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Queer-Anarchy After Leftism

This text was originally published by
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Further Reading

Queer Ultraviolence: Bash Back Anthology

Bædan: Journal of Queer Nihilism

Bædan 2: A Queer Journal of Heresy

Bædan 3: Journal of Queer Time Travel

I Don't Bash Back I Shoot First: On Queer Gangs

Toward the Queerest Insurrection

Criminal Intimacy

Anti-Left Anarchy: Hunting Leftism with Intent to Kill

Queer-Anarchy After Leftism

I celebrate many achievements of Bash Back!, but for me the greatest is the way in which Bash Back! shows the possibility for a queer-anarchy that has no attachment to the dinosaurs of queer leftism. Radical queers will critique reform, the State, and non-profit organizations endlessly. And yet, at the end of the day their politics are still focused on different issues to be reformed, different demands upon the state and the same tired rhetoric and reliance on the non-profit industrial complex. Bash Back! concerned itself with none of this.

In attempting to articulate this form of queer antipolitics, I'll borrow briefly from Selma James in her introduction to Mariarosa Dalla Costa's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. James locates two mainstream trends within the Women's Movement of the '70s. On the one hand, there are the Marxist Men who happen to be Women and on the other are the militants of women's issues. Women in the first camp simply reiterate the party line, but without specific reference to the position of women under capitalism. Women in the second focus on this or that issue concerning women, but without indicting capital itself as "a social relation which we struggle to destroy" The position of James, Dalla Costa and other autonomist-feminists is to refuse both of these positions, to seek an analysis of capitalism that is specifically rooted in women's position within it and then from that position to discover its undoing.

While there are strong criticisms to be made of autonomous marxism as well as of essentialist notions of the category of women and their position within capitalism, autonomist methodology is helpful here. In the tradition of Selma

Identity is meaningful in that it marginalizes us in different ways, and the affinity that comes from similar or shared experiences is powerful. However, it must always be remembered that such affinity is useless when it is integrated in a system of domination and control. Such affinity ought to be encouraged as it strengthens our bonds to one another and promotes conflict with the social order, be it bombing police cars or expelling rapists from one's community.

Another reaction to the Left's adoption of identity politics is the rise of hard-Right identity politics. This leads to absurdities such as men's rights movements, white rights movements, and groups dedicated to preserving Christian culture and identity. One can see a connection between these reactionary positions, despite their apparent contradictions. Each position represents a different tactic towards the same goal: maintaining a class-based society along with the homophobic, white supremacist, and patriarchal structures that uphold it. This stands in contrast to identity politics, which seeks to mildly reform class society and its institutions.

In short, there today exists a tension between progressive identity politics and reactionary anti-identity politics. The failure of both rests in their reliance on the state and capitalism as basis for their vision of society. Both seek to better manage the present order. It is clear: there exists a subset of people in this society that benefit from the current social order. These people include queer people, people of color, women, and every other identity. Politicians, police, prison guards, landlords, and bosses: these are our enemies. They come in all forms.

It is equally clear that queer-bashers, rapists, and racists are similarly enemies of liberation. While in some cases these are not people with access to and backing of institutional power, the violence they inflict is no less real or important. Indeed, their tactics are taken directly from the state, and uphold systems of control even after the formal powers officially abandon them.

James, I'd like to identify two major currents of queer activity. On the one hand, anarchists who happen to be queer; on the other, queer people who are militants of queer issues. To understand Bash Back! the first way would be to reproduce Crimethinc's assertion that such activity is "queer themed" or to just ignore it altogether. To understand Bash Back! within the second current reduces it to the level of Gay Shame's issue- specific, reform-oriented street theater. We refuse both conceptions.

Bash Back! must be understood to be a concrete attempt to critique society from the perspective of queer experience, and then to find methods of attack that stem from that position. In this way, Bash Back! Is the queer answer to autonomist-feminism. The experiments can be categorized into two broad strategies. The first-to open up queer space within conflictual action. The second-to apply insurrectionary strategies to the daily struggle intrinsic to queer life. Examples of the first would be the queer blockade at the RNC, the riots at the C2O, solidarity attacks with other struggles and insurrections, etc. The second is exemplified in attacks on queer bashers, arson at the houses of murderers, the dissemination of self defense information, distribution of pepper spray, squatted queer-youth centers and queer dance parties that ended in broken police cruisers. The synthesis of these categories is the beginning of a living-and-fighting practice that I call queer autonomy.

I want to take a moment to emphasize that this queer-anarchy after leftism must also mean a total break from activist logic. At a time when its former proponents have backed away from so- called "lifestylism", Bash Back! is a return to hyper-lifestylism! I refuse to see queer life as

secondary to queer politics. Rather, I'm interested in documenting, exploring, and articulating an anti-politics that takes life itself as its field of struggle. Toward this end, Bash Back! was successful in locating the crises within the lives of its participants and materially acting to resolve each. Queers needed housing, self-defense, nice things, and pleasure. Consequently they occupied houses, communized weapons, and trained together, looted as much as possible, and organized parties and riots and orgies. At this point, any struggle that doesn't immediately implicate the very lives of its participants is doomed to irrelevance.

One can see these developments thriving to this day: queers squats, sex worker self. organization, queer street gangs, transgender prison gangs, queer contingents within militant street marches, marches that leave occupations and auto-reduce the cover as they reach the party. One can imagine ways that these strategies could be deployed as more and more aspects of life under capitalism are thrown into crisis. When funding disappears for AIDS drugs, new forms of expropriation will become appropriate. As the nuclear family is not an option for many-the crisis will force queers to forge new, non-familial modes of communal existence. As reactionary groups begin to assert themselves on the street, queers will strike back with new weapons and self-defense formations. As society falls apart, we will discover ever more decadent ways to push the contradictions and dynamite the ruptures.

Identity Politics and Anti-Identity Politics

Given the political effectiveness of these organizations, their model has been emulated by others seeking to reform the current socioeconomic order. This has led to identity

politics becoming a central part of the contemporary United States political order. This is especially true in the liberal reformist movement, where organizations such as the NAACP, HRC, and NOW are prominent. With their successