or challenging their validity after the fact than for initiating them. The impacts of our actions ripple far beyond our ability to trace them or the range of lives they will touch. We cannot even hope to be aware of every person who would be impacted by a decision, much less solicit meaningful input from each of them to confirm or deny consensus.

In practical terms, expanding the participation in decision-making to everyone affected would either require resorting to majority-rule democracy—not a consent-based framework—or accepting the impossibility of ever making decisions.

Here we have to unflinchingly confront the reality that broad consensus on many issues will never exist. We might be able to agree about what to cook for dinner, but on the real questions about how to organize society and distribute resources, no consensus is possible today. In a class society stratified by white supremacy and patriarchy, our interests are fundamentally in conflict. Certainly we share many interests in common and need to frame our discourse and actions in such a way so as to not pitted against one another in contests for status and survival. But we will not be able to desert this world by consensus.

We’re acting in self-defense. As this reasoning goes, the operation of oppressive institutions constitutes an attack on us, and we don’t need the consent of our attackers to defend ourselves. This harm is always on a lateral, direct, individual level, as in that specific Starbucks window makes my individual life increasingly precarious and impossible. In a hopeless, complex global economy that makes the root causes of the harm it creates, nearly any attempt to launch a defensive counterattack will seem either symbolic or misdirected. Still, in this sense, direct action can be framed as defending ourselves against violations of our consent by state and capital.

But the rhetoric of direct action as self-defense doesn’t offer us much guidance for how to move forward. In this model, state and capital are the protagonists, and the various formulations of us that will not participate in the actions of our actions. We can only react, not strategize new initiatives. Furthermore, the framework of self-defense is based in the terms of liberal individualism, with our private personal rights beginning where those of another end. Is it that we’re defending? Our role in society as defined under capitalism and patriarchy? Our rights as dictated by the democratic state? To get free, we should be fighting to destroy our selves! Nor our bodies and lives, but the selves that are constituted under state and capital.

If self-defense extends as far as the bank windows, if our selves overlap so extensively, we need another framework—we’re not just defending ourselves. At best, self-defense is a justification, not a praxis; at worst, it’s a distinguishing scream that leaves us without a framework to evaluate our effectiveness.

Consent has to be informed. In all consent-based ethical systems—medical, sexual, and otherwise—authentic consent requires full knowledge of the implications of a decision. On the political level, this criticism goes, if we all had access to complete information, we would make decisions differently. This is the basic hypothesis of liberalism: that the best of all possible worlds will result when people have access to all relevant information and the means to discuss it openly in order to make rational decisions.

The fatal flaw in this reasoning is that it falls to take power dynamics into account. When access to money and property determines our ability to act under the rule of a state that reserves the sole right to employ violence, knowledge is not in fact power. Furthermore, it seems to demand a politics of total transparency, which would either preclude illegal activity or consign us all to the certainty of prison. An informed consent framework neither enables us to imagine how to achieve a consensus for anarchist revolution nor suffices to determine how much information to share with whom about the actions we take to fight for it.

In concluding that the consent framework can’t accommodate our political needs, we’re not endorsing the violation of consent, nor throwing consent out as a priority. Rather, the consent framework has not been sufficient to transcend the self-defeating dichotomy between either respecting consent to such an extent that we can’t overthrow capitalism or disregarding it entirely. The point is to come up with a framework that solves these problems, not to throw out what gains we’ve made already.

In fact, our basis for fighting capitalism and hierarchy goes far beyond the claim that these systems operate without our consent. Ultimately, we fight for new worlds out of desire, and in order to move beyond the limitations of political consensus discourse, we must look more closely at what desire is.
DESIRE, CONSENT, AND POLITICS: A PRELUDE TO SEDUCTION

What is desire? Let's conceive of desires not as internal elements emanating from within individuals, but as autonomous forces that flow through them. Individuals don't desire things; whole societies produce and circulate desires, even if those desires remain submerged in most people. The fundamental unit of our analysis is not the individual human being, but the desire, with humans as the medium.

How can we conceive of desire and selfhood as they relate to consent and political action? The existing concept of desire presupposes static notions of self and desire. It presumes that desire is monolithic, composed of a single thrust rather than multiple pulls in different directions. When we have multiple desires, the desire that garners the plurality in our internal electoral process is assumed to be the only one that counts. Consent discourse presumes that what we want is knowable and can be articulated within the framework of our shared reality.

In reality, the desires we experience are not fixed or unitary. They shift constantly based on our experiences and contexts. They are multiple, contradictory, and divergent, surprising us with their diversity, frustrating us with their mutability. They resist our attempts to confine and domesticate them. They simply can't fit into a two-dimensional binary model of consent, wherein we either want something or we don't. This realization is terrifying, but it opens up new ways of understanding the anarchist project in relation to the consensus reality arrayed against us.

The nature of desire is complex and centrifugal, in contrast to the simplifying and centripetal nature of interests. The traditional approach of the left is for organizers to assist constituencies in winning victories that build power, which will presumably be deployed towards increasingly radical ends. The goals of these victories are generally framed in terms of the interests of the constituency, not their desires. This is a clever trick, as interests appear to be an objective rather than subjective matter, it is easier for an outside managerial class to get away with defining and representing them. Interests can be framed as unitary, coherent, and integrative, whereas desires are multiple, incoherent, and contradictory. Identity groups share interests; friends and lovers share desires. Interests are composed of cultivated blockades of desires standardized to make sense within consensus reality.

Not only is desire far more complex and unstable than our discourses allow. It's also shaped by the conditions of our misery and exploitation. Even amid contradictions and chaos, the range of what is possible to desire rarely escapes the confines of consensus reality. Who really imagines that in a free world, we'd dream of ergonomic chairs for our cubicles, more TV channels and brands of detergent, longer chains and softer cages? This is not to demean the struggles of those who fight for better conditions within this system. It's just to say that we would be paltry revolutionaries indeed if we based our programs merely on the consensus desires of groups whose allies we want to be.

The task of the revolutionary is not the task of the ally. We are not here to make the dreams of the proletariat come true. The proletariat is produced by capitalism, which we want to destroy. The task of the revolutionary is to shift our collective sense of the possible, so that our desires and the realities they drive us to create can shift in turn. We are here to transform reality beyond where our notions of consent can lead us. We need a different discourse to imagine the transformations that can open pathways out of consensus reality.

Sociologists studying prison life speak of "situational homosexuality," explaining previously heterosexual prisoners' homosexual behavior in terms of the conditions of their confinement in a single-sex environment. But isn't all homosexuality not only all hetero- and hetero- and other sexuality "situational" in the sense of being influenced by the context in which it occurs? Our sexual desires are shaped by the demographics of the places we inhabit, by our early experiences of integration and experimentation, and by the media and education we've exposed to. Among innu-erators, for example, other "situational" influences. Sociologists see prisoners who have same-sex sex in prison and then return to cross-sex relationships upon release as being "really" straight and only "situationally" queer. Who knows what patterns of desire and sexual expression would emerge if the circumstances of interest were different? What would happen if the prison were different? What would happen if the prisoners were different? What would happen if the authorities were different?

Many people experience their "sexual orientation" as unalterably fixed. Probably we all experience a mixture of seemingly intrinsic inclinations that frame a certain range of possibilities and pleasure within which we make choices. But the queer project is not to carve out a space within capitalism but to articulate and increase the possibilities of our desires. The queer project is to obiterate capitalism and hetero-patriarchy so that desires can be created. In post-society our desire, heterosexual or not, will always be "situational," constrained by countless limits. Let's destroy these constraints opening the way for desires more powerful and terrible than we can imagine.
INTRODUCING SEDUCTION

There’s another discourse we could try out here, a framework that seems to be implied by our current practice whether or not we acknowledge it. This framework is seduction.

What is seduction? It’s a rather unsavory concept, bringing to mind manipulative attempts to induce others to let themselves be used for one’s own ends. In the context of its implications there is a romantic, charismatic, persuasive use of charm to propose a sexual encounter, or to trick someone into succumbing to one’s advances. The connotations are disconcerting, but the salient factor is the implication that the seducer creates a desire, rather than simply awakening it. It is this sense that we find most interesting in considering the problems of desire and consensus reality on the political level.

When we seduce, we present someone who ostensibly doesn’t want something with a new situation in which they may want it after all. Whereas consent focuses on obtaining the go-ahead for an external action, “Is this OK?”—seduction focuses internally, on desire: “Could you want this?” Our practices of seduction don’t aim to induce others to do things they don’t want to do or to induce others to create something they want to do, in the most meaningful sense: to want to take on all the risks and pleasures they entail.

Again, we don’t believe that we can persuade everyone to consent to anarchist revolution, not only is the deck stacked against us, but the dealer, the table, and the whole house. We don’t buy into the idea that our goals are what everybody “really” wants, nor do we assume that everyone would adopt our views if only they had access to all the right information. We don’t claim to represent anyone beyond ourselves, nor to stand in for any silent majority. In this sense, anarchist revolution is not a democratic project. Nor do we, despising all these things, decide that to be true to our principles we must give up on anarchist revolution altogether and retreat into isolation among the few comrades with whom we can establish meaningful self-determined consensus. We don’t think it’s helpless to resist in the face of the stranglehold of consensus reality. We want a different path forward, one that doesn’t assume desire to be fixed, that doesn’t rely on liberal consent.

We neither wish to impose our will on others by force, nor to disregard their desires if we want to perform a kind of dark magic, an alkaloid operation. We want to induce desires, not simply fulfill them.6 Recall the militants of the Gay Liberation Front in the 1970s. They had little interest in securing rights as an interest group within civil society, but rather considered the question of what they could do to alter the very idea of desire. Genitality is one aspect of desire, senses of GLBT people being one route to enriching the concept of desire. We can think of these as similar to the strategies of different configurations or forms of desire. In other words, we believe that by changing our understanding of desire, we can change the climate of desire. But what kind of change do we envision? An understanding of desire that was based on the idea of desire as a disposition of the individual, or an understanding of desire as a disposition of the collective, which would not only change what we think desire is, but would also change what we think desire can do?

In that spirit, our prime advantage as anarchists lies not in the coherence and reason of our ideology, but in the passionates we undertake the unenviable lives we lead. Let’s not try to convert people to anarchism: let’s set out, with mischievous glee, to infect everyone around us with the anarchy that flows in our veins. Let’s produce situations in which anarchy is possible—even likely—even desirable—to those who might not feel any inclination towards it today. Of course, this is a violation of liberal consent: the right to be left alone is one’s desire as they have been produced by the domination of state and capital. But in our strange cruel love for our friends and neighbors, we cannot abandon them to the mediocrity of consensus reality. How can we sleep at night, knowing that their heads resound with capital’s bleak dreams?

If so, congratulations, but it seems that most of us have some sort of experience that opened us to a sense of possibility we hadn’t seen before. For me, it happened at age 18 when I heard a vague rumor that I should show up to a Sexed Up, Bizarre Feminist show: show, did, and when it ended, I and beheld, a group of manics appeared with drums and banners, and before I knew it I’d joined 300 others rushing in the street, permits be damned. We were unstoppable. The blood boiled in my veins and I howled ecstatically until I lost my voice. Things were never the same again.

Now, I’d participate in polite permitted marches before. If you’d asked me if I was interested in getting on a deity unpermitted midnight march, I probably would have thought it sounded cool. But I didn’t actively desire it beforehand, if I’d been foreknowledge, I might have declined out of anxiety or indifference. The desire was generated by the collective, by the experience itself. Likewise with the Christmas boot: ask me if I want to lock a boot, and I’ll laugh, screw up my face, and say, “Blow!” But put me on the kitchen floor in that specific moment and context, and I’ll beg to give you my last dollar for the privilege. I suspect that with both the marching and the boot, the key was that it was unexpected and illicit, and in that it went against my instinct: these were the reasons it left such an indelible imprint, opening some door of desire in me that couldn’t be shut. Had someone asked me in advance whether I would consent to participate, this might have undercut the very sense of liberation I experienced.

If you’re as comfortable with the implications of this as you are. But we need to look honestly at the transformative experiences that opened the door for us into anarchism and all the other ways in which we can restructure and open those types of doors for others. If we’re not going to be a vanguard and we’re not going to simply throw ourselves through rational discourse and taking the right ‘lines in the marketplace of ideas, this might be all we’ve got to work with.

How did you become an anarchist?

Did you emerge from the womb in a black hoodie? Did you “always know” you were going to crave riots, state bagels, and photocopy scenes? If so, congratulations, but it seems that most of us have some sort of experience that opened us to a sense of possibility we hadn’t seen before. For me, it happened at age 18 when I heard a vague rumor that I should show up to a Sexed Up, Bizarre Feminist show: show, did, and when it ended, I and beheld, a group of manics appeared with drums and banners, and before I knew it I’d joined 300 others rushing in the street, permits be damned. We were unstoppable. The blood boiled in my veins and I howled ecstatically until I lost my voice. Things were never the same again.

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As grim as it looks, this vista reveals that if we are not purveyors of certain modes of desiring, we will remain objects rather than subjects within these desiring wars. We cannot retreat into essentialist notions of unearthing our “true” desires from some internal vault, nor a pure Buddhist project of extinguishing desire on an individual level while the world burns. What sets us apart is that we strive to create a world in which everyone can realize her unique potential on her own terms, rather than simply pushing for this or that option within the current conditions.
TRANSFORMATION, INVITATION, AND CONTAGION

How does seduction work? We hypothesize that seduction involves three processes: transformation, invitation, and contagion. We transform circumstances, creating space for new possibilities and thus new desires to form. Others then participate in these new situations, to experiment with different modes of action and desire; and we infect others with curiosity, an insatiable desire for freedom, and the means to experiment towards it.

We strive for transformation because if we desire on the basis of what we know, we can only induce new desires that exceed the confines of our current reality by shifting the conditions in which we live. Sometimes it can be as simple as doing things in the street without permits, or using a park or building for an entirely new purpose. Disobedience is crucial to transformation; nothing opens up a sense of possibility like literally breaking the rules. But our behavior is constrained by far more than traffic laws and zoning regulations; social norms, gender roles, and innumerable other systems shape how we act, and each way we’re constrained provides new terrain for transformation. The key lies in challenging what’s taken for granted in a way that opens up the possibility to act differently, and to imagine how the world would be different if those rules and borders were no longer fixed.

Invitation requires neither persuasion via rational discourse nor imposition of force. Here we maintain the spirit of consent discourse, asserting our respect for the wishes of others and opposition to coercion. We aspire to a world based on voluntary assoc- iation, in which participation is based on our own free choice rather than force or manipulation, and thus we aim to produce that world through our methods of creative resistance.

This can take many forms: leaving the doors open in the occupied building; modeling mutual aid at public Really Really Free Markets, offering black bandanas and cars of paint as the march leaves the show. Of course, we can’t literally invite others to participate in many actions beforehand, either because they have to be organized clandestinely or because we honestly don’t know what will happen. But we can shape our actions to maximize the agency of potential participants.

Seduction casts the invite as the protagonist, the one whose agency counts—in contrast to consent discourse, which merely seeks permission. The whole point is for people to discover new desires, to want to do something they didn’t want before; they have to be in the driver’s seat for that to be possible. In this sense, anarchist seduction means the opposite of its traditional negative connotation of trying to get something from people against their will or at their expense.

Finally, we aspire to invite others into practices that will prove contagious: ideas that self-replicate, models that can be applied in a variety of circumstances, attitudes that prove infectious. Contagion ensures that rebellion isn’t restricted to activists, revolutionaries, or any other particular group. Only when revolt spreads so widely that it can no longer be quarantined to a specific demographic will anarchism move permanently beyond the anarchists. We succeed when others emerge from the spaces we create feeling more powerful. We win when the ruptures of possibility we open prove impossible to close.

WHEN SEDUCTION FAILS

Unfortunately, our actions don’t always achieve these goals. Sometimes we try to cast spells of transformation and they fail. One way our efforts can go awry is when they position the organizing cabal as the protagonists rather than the invitees we hope to seduce into participation. In these cases, our actions don’t spread, but remain in the province of a distinct group. For partisans of transformation, what counts is the circulation and contagion of subversive ideas and practices, not the power of a specific social body—be it anarchists or the Party. Rather than talking about how we’re going to fuck shit up, it would be more audacious to claim, “We are going to cast a spell in which every good citizen finds a hammer in her hand, a bank window before her, and the will to mayhem.” If our spells are not infectious, we are at best an interesting vanguard.

Sometimes when our seductions fail, those we’ve attempted to invite feel used rather than seduced. Over the years, this has proved one of the primary causes of the unpopularity of unilateral militant activity. It’s flattering to be offered a role as a protagonist in an exciting story, but it isn’t so nice to feel that others are trying to take advantage of you. In the debrief conversation after the Mayday debacle described above, when so many people spoke with frustration about the lack of consent implicit in how the action went down, we must understand that as a failure of seduction. When they speak of consent, they’re describing their reactions to the actions that took place; our analysis of seduction treats the desires underlying these as the center of gravity.

Perhaps we can best understand such conflicts by reframing them: they are not merely contests between people with different desires, but contests between different desires playing out between people as well as within individuals. The failure of an unpopular anarchist action doesn’t stem from the fact that it failed to meet the desires of participants or bystanders. Rather, the action failed to enable subversive desires to arise or flow into new hosts. Participants in the Mayday debriefing weren’t necessarily opposed to rioting; they simply didn’t feel as though they’d had the chance to become protagonists in their own stories of rebellion.

Let’s not forget the importance of seducing ourselves with our actions. It’s frighteningly easy for anarchist activity to ossify into dreary, repetitive routines. Actions that don’t emerge out of our own desires are unlikely to seduce us or anyone else. Sure, some kids will be radicalized by the Poed Nor Bane’s run by our burnt-out punks who resent every Sunday they spend in the kitchen. But we forge our deepest relationships of struggle in collectively experiencing the new, the exciting, the terrifying. It’s not just beautiful but strategic to live lives that push to the outermost edges of what’s possible.

The stakes are high. From consent discourse, we retain the prioritization of acting for others and paying attention to their needs. We must never disregard the well-being of those we invite into zones of transformation; yet neither can we play it safe and allow consensus reality to dictate our range of possible dreams and actions. We cannot promise safety, but we can share in the danger of the unknown, in its pleasures and its risks.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

What are anarchists good for? We don’t see ourselves as the revolutionary subject, nor its vanguard or representative. But that doesn’t mean we’re irrelevant to the struggles around us. We up the ante and rep the anti; we call bluffs and take dares; we unsettle lines of flight out of consensus reality. We take risks to induce others to share the risk with us; we take care of each other so we can be dangerous together.

Ultimately, the politics of seduction don’t rely on rational argumentation to influence people. These are passionate politics: we dive headlong into the terrifying fires of transformation, allowing strange passions to seethe up. It’s not that these desires are “ours”; rather, we are theirs. We become lightning rods that crackle with swaths of charged desire.
Coda: Back to Consent and Sexuality

What does this imply in the realm of sexuality? Are we positing an artificial distinction between the political and the sexual? Remember, our goal in acknowledging the limitations of consent discourse is not to discard it entirely but to determine where it can take us and where else we need to go. Consent provides crucial tools for us to treat each other with care in sexual interactions. At the same time, we can challenge simplistic notions of desire: it may be that some of our most deeply erotic moments did not occur when we finally achieved a desire fixed within us, but when we experienced unexpected and unprecedented forms of pleasure. Perhaps insights from our discourse of political seduction can offer perspective on our sexuality, but we maintain our allegiance to consent discourse in sex. Our critique of political consent discourse isn’t abstract, but based on its concrete shortcomings, the limitations of what it allows us to do and imagine. By contrast, sexual consent discourse has proven its utility in our daily lives, inducing us to examine our desires and transform how we relate to each other erotically.

But what about the terrain on which the sexual and political join in glorious intercourse? We’re speaking, of course, of the fascinatingly protean, mercurial, kaleidoscopic array of discourses, identities, and practices known as queer.
II. W(H)ITHER QUEER?
By should anarchists care about queer discourse? Isn’t queerness just a term for a small, if fashionable, subset of today’s anarchists? Isn’t it wrapped up in the baggage of identity politics?

On the contrary, not only does anarchist engagement with queer discourse expanded expanded beyond my fixed position of sexual identity, it also reflects some of the most interesting tensions in current anarchist practice. It has become intertwined with insurrectionary action, revolutionary possibilities of feminism, and—most critically for us—the messy politics of seduction.

Whither queer? To what end this discourse? Why do we use it? Where do we locate it—what bodies, experiences, tendencies, actions? And—whether queer? Should we let it rot, exposing its emptiness? Do we imagine it withering away when it has outlived its usefulness, like the state was supposed to do under communism? Or do we imagine the wasting common in AIDS patients, sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, queer bodies withering from the combination of a virus and the indifference of those whose fingers lie on both cures and triggers? Can we imagine queer practice as a virus that infects the body politic, a time bomb that destroys from within?

There are no real answers beneath the glitter. The question is not “What is it?” but “What does it enable us to do?”

In some ways, this is my wildest fantasy: a bunch of dykes and fags and freaks, bloc’d up and going nuts on some college shopping district. Shit’s rolling in the street, windows are dropping like it’s hot. Who cares who fucks who? Anyway, pink is so last season; my mask is black.

Later on, I’m driving a van, scooping up friends from alleys and commenting on the new cayenne college they’re sporting. Having recovered the affinity group, we sail—the big white with out-of-state plates might not attract us the kind of attention we want after our night on the town. We pass college quad where lines of riot pigs charge hapless students in UPII sweatshirts filming the wildness on their I-phones.

Back in safe quarters, our little all-fag cadre zines off, talks quietly, sips tea. That was definitely different from any “queer” event we’d been to before! Even among the many (“straight”?) mobilizations we’d be at, this was a particularly spunky one. We’d later read that the Bash Back! march was the rowdiest and smallest part of a fairly chaotic counter-convergence. We mugged up another day of craziness, reflecting that maybe there was something to this whole queer insurrection thing.

So what happened? I check out the report online. A big dance party at midnight, a car dealership, ATM, and of course an American Apparel get smashed, tusks with the cops, and one arrest, but not too serious, it seems. In breathless prose, the communiqué bellowed, “Then the homo hoard charged down Pike, the windows of two cop cars left shattered in their wake. Rainbows flags became weapons as the queers raged on down Broadway, the cops scuffling along after like rabid dogs on the prowl.” Wow!

But then whiffs of the drama fallout begin washing outward, all over the internet and via pals from the left east. One friend tells me dismissively how those “identity politics types” get all whiny about it afterwards. Maybe he was talking about the announcement that went up shortly after on the Puget Sound Anarchists website: “Tonight was Queers Fucking Queers. Everyone was so excited for this event, it was to be the event of pride weekend. A night that was intended for queers and their allies to dance their hearts out, and enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that the night was theirs... The evening did not go as some had planned. Many people at the event would like to have a community meeting to talk about tactics and the safety of actions. No actions are safe, but there is a shared feeling of disappointment, frustration, and alienation after tonight’s events.”

Mmm... sounds familiar. Divisions erupting around tactics and communication, around what consent and safety should look like in actions and how they relate to the identities of the participants, hurt feelings and name calling. Bash Back! is dead, and with these diverse parties-run-mini riots radical queer seem to be generating as much or more conflict with each other as with the cops. Which way forward now for the queer insurrection?
A) a sexual identity: *either*

A1) an umbrella term for same-sex loving people, including gay and lesbian, homo/bisexual, and others who don’t prefer any of those labels but have same-sex sex; A2) same as above, but including those who may have never had same-sex sex but might want to, or think about it sometimes, or might be open to it in the future; A3) a synonym for what used to be called bisexual, now that the label has fallen out of fashion: someone open to sex with multiple genders of partners, or more specifically someone who presents as lesbian or gay but also has cross-sex relationships; A4) an umbrella term for sexual dissidents, including AI but also possibly including the kinky, the polyamorous, sex workers, and otherwise sexually deviant heterosexuals; anyone who has been targeted or marginalized for sexual behavior; A5) that which is at odds with the social norms of sexuality. Under current arrangements of heteropatriarchy, this entails the above, but the above isn’t inherently queer in all times/places. For instance, in ancient Greece, with its socially normative traditions of male/male and female/female, queer wouldn’t include same-sex sexuality per se, but modes of it that challenge the social expressions of sexual power. This A4/A5 distinction is meaningful insofar as it recognizes sexual centers and peripheries that aren’t fixed but shift under all contexts.

B) a rejection of fixed sexual identity: *either*

B1) adhering to an alternative framework for understanding sexuality—one’s own sexual expression as well as a general understanding of what sexuality is and how it works, conceiving of it as fluid, in constant flux, and/or not organized solely around the genders of one’s partner; B2) a modification of the above that destabilizes not just sexuality but gender, seeing it as socially constructed, malleable, devoid of fixed meaning. The word queer alone is sometimes understood to denote this, or is sometimes further clarified as “genderqueer.”

C) a subcultural label: *either*

C1) an affiliation with a certain subcultural sphere and set of aesthetics, which borrows from other gay, lesbian, and transgender culture (particularly gay male, femme, and transfeminine elements) but also mixes in borrowings from various other countercultural scenes; C2) a variation of the above, but with an additional focus on radical politics—usually a critique of social and gender assimilation, consumerism, and sometimes capital and the state. C3) a catch-all adjective connoting object, filthy, weird, ill-fitting, atypical, freakish, disobedient, rebellious, disputable, marginal, or otherwise excluded from normality and propriety; usually implying an unapologetic embrace of those qualities and the marginality they entail.

D) a trajectory of critique: *either*

D1) inverting, destabilizing, or undermining fixed assumptions, binaries, and categories, following post-structuralist and deconstruction theory—e.g., a “queer” interpretation of biology questions the assumptions underlying the discipline; D2) reinterpreting material in light of sexual conversations, especially suppressed homoerotic dynamics—e.g., a “queer” reading of Sherlock Holmes throws light on the latent erotics of his relationship with Watson.

A FUTILE ATTEMPT AT CLARIFICATION

What the fuck is queer? It’s a noun, verb, and adjective. It’s not just ambiguous (implying uncertainty as to which of multiple possible meanings is intended) or polysemous (having multiple certain meanings simultaneously). It’s a contested terrain where disparate currents compete and flow in and out of each other. Queer signifies different, sometimes contradictory discourses—in contrast to feminism, for example, which has different specific formulations, but all within a shared framework. It’s unpredictable enough that many anarchists see it as a discursive space from which we could both rise and user.

Queer discourse, as anarchists have recently deployed it, focuses on some of these senses more than others. The notion of queer as an identity tied to sexual practice may be on its way out. There are definitely more queer-themed anarchist conferences and events in recent years than a decade ago; yet the more closely the “radical queer” tendency adheres to anarchist subculture, the more diffuse the sexual practices of the participants seem to be. It used to be that every year at Washington, DC’s now-defunct National Conference on Organized Resistance (NOCR), every person interested in queer dates would crowd into the one queer-themed workshop, half-keeping to pay attention to the presenter while cruising the scene.² Now straight couples attend anarcho-queer gatherings together and play in anarcho-queer bands, while anarchist homes are back to the drawing board.

This seems to indicate that queer as a sexual signifier has slipped almost entirely from the AI sense (descriptive, reflecting where I’m at now) to the A2 sense (functional, where I’m concerned or interested to be) and the B1 sense (where we’re at it constantly in flux or open to change). Also, as BDSM discourse and practices proliferate in anarchist scenes, the A3 sense of queer equaling not just homo-sexual deviance also seems to be expanding, with a similar blur between the redefine perversion and those who aspire to greater perversion. According to some, the queer tent is big enough to encompass those who desire or even simply remain open to deviant sexual and relational practices.
even if they have yet to enact them. In this sense, queer identity is almost metaphysical, a kind of state of mind. Its cultural and aesthetic components blend into and blur its sexual components, to the point that a self-perceived affinity is enough to smooth over the contradictions of claiming an identity that still implies a specific sexual practice to many people.

This has provoked frustration among queers whose identification with the discourse stems from specific experiences and positioning within sexual power matrices. While it’s unclear to admit in mixed company, it’s common for those of us who see ourselves as “real queers” (i.e., I routinely have gay sex, I’ve started transitioning, I’ve been targeted for anti-queer violence) to perceive others who don’t share certain experiences as “fake queers” (i.e., she’s just Lesbian Until Graduation, he’s just hopping on this gender-neutral penisume craze, he’s just a straight manarchist who thinks that queer identity will make him more appealing to women). Between social queerness and lifestyle queerness, an unbridgeable chasm, opines a grumpy old gay Murray Boughin.

Of course, often those most invested in policing the boundaries are those who feel the most anxiety about their own queer credentials (at least one of the authors here included). As the joke goes, a “real queer” is defined as me plus anyone to the right of me on the Kinsey scale.

Since the rules of sex/genre/identity politics defend the right to self-definition as omniscience, it can only be fucked up to de-legitimize anyone else’s queer or trans or genderqueer identity. But then how can we engage with these frustrations about the diffusion of queer sexual identity almost to the point of meaninglessness?

One alternative conception distinguishes between sexual identity (internal, subjective, based on how we see ourselves) and sexual positioning (based on external placement within matrices of power and privilege, how we’re seen by others). According to this reframing, the relevant basis for sexual fetishism is experiences, practices, and concrete interests, rather than desires and self-definition. Queers whose queer identity is rooted in experiencing sexual marginalization may begin an exodus from “radical queer” anarchist spaces towards others organized on more specific bases of shared experience. But will that trigger constant skirmishes about who’s “really queer,” with a border patrol struggling to defend ever-receding boundaries? Gender gentrification and gazed communities of identity?

As trans, genderqueer, and other non-binary gender identities proliferate among anarchists, it’s increasingly difficult to make sense of these boundaries. Is a cissexual* man who hooks up with a transmasculine person queer? Does it matter if his partner has engaged in this or that aspect of physical transition? What if he identifies as straight? What if his partner identifies as gay? Are dykes who go for butches less lesbian because many of their partners now use male pronouns? Are male-assigned and female-assigned folks in relationships with each other “queer” if they prefer general pronouns?

The traditional notions of sexual identity based on the gender of one’s partners can’t accommodate more complex, self-determined notions of gender identity, or at least must shift dramatically in response. Some even see having a sexual orientation—a distinct pattern of attraction along body or gender lines—as somehow oppressive or tacky. Others counter that that’s homophobic, It’s a mess.

Perhaps these trends indicate that anarchists increasingly de-emphasize the sexual identity senses of queer in favor of the C1-C3 senses of an aesthetic/political discourse. This suggests that queer discourse is appealing for anarchism because it poses anarchism as political queerness.

What does it mean to be an anarchist in our North America subculture today? Certainly there’s more to this than believing that state and capital must be abolished in favor of a non-hierarchical society based on mutual aid. We speak of our “milieu,” our “communes,” and joke about the difficulties of dating “nuggles.” We have an array of obscure reference points, from historical events defined by a city (Seattle, Quebec City, Miami) and acronyms (ACAB, ANW, NOOR, WTO/MF/FTAA) to splinter groups (primitivist, insurrectionist, syndicalist) with matching colors and ideas. There are the serious outlaws we love to hate (A-News, Infoshop, Slingshot), the weird professors we admire or hate on each other for admiring (Faureault, Agamben, Daniel Guerrieri), the petty criminals we commit less out of ideology or material need than for style, the idiosyncratic diets and hygiene...

The point is: we are a subculture so far outside the mainstream as to be incomprehensible to most of our parents, coworkers, and neighbors. In spite of our Really Really Free Markets and ana-cho-good neighborhood, most of us really can’t make it outside our tight-knit little world. Some couple off and secede to breed, or liberalize and disappear into the nonprofit world, but those of us who are here know it. We can recognize this mask of Cain on each other, even without patches. It’s curious that the state hasn’t already swooped us up, since we’re so laughably easy to identify.

How does this relate to queer? Anarchists understand the unapologetic marginality entailed in the C3 sense of queer. Our aesthetics and lifestyles, our political beliefs, and our sexual practices and relationship formats (whether hetero, homo, or off the map) put us irrecraschibly at odds with social norms. We bind together for mutual support in our milieu because nearly everyone of us feels the crushing burden of the dominant culture telling us we are insane. We perceive patterns that most dismiss and unspeakable horrors to which must remain infuriatingly indifferent. Gutter punks and train-hoppers may look the part more than the rest of us, but whether or not it’s externally expressed our exclusion remains internally palpable.
Small wonder a framework that flamboyantly embraces marginality resonates with us. Queer discourse celebrates the rejection of mainstream norms—wearing black not just to distinguish ourselves from muggles, but as a tactic to punch cops in the face and get away with it. A framework that emerged from the experience of sexual and gender marginalization has evolved into a means of understanding political queerness.

This translates into cultural and aesthetic realms, too. Consider the campy queen’s horror of the mainstream and lesbian culture’s love for high culture, or feminist critiques of body norms, reproductive fashion, and patriarchal accoutrements. We see hints of these trends reflected in contemporary anarchist aesthetics, from the fastidiously metrosexual insurrectionist who reads fashion blogs and critical theory to the hard femme with unshaven legs and hand-sewn skirts. That unapologetic pride in exclusion flows between queer and anarchist scenes even as assimilation displaces it from the former. Thus anarchists appropriate and reconfigure queer aesthetics, which resonate and communicate important messages about our self-understanding, even if we leave behind their sexual connotations.

But among anarchists, queer hasn’t become entirely decoupled from LGBT terms. The C3 sense, while increasingly common, hasn’t fully displaced the C1 and C2 senses. In anarchist communiqués about “queer” happenings, we see persistent use of “fabulous,” “fierce,” and other stereotypically gay lingo, as well as constant references to lesbian and gay “assimilation”—even when the targets are at best tangentially related.

Is this because at least some of the participants are still invested in LGBT community, even if they primarily roll with anarchists now? Is it because of an aesthetic admiration for LGBT culture, particularly its saucy gay/trans/femme manifestations? Is it to try to legitimize anarchist tactics in LGBT communities by deploying language that emerged from their radical elements, or in the liberal mainstream by framing anarchist action as queer? At worst, the latter seems like a troubling attempt to play Bombs and Shields with another community.

Can we justify appropriating queer discourse and separating it from its sexual content? Is there any other identity we could imagine appropriating as a point of departure for rioting? The Black Radical Congress, an SEIU convention, Renaissance Faires or Drags? What are the specific conditions of queer culture that rendered it so appropriate? Is it because enough of us consider ourselves queer, regardless of whatever our understanding of that with non-anarchist queers, that we don’t feel guilty appropriating this trajectory? Or because our contempt for mainstream gay or lowbrow queer centralism makes us feel no reservations undermining it? Is that just plain homophobic? What consequences does this have for anarchist queers, or for queer identified LGBT anarchists?

Ultimately, we don’t think we can make sense of anarchist engagement with queer discourse through any of these lenses. And the D1 and D2 senses of queer are used mostly in academic contexts or mocking engagements with pop culture, so we’re not going to find much more insight there. We have to look beyond this taxonomy at how queer really functions in anarchist scenes.

I. Queer as Post-Feminist Signifier

In several anarchist scenes where queer discourses have taken root, we’ve observed certain gendered trends emerging. First, many people are adopting gender-neutral pronouns—but female-assigned people appear to constitute a notably larger proportion of those doing so. In one town’s scene, we hear that all the female-assigned cissexual folks prefer “she” or “they” while all of the male-assigned cissexual folks prefer “he,” just he. Next, among anarchists who identify as queer but are not often ever in same-sex relationships, a larger proportion seems to be female-assigned than male-assigned folks. This isn’t the same as saying that there are more queer (i.e. lesbian and bisexual) women in anarchist scenes than queer (i.e. gay and bisexual) men, though in some scenes that is the case. Rather, we mean that queer identity that indicates something other than current sexual practice seems to be more accessible to female-assigned than male-assigned anarchists.

On some level, it appears that queer has expanded into a sort of post-feminist signifier, without entirely displacing it. A substantial proportion of anarchists, particularly anarchist women, remain committed to feminism as an ideology and to some extent an identity, even if it doesn’t get as much screen time as queer does these days. But new and complex notions of gender have challenged the relevance of old discourses of mainstream gay and lowbrow queer centralism, and a radically reframed conception of gender with a politicized construction of sexuality, and appealing aesthetics to boot. As a result, it attracts energy that had previously flowed into feminist discourse. And as queer steps in to communicate meanings that the label feminist formerly carried, its specifically sexual content erodes.

Feminist history offers context for this de-centering of sexual practice in queer identity. The women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s coined the slogan “feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice.” No longer would lesbian simply refer women who sought sex and romance with other women; a whole new political meaning emerged, not limited to sexual desire. In a way, contemporary anarchist usage of “queer” resonates with this: queer feminism, except without the focus on women’s experience and women’s oppression—the core of the analysis.

So is the construction of “queer” in our conception of “queer” today? Like that bald French guy said about sexuality in the Victorian era, it has been hidden through a proliferation of discourse, obfuscated through the very processes that won’t shut up about it. All the queer theory complicating how we understand gender, the new practices around pronouns, the challenge to any assumption about anyone else’s gender identity... have these actually served to dilute patriarchy?

Not necessarily. At worst, they risk reinforcing it by reframing gender as a mode of individual expression rather than a force of collective domination. Shifting our identities and discourses hasn’t succeeded in ending gender oppression. Thankfully, we’ll never return to an essentialist Eden of gender absolutism and biology as destiny, before we bite the post-structuralist

7. Bombs and Shields is a game in which each player picks one person as a bomb and another as a shield. The goal is to keep your shield between yourself and your bomb at all times, which usually involves lots of running around. In this example, the stakes are higher, as opponents' queer anarchists attempt to keep LGBT communities as a shield between themselves and the bombs of state repression and public backlash.

8. Curtains: "Shoot" (Facing White, Class privileged, City-based) "Radical Queers Say Each Other" on Youtube for authoritative documentary evidence.
In the context of a queer dance party, the question arises as to whether such events can be seen as a form of resistance or simply as a celebration of identity. The dynamics of power and control play a significant role in the formation of queer spaces.

II. Queer as Eroticizer of Insurrection

As sometimes indeed they do. Why? How?

What does queer have to do with street riots? Why did anarchists decide they wanted to riot via queer dance parties? Do we need to rethink the seductive allure of erotic deviance to be sufficiently compelled to assemble and wreak havoc? Have we so de-eroticized the (heterosexual?) mass mobilization that we can’t get it up for the IMF or the RNC anymore?

When the “queer dance party” shifts into a riot, is this also an attack on fixed queer identity? Should queers who are invested in queer identity experience this as a bashing? Should well-meaning straight anarchists participate in queer riots? Does doing so make them queer? Does refusing to do so keep them straight, or does it make them respectable allies? Will we look back on the years 2008 to 2011 as the hip-buzzing phase of North American anarchist rioting? Does the emergence of the Occupy movement, which seems to mark a shift from the “queer dance party” to the “public occupation” as an impetus to riot, indicate a re-heterosexualization of the anarchist riot?

These questions beg others. Is the anarchist riot heterosexual? Is riot porn a kind of straight porn? Is there queer riot porn? Would a video of, say, the White Night Riots be queer riot porn just because the rioters were gay, or is there something straight or queer about rioting tactics themselves? Did the Oscar Grant riots have a sexual orientation? Would it have changed if he had identified as queer, or if he had died in a queer bashing? Regardless of the identities of the subjects or objects of queer discourse, does it succeed in perverting us into greater acts of creative destruction?
Here we wade into the tumultuous waters of queer insurrection. Although a few (in the A8 sense) have been dancing in the streets as long as there have been streets, we can trace the origin of this particular trajectory to the 2008 RNC protests in St. Paul, at which a Bash Back! contingent plugged into the unconventional Action blockade strategy with a dance party at a downtown intersection. This trend, appearing from Bash Back! convergences on the Queer Question Queers marches and the ‘times Towards the Queerest Insurrection of Pink and Black Attack,’ aims to make queer a threat again. But which sense of “queer” is this referring to? It’s clearly more expansive than the AI sense; some insurrectionary queer texts make no reference to same-sex or intersex or binary gender. Perhaps we can more accurately read the intended sense of queer as a line of flight.

What’s that? Imagine any field of social relations as a matrix, like graph paper crosscrossed by parallel and perpendicular lines. The state apparatus—the whole range of coercive elements including police, prisons, surveillance, policymakers, corporate media, and more—orders all the facets of social relations into a grid of control. Sexuality, for instance, is governed by norms indoctrinated by churches, media, and family, enforced by laws, police, and social norms. These systems form an invisible grid around us, ghostly prison bars shaping the contours of our reality. Just as road networks determine which paths we can take from place to place, this grid steers our actions within a narrower range of trajectories. Delerue and Guattari call these constrained fields of social relations stratiﬁed space.

In the face of the recuperation of mere homosexuality, the emergence of queer identity, the promythesizing of stratiﬁed space, the emergence of queer identity, the promythesizing of stratiﬁed space, we emerge into a plane of smooth space that isn’t mapped in the grids of control: we have become déterritorialized. However, the apparatuses are constantly shifting the grid, adding bars to our windows and paving roads over open ﬁelds. They incorporate and neutralize our line of ﬂight until it becomes just another stratiﬁed space. This process is called réterritorialization.

There was a time when mere homosexuality was understood as a “spectre” and the family. During the Cold War, capitalist production depended on forms of social reproduction that sexual division threatened. However, in the neoliberal era, social conformity is less important than a diversity of consumer niches; legitimizing gay identity as a target market has proved more proﬁtable than mere repression. In tandem with these economic shifts, LGBT political movements have produced homonationalism, the pursuit of individual rights and state protection of people under threat of state repression. On an international level, states deploy this ideology to advance imperialism: the Israeli tourism industry courts LGBT travelers to “pinkwash,” apartheid in Palestine, while gay pundits cite homophobia in Iran to promote gay support for US military intervention. On local and national levels, homonationalism manifests in LGBT alliances with anti-immigration forces and gay and lesbian lobbies within urban police departments. All of these operations are intended to increase the investment of the dominant strata of a marginal population in the repressive forces that targeted them just a generation ago.

Let’s be clear: the only thing to do with any “identity card” is to play S2 pickup with the whole deck.

to all without regard to actual practice or positioning, the sexual equivalent of “change we can believe in.”

In queer practice, however, perhaps a glimmer of potential remains. Uncumbered by the baggage of identity, queer insurrection despises war on the apparatuses of the state and hetero-patriarchy. Since these apparatuses form the basis of control, our attacks must focus on disrupting them, not merely responding to the present of homophobia. That is to say: disrupting public order and engaging in the state in conﬂict confronts the roots of our oppression more directly than collective liberation from our queer subjectivity. The latter is an impetus for the former, a basis for coming together, but it should never remain our goal. Our goal is not to domesticate or to domesticate or to reproductivize the afﬁnity, sexuality, or other ways, that brings us together, but to keep it intentionally ephemeral so our attacks cannot be reterritorialized. That’s queer as a line of ﬂight, a temporary position assumed and then abandoned for the purposes of war.

That’s what happened at the infamous Bash Back! march at the G20 in Pittsburgh. A queer impetus to riotous collectivity gathered a whole bunch of weirdos, an unknown proportion of whom might or might not have “identiﬁed as” queer. But the chant circulating as the bloc tore through the college district as ‘We’re here! We’re queer! We’re anarchists! We kick your ass!’ seemed to strip all night demonstrating the meaning of queer in that chant: we’re marginal, object, self-righteously excluded! We’re all hot and bothered for property destruction! It doesn’t matter. The point was, we came, we wrecked, we vanished. Queer was simply the mask we were in common, and less likely than our black bandanas to come home heaving of pepsi spray.

But what does the line of ﬂight actually entail? What is the content of the temporary position assumed and then discarded? We didn’t all wear pink bandanas, we didn’t all have queer sex during or after the riot. The Pittsburgh Bash Back! march was successful in getting anarchist militants together to make moderate gesture across lines of sexuality and gender. The action offered space for anarchists who were also queer and for queer activists to form bonds across sexual and gender identity. It also offered space for anarchists who were also queer and for queer activists to form bonds across sexual and gender identity.
But if all the queer black bloc messages to do is to arrest queer anarchists in achieving their desires, while that’s a worthy goal, it remains within the confines of identity politics rather than a politics of seduction. A genuinely seductive project of queer insurrection would transform situations that seem to be fixed—such as a queer cabaret in a college auditorium, let’s say—and crack them open to reveal unforeseen possibilities of desire. If the Bash Back! march imbued people starting from the subject position of queer (regardless of politics) rather than that of anarchist (regardless of sexuality) into slyly desires, we count that as a success. But if nearly all the rioters came to the “march for queer liberation” in order to riot, rather than coming to a queer-themed event and finding themselves swept away in tawdry currents of seductive desire, we simply provided an identity-specific, inclusive alternative to the standard black bloc—a “safe space” to get dangerous.

In that sense, how is a queer black bloc different from Christian hardcore, a subculture where people rooted in two different scenes can bring them together comfortably? Is queer insurrection an integrative project? Have we just created a sort of monochromic rainbow coalition, a rainbow flag in every shade of black, and you don’t even have to take it in the ass to join?

Meanwhile, after Mayday 2010 in Asheville and the 2012 Queers Fucking Queers event in Seattle, some queers who participated in an essentially anarchist riot articulated that their desires hadn’t been respected in the escalation. The evolution of a cultural notion of queer without explicit politics, leaving little tangible context beyond please parties, has produced a situation in which many of those drawn to an anarchist-queer event don’t necessarily share the desire to smash back.

The abortive mini-riot in the Beystown gayborhood of Chicago during the 2009 Bach Bash! convergence reflected those tensions to the fullest. Were the queers who dragged a newspaper box and trash can back onto the sidewalk liberal traitors whose lack of respect for diversity of tactics left marchers more vulnerable to police violence? Or were the queers who catalyzed the “spontaneous eruption of anger, joy, vengeance, and desire” responsible for the lack of planning and resulting clusterfuck? Were those who condemned the action afterwards myopic pacifists whose narrow and tepidizing critiques stemmed from misguided notions of solidarity? Or did they point out valid problems with the “lack of coordination, consent, and effectiveness”? It seems that in these instances, anarchist-queer seductions largely failed—for all these reasons, but also as the result of an unresolved tension about who is entitled to engage in queer discourse and tactical escalation.

This prompts us to ask what the relationship should be between our positioning and the lines of flight we seek. As those two batty Trench chaps put it, “it is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight.” So what about people who have no meaningful relation to the LGBT strata? Here I mean those who were never lesbian or gay before becoming “radical queers,” who never desperately needed the things these communities offer, who never experienced assimilation as an intimate betrayal rather than an ideological impro- priety. A critique of assimilation is a very different thing coming from within an LGBT community struggling with how to respond to normalizing trends than coming from anarchists who are not under comparable pressure to assimilate into mainstream society to maintain their community identity. It would be like a bunch of gay leather daddies, a few with flow- sewn patches on their vests, wrecking a Hot Topic for commodifying punk culture. Cool, I guess, but... really?

This begs many questions. Does it matter what kind of sex the participants in a “queer” event have and with whom? Does your position in the matrix of sexual power determine how “legitimate” it is for you to claim queer identity, participate in a queer event, or steer it in a certain direction? If queer just becomes a synonym for social war, is that OK, and who gets to decide? Does it matter that others who use the term have dramatically different notions of what it means? Should anarchists deploy queer discourse towards our own riotous ends when it may have harmful consequences for others?

As the Puget Sound Anarchists announcement after QJQ 2011 acknowledged, “no actions are safe.” Yet we cannot ignore the “disappointment, frustration, and alienation” other queer folks ex- pressed. This is a symptom of failed seduction, in which our would-be friends didn’t feel invited, their range of possible desires wasn’t transformed, and our tactics didn’t prove inexcusable. For queers who are targeted by violence on a regular basis and see an anarchist-organized queer event as an opportunity for self-assertion rather than confrontation—a rare chance to experience public safety rather than to take crazy risks together—a queer street party may not be fertile ground for insurrectionary camaraderie to bloom. When a small vanguard of instigators uses a queer event as cover to attack and then disappear, leaving a confused and vulnerable crowd to deal with the consequences, this is a recipe for failed seduction indeed.

But does this mean we have to consign queer events to feel-good identity liberalism, tamed by fears and good intentions into sterile ally-ship and tactical monotony? Not! Let us reject both the heterosexuality of the riot and the liberalism of the queer dance party, and instead explore how the politics of seduction can offer tools for challenging each.
THE FAILURE OF QUEER SEDUCTION, & the Seduction of Queer Failure

Of course a queer black bloc is an unsafe space. But it’s not just an unsafe space for queers—and perhaps that’s what makes it queer. Yet queer instruction of the project of extending unsafety outwards from the sexually marginal to all? Seducing the straight into danger? How does this relate to consent?

Queer discourse presents a test case of the politics of seduction in a way that blurs the lines of the metaphorical and literal. It explicitly refers to the erotic power of the political in ways that are usually felt latent. It deploys the aesthetics of sexual desire to induce us into illicit political practices. It’s a project of extending that risk outwards, infecting those whose merely sexual appetites might be recuperable, or whose rioting might not threaten their own cushioned normativity. In some ways, it’s a modification of the original Gay Liberation Front vision of sexualizing the world by unlocking the potential for gay love in everyone, reapportioning on the political level. It works through seducing others into deontic militant acts, in such a manner that the sexual nature of that seduction need not be purely rhetorical or latent. A politics of seduction offers a framework for queer events to produce insurgent social bodies—yet one caught with the risk that other queers will be angry you’ve invited outsiders into their home.

Here’s a queer contradiction: we’re utterly uninterested in conforming to the norms of others, but we want to seduce them. Embracing marginality ensures that we avoid assimilation into any center, while our insistence on fluidity implies the radical possibility that you, or anyone, could be us. Yet that possibility can undermine whatever radical potential exists in positioning queer as counterpower, as the queer tent expands wide enough to encompass people whose marginality is more metaphysical than concrete. Deploying queer in ways less demonstrably linked to exclusion re-ups the position of its anti-normative force.

As anarchists, we grapple with a constant tension between expansion and contraction, attraction and repulsion—our power resides in our critical distance, standing apart as a negative force, yet if we don’t connect with others we consign ourselves to irrelevance and repression.

Queer seduction, then, treads a different line. It must remain rooted in the periphery while also avoiding any fixed position within an identity framework. Queer must negate, yet it must resist the inclusive pseudo-negative project of the black flag rainbow coalitions. It must be a disintegrative force internally and externally, constantly undermining itself. The line of flight must evacuate every time, preventing any coherence from crystallizing to offset the threat of retoricization. Perhaps the failure of queer discourse to produce any coherence is the root of its seductiveness. Its combination of in-group exclusivity and unplaceable borders gives it a mysterious yet accessible allure.

Anarchists can learn from this. We have to keep our distance from all mainstreams, yet the project of transforming society must spread outward. How do we maintain that feisty, self-righteous marginality while finding affinities outside of our tiny slice of the periphery?

HOW WE SEDUCE

What can all this teach us about desire as it figures in consent and seduction? One notion of sexual identity holds that queer people fit a predictable development arc, ultimately uncovering timeless truths about their sexual desires beneath the shifting sands of homophobic socialization. Eventually they declare and enact those truths—coming out—and enter into community with others who have progressed through these stages.

In this narrative, the role of the queer seducer is limited; he or she presents the opportunity to fulfill a pre-existing yet submerged desire, revealing an underlying sexual truth as the subject moves towards the inexorable future of stable identity. When desire is conceptualized as a fixed quantity that can be unknown to its possessor, even in conflict with his or her will, consent passes out of our hands. The mere fact of having had queer sex becomes part fertile evidence of its being consensual, since one’s words can be suspect due to homophobic conditioning. And if the subject fails to advance to the stage of stable gay identity, then the sex was merely an aberration, a step towards realizing the fixed truth of one’s heterosexuality, which was there all along.

A tempting queer narrative contends that desire is neither fixed nor stable, rejecting the linear developmental model and its neat fixed outcomes. Here, the queer seducer does not play a definitive role but rather a contextual one, offering an option for pleasures that connote nothing more about those who pursue them than what desires flow through them in a given moment. Consent becomes more significant when the unpredictable lurches of our hearts and joints mean more than simply acting out a pre-written script of sexual truth. Here, a certain politics of seduction reveals itself as even more radically consent-oriented than the standard consent discourse: it recasts our agency as not simply saying yes or no to options within the identity-bound palette of desires, but rather opening new vistas of possible desire.

We recruit,” proclaims the pink bloc banner, acknowledging that our potential lies not in speaking sexual truth to power, but in disrupting sexual truth via seduction. Queer seduction is a threat because it offers possibilities—sexual, material, relational, and otherwise—not just as candidates in our elections of desire, but as forces undermining the stability of the entire electoral system.

How do we recruit for our black blocs, and how does that rate as seduction? Let’s think of how seduction into queer sex and culture intertwines with the entryways we offer into anarchism. The queer seducer offers a way to make sense of one’s marginality, whether it is experienced internally or imposed externally, inviting one into a community of exclusion.

As anarchists, we table at book fairs, hand out bandannas after punk shows as marches take to the
street: we use our charisma to generate a sense of mystery and excitement about our marginality, hinting that one’s private alienation may resonate with a community of other Others. As queer cruisers, we flick glances at strangers strolling down the street, turn our heads and make eye contact again, stop to gaze in a shop window to see the other doing the same, then amble back to nod hello and arrange terms. Subtle cues, code words, key entry points; we unlock gates to hidden knowledges and perverse practices. We seduce with subtlety, visible to those who need to find us, but clever enough to stay hidden from our enemies and the clueless mainstream.

In all of this, there is risk. We must understand what HIV/AIDS activists say about sex: there is no safety. There are practices that minimize risk, but there is no utopia where we can be sure we are out of harm’s way. Having queer sex subjects one to greater risk: mental distress, rejection from family and religious institutions, health consequences, homophobic violence. Likewise, years of participation in anarchist struggle have left us with FBI files, imprisoned and injured friends, empty bank accounts and rotten teeth, post-traumatic stress and broken hearts. At times, we blame our lovers and comrades for subjecting us to these risks, rather than fighting the oppressive institutions that force them upon us.

We have a world to win, but we have much more to lose than our chains: we have to lose our sense of safety, our taste for security, our comfortable illusions, our untroubled sleep, our physical health, even our lives. To be queer is to embrace the pleasures of perversion in spite of its dangers, to assert that its risks are worth taking. And perhaps this gets at the heart of what it means for us to be anarchists.

Queerness is unsafe. The push towards security is the push to annihilate queerness. "Safety" depends on reducing risk through predictability, conformity to norms, all the things queerness rejects. The project of the security state is to annihilate peripheries that do not submit properly to the exploitation of the center. A "safe space" is a temporary zone of stability in which our identities and the apparatuses that produce them can operate without disruption. Whether we’re talking about penetrating our bodies or penetrating the body politic, we lose safety, we face risk—and we affirm that this risk makes our lives worth living.
III. TERROR INCognITA
We fear what we know: we’re terrified of the unknown. Unlike our fears, bound within their specific references, our terror goes beyond the limit of even our imaginations.

We became stronger in ourselves. Through terror, we moved beyond ourselves into something entirely different. We knew that we needed to find a way out of this world. But confined within our desires and our fears, we could see no escape.

Only by feeling terror and following it did we uncover the pathways to other worlds. In these moments, we became anarchists.

Beyond our familiar desires and identities, past the limits of civil discourse and consensus reality, on the furthest edge of the map of what we know, there is a cliff.

Do we dare?

We begin our exploration of terror by examining its relation, the most provocative word in our political vocabulary...
What is terrorism? There is no universally accepted definition. This ambiguity is strategic in the post-Cold War era, as the definition can be shifted in different directions to induce different fears and target different enemies. In this regard, it has proven far more versatile than communism: although a week before the event, critics were smacked with the red brush, communism had real-world reference points—including governments—that placed concrete limits on the imagination.

During the Cold War, the US government played on symmetrical fears of nuclear annihilation to build the military-industrial complex and advance imperial and capitalist power. By contrast, in the era of the War on Terror, it relies on the threat of asymmetrical terror to advance a neoliberal surveillance society. The principal antagonists no longer form an "evil empire" comprising a defined territory threatening other territories, but a shadowy "international network," everywhere and nowhere, fighting on the terrain of the "hearts and minds" of the population. The figure of the terrorist is an ideal adversary: a stateless, state-detached from territorial defense, unlimited warfare can proceed on every front, demanding more and more total forms of control.

According to the US State Department, terrorism is "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." The US Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies," adding that "religious, political, or other ideological beliefs" often motivate it. So one key aspect of terrorism is thought crime—not just acting, but doing so because of a belief or ideology. Another is that it must be illegal and undertaken by a non-state actor, challenging the state's monopoly on legitimate violence. The original 2003 US State Department definition of terrorism—"premeditated, politically motivated violence against innocent targets"—was changed some months later because it did not categorically exclude actions of the US government.

Although this is more controversial, not all definitions of terrorism require that terrorist actions involve actual harm to people. As critics of US domestic anti-terrorism policy often cite, for many years the number one domestic terrorism threat listed by the FBI has been the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), whose most militant actions have resulted in neither deaths nor injuries. An FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force that focuses on political radicals consulted with our local police department after a recent anarchist building occupation that involved neither violence nor the threat of it. By contrast, anti-abortion, anti-immigrant, Neo-Nazi, and right-wing gun groups in the US have killed and injured numerous people and threatened countless others, yet receive scant attention compared to activists who challenge the property of developers or vivisectors. Many radicals respond by asserting that the government's definitions of terrorism have more to do with the political beliefs of the supposed "terrorists" than the harm that they cause. They speak of "state terrorism," citing the US government's use of violence against noncombatants to coerce obedience or protect economic interests. Calling someone a terrorist rather than an enemy combatant, criminal, freedom fighter, or insurgent says more about the interests of the labeler than the actions of those labeled.

Yet for the purposes of this exploration, let's assume that these official definitions of terrorism tell us something valuable. The choice of whom the state considers terrorists—and of framing their objective as terror—reveals something crucial about what the neoliberal security state perceives as threatening.

The most terrifying specter for any managers—government, activist, or otherwise—is an element that cannot be controlled by bringing it into the political consensus mediated by the state. This is what we call terrorism.

OCCUPYING THE HOUSE OF WAR: Terror and State Control

Islam Abdi Hanifah, an eighteenth-century Sunni Muslim theologian from Iraq, developed a framework that has exercised lasting influence on Islamic theology. He distinguished between dar al-harb, literally "the house of war," a space from which believers are excluded, and dar al-islam, the house of peace. Dar al-islam represents the regions where the Islamic faith dominates. It is a zone of tranquility presumably inhering as a result of the orders of people living in accordance with the will of God, while dar al-harb designates the regions not governed by Islamic rulers and law. This is a legal rather than religious distinction: the difference between the house of Islam and the house of war is not determined by the percentage of Muslims in a region, but by what political system governs it. The designation "house of war" refers both to the assumption that any territory that has not submitted to the will of God will endure constant strife, and to the call for Muslims to undertake holy war against unbelievers.

The "houses" are defined thus because Islamic tradition teaches that the war of Christianity tend to emphasize proper conduct (orthopraxy) over proper belief (orthodoxy). In this view, how people behave is more important than what they believe. The pagan cults of the Roman Empire operated similarly: as long as a Roman citizen observed the prescribed rituals, he could profess whatever beliefs he wanted.

In contrast, Christian traditions of defining orthodoxy and persecuting heresy valued the pro- pect of proper belief above all; merely behaving in accord with Christian precepts did not guarantee salvation. This emphasis on orthodoxy persisted through the Cold War, with its McCarthyist witch-hunts and loyalty oaths. The government promoted social conformity and patriotism to cement correct beliefs, and professing an improper creed could be lethal.

However, without some of the discipline of mass consumer society in the aftermath of the Cold War, orthopraxy has supplanted orthodoxy as the dominant paradigm for governance. Belief has been relegated to the same realm as religion: private, subjective, unenforceable, optional. In the age of Internet anonymity, earnestness is laughable, dogmatism contemptible, credulity hilarious. Whatever power satire once had has dissolved in the general undermining of all faith. In the postmodern US, you needn't participate in rituals like voting or July 4th parades. All that matters is that you keep going to work, keep shopping, keep doing what you are told by authority figures. When the retail chain that employs you shows a video explaining that stealing from the store is really stealing from yourself, oblige, lest the terrors of the coworkers on your smoke break all you want—so long as the till adds up correctly at the end of the day. Trumpet the fact that the top of your conscience is corrupt, capitalism is the crisis, consumerism is destroying the planet. Just make sure that when you act on your own beliefs, you do so by convincing far a third party candidate or driving your hybrid to the co-op to buy high-efficiency light bulbs. Resistance that moves beyond speech, that challenges orthopraxy via heretical action, is another matter entirely. In the electronic era, when control no longer hinges on geographical space but on diffuse networks of power, the "house of war" is everywhere and nowhere, requiring eternal vigilance and omnipresent surveillance. Today's authorities utilize technologies of control that the Abrahamic religions could have only dreamed of. Imagine the inquisitions a papacy armed with RFID chips, CCTV cameras, and satellite-guided drones could have carried out. Yet even with such tools at their disposal, the terror of the authorities in the face of the dar al-harb only grows more frantic. As the experience of being governed becomes universal, the perceived threat of any alternative looms ever larger.

As James Scott discusses in The Art of Not Being Governed, his history of resistance to the state in upland Southeast Asia, for the vast majority of our species' tenure human beings have lived without state power, or next enough to expansive states regions that they could escape. This placed limits on the depredations to which states could subject people, since mere physical flight and the vulnerability of mass consumer society in the aftermath of the Cold War, orthopraxy has supplanted orthodoxy as the dominant paradigm for governance. Belief has been relegated to
transportation, communication, and military technology advanced to such a point that states can prevent people from escaping. As the state marches us towards a brave new world of total control, that shrinking fraction of undefined space is the house of war, a zone of terror.

Mountaineous areas have often been among the territories most difficult to rule. High-elevation regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan that have resisted state control are represented as havens for Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The War on Terror provides the ultimate impetus for bringing every square inch of the globe into the web of surveillance and control; these few slender territories free from state domination now constitute threats to the security of the United States. If the authorities can reach them with tanks, they can target them with drones; what can’t be colonized can at least be destroyed. The project began during the Cold War of imposing neocolonial domination on all non-aligned states continues in the anti-terrorism era, as the last regions that declined to be ruled by communism or capitalist democracy are targeted.

The land mines US troops spread across parts of Southeast Asia during the Cold War anticipated the project of total control advanced by the War on Terror. By rendering regions uninhabitable that were antagonistic to state control, they opened the final chapter in the struggle of the state to dominate all human societies. In the guise of an internecine quarrel, the superpowers expressed their mutual terror of autonomous peoples by imposing regimes of fear: the sudden explosion that means a forest dweller, the platoon that shoots without warning regardless of which side you’re on. Petty despots in Latin America waged parallel campaigns as dictators and paramilitary death squads imposed fear as a way of life among indigenous communities from Guatemalans to Chile. Now in parts of the Middle East, no one can escape the fear that a remote-controlled aircraft will rain death upon them from the sky.

The domain of the state has expanded so far, and with such brutal consequences, that life beyond it has become nearly unthinkable. Margaret Thatcher’s infamous declaration “There is no alternative” has become the goal and vision of the security state. It aims to create the das al-islam—peace through universal submission to authority—by waging endless wars against all who challenge its monopoly on control and violence.

All space outside the control of the security state is, by definition, the zone of terror. Let’s call these regions of possibility territory.

BLANK SPOTS ON THE MAP: Territory and Its Discontents

Territory is non-stratified space. When every territory has been plotted within the latitudes of power and longitudes of control, it is the terror iconoclasts, the frontiers of the unknown beyond the edges of the map. It is the destination of our lines of flight. It is what lies outside conscious reality.

Close your eyes and imagine feeling terror. What do you see? Is it a person, an event, a setting, an environment? Throughout millennia of struggle between civilization and wilderness, most who fought on the former side would have named plagues or landscapes. Frontiers and forests, the wilderness and the jungle: these areas loomed in the imagination, reminding us of the relentless struggle between the gaping unknown and the precarious enclaves of civilization. But the spread of the state, combined with new technologies of destruction, allowed the balance of that struggle to swing toward the civilized, who ferociously domesticated wild landscapes and the peoples who inhabited them. Now, as the forces of state and capital methodically eliminate the last social groups that resist civilized control, we’re losing memory of any mode of life outside the binary of absolute control or absolute terror.

The “state of nature,” described by Thomas Hobbes as the primordial chaos from which all people strive to escape into the reassurance of state control, is the original territory. Life under state rule, which for the majority of its victims proved more “nasty, brutish, and short” than life outside of it, had to be justified by positing an even worse alternative. Yet in the first centuries of European Immigration to North America, thousands of colonists “went native,” deserting to live among indigenous tribes. Macrocosms of escaped slaves, indigenous locals, and poor white escapees flourished in the swamps and borderlands. Without a constant war against these alternatives, supported by white supremacy as an ideological incentive for exploited Europeans to identify with their masters against their African fellow workers, the North American colonies would never have survived. The United States’ racial nightmare of genocide, slavery, and exploitation originated in the terror of the European ruling classes, whose entire project of domination was threatened by the allure of the peripheries.

Who are we in a territory? It is inhabited by the people all Kurosawa meant when they whispered “Extremists all the brutes”12. The imaginations of rulers have populated territories with a series of specters, pushed into the spotlight to be demonized and then discarding them when the threat arose. During the Cold War, the ruling class attacked Communists and labor agitators, along with homosexuals and other sexual deviants. For over a century, they have blamed immigrants, recently emphasizing Mexicans and other Latin Americans. Since the 1970s, as the prison-industrial complex has expanded, politicians have targeted criminals, sexual predators, drug addicts, and young men of color. Since September 2001, Muslims have come under their scrutiny. At other times, anarchists, Jews, welfare recipients and other poor people, and a great many more have found themselves in the crosshairs as rulers fought to redirect discontent toward the powerless.

The proliferation of scapeseated demographics indicates the insecurity of our rulers despite the expansiveness of their control: we see this in the proliferation of gated communities with armed guards and CCTV cameras even as violent crime rates drop. No technologies can abate their terror so long as sinister peripheries and fertile longings lurk in the shadows of their minds. The cast of monstrous characters projected onto territories share two key features: they operate secretly, spreading subversion under the radar, and they are contiguous, infecting the unsuspecting with their illicit desires.
SECURITY AND SECRECY

Old mapmakers scrawled terra incognita—unknown land—over regions yet to be explored. The phrase conjures images from the medieval bestiary: flayed dragons searing over secret seas, one-eyed men alongside gold-foaming griffins. Allure, mystery, terror. But with the expansion of state and mercantile power, the extension of the Christian missionary impulse, and the triumph of scientific discourse, these unknown zones became colonies to conquer, markets to penetrate, unused souls to convert—frontiers to discover. When Napoleon led his expedition to Egypt armed not only with soldiers and cannon but an array of engineers, scientists, and indeed cartographers, he inaugurated the modern era of governance: total conquest through total knowledge.

State power is a cartographic project: an effort to map and graph and delineate all territory so as to administer it. From the earliest efforts to systematically survey territory and its inhabitants, through imperial Roman censuses and William the Conqueror’s Domesday book in 11th century England, rulers have seen mapping, accounting, and enumerating as crucial to control. One of the first steps of the state apparatus in striking space is literally girding it in lines of latitude and longitude, elevation and topography.

This pursuit of total knowledge through mapping extends to the populations of states as well as their territories. Look at the state’s strategy in recent years for targeting radical social movements: prosecutors press conspiracy charges, using subpoenas, undercover agents, and social media platforms like Facebook to map relationships between potential insurgents. The strategy to criminalize youth of color operates similarly: expansive regulations targeting “gangs,” anti-loitering ordinances, video cameras on streetlights at every intersection in the projects.

Wherever people come together on their own terms, they become a threat that must be managed by surveillance. Conspiracy is secretive, withholding knowledge, however innocuous, threatens the security state’s need to know all.

As an officer once said in requesting community assistance with an investigation, a cop is only as good as his information. Whoever came up with the saying “secrets make friends; keeping secrets keeps friends, and can keep them out of jail as well.”

And secrets are threats. Our secrets terrify. Our conspiracies open secret passages into terror incognita.

TERROR AND CONTAGION

In his introduction to Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes described the state via an extended metaphor of the body, with different parts and functions corresponding to those of the state. In this metaphor, he identified sedition with sickness. The urge to rebel is indeed infectious. The FBI attempts to track it epidemiologically. In crowds, it can spread like wildfire, reaching epidemic proportions.

Fear of contagion often reduces to a fear of being penetrated. The discourses deployed to target scapegoats reveal a disquieting sexual theme. Spies and infiltrators penetrate secret networks; homosexuals and perverses penetrate forbidden parts of the body. Illegal immigrants penetrate the border, despite the 700-mileatha, and even the 700-mile chestly belt across it. The brutal violence against scapegoats likewise takes on horrifyingly erotic casts: white obsession with the bodies of black men, the sexual mutilations that often accompanied lynchings, the forced sterilization of women of color on welfare, hysterical hyperbole about gay male promiscuity by the God Hater Fags set. Terror of penetration by subversive elements haunts the wet dream nightmares of our rulers.

THE CONTINUING APPEAL OF SEX AND VIOLENCE

But really, why all the fuss about sex and violence? Why are anarchists so hung up on breaking windows and fucking? Are these the only spaces in which terror and the unknown can come into play? Perhaps we fetishize riots and sex as the last frontiers of unmediated relation to the body. What are you doing after the riot or the orgy or whatever, after all? Let’s all die on the barricades in the throes of orgasm, confident for the first time that we’re really alive!

We risk years in prison for the rush of glass shattering beneath our hammers, or pregnancies and diseases for the thrill of intertwining our sweaty flesh. Are the erotics of rebellion and the rebelliousness of the erotic all we have left, the last rapidly eroding facade of unmediated embodiment? When every acre has been mapped, can we imagine no other zones of possibility beyond our own unpredictable limbs? Is the body the last territory?

Terror is an erotic feeling. No center can cohere without eroticizing its periphery. The line between disgust and desire is far more porous than most of us care to admit. This is why seduction best characterizes our politics: spreading anarchy is an erotic process, not a rational one. This isn’t to say we have to give up distributing ‘zines and crafting careful critiques—but we will not argue and reason our way into an anarchist society. We might, however, seduce our way into unexpected affiliations, transfer the margins into volatile peripheries, and infect the body politic with subversive desires.
QUEER PERIPHERIES AS TERRORORIES

The most politically interesting senses of queer locate it at the antagonistic margins of dominant forces, sexual or otherwise—a periphery that is always shifting in relation to centers of power. In this light, the flight into territory is a queer project.

If this is true, it's not important for anarchists to be queer, whatever that might mean, so much as it is for us to seek out peripheral positions from which to attack consensus reality, seducing others into these zones of possibility. Fascinating innovations in relationships and sexuality continue to emerge from queer communities because marginality catalyzes creative resistance. Likewise, our political queerness and rejection of respectability afford us a perspective from which we can continue to precipitate ruptures in the ruling social order.

Just as radical queers undermine their potential by attempting to become an interest group with a stake in civil society, anarchists will not succeed by seeking to escape marginality. We can debate whether dropping out into subculture empowers or isolates us, but it's clear that whatever power we have proceeds from our practice of challenging political peripheries and striking from there. We don't have to avoid compromise at all costs—rather, we should only make compromises that undermine the stability of the center instead of drawing us closer to it. We can participate in coalitions, so long as our participation always exposes the limitations of internal consensus and consensus reality.

FOLLOWING TERROR TO DEATH AND BEYOND

We have to think beyond the politics of consent because we don’t desire terror, in the sense of embracing it as a conscious positive goal. Terror is not an objective to which we say yes or no. Rather, it is the inevitable result of hurling ourselves into the fires of transformation. We want terrible freedom, moments of rupture that force us into new worlds where our previous desires are exceeded so fantastically that we can’t even remember them. Perhaps there is no prospect more terrifying.

Consensus reality grips us so powerfully that we find it less frightening to die within it than to live outside of it. So long as we remain within its grasp, even our deaths can be appropriate and functional. States and nationalist projects strive ceaselessly to appropriate death: the war memorials and September 11th speeches, the posters of the martyrs of the intifada. Perhaps this is why the death of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia resonated so broadly: finally, a death that did not serves the project of state domination. The self-immolating protestor terrifies us by refusing to enter into consensus with the state, right up to the point of death—yet we imagine him facing his terror, choosing his path on his own terms. Perhaps such deaths can help us imagine the possibility of living courageously, as well. Perhaps if we’re bold enough to face it, we’ll find that in releasing ourselves to terror, we overcome our fears.

There can be no freedom, let alone liberation, until we confront the things that terrify us most. In this regard, when we experience terror, it is a sign that we are finally on the right path. Rather than an affliction, a boundary, terror could be the star by which we navigate into a world beyond our wildest dreams. We can’t argue that the world we reach will be “better,” in the sense of being more in line with our current framework of desires.

But we can say that the moments in our lives that really mattered, the ones worth telling as stories, occurred when we stared terror in the face—and stepped forward off the cliff.
This is the anarchist project:

FIGHT & TERROR,
LET THE WORLD BURN
against every map • for every territory
for every bomb threat • against every telephone
against every for • for every against

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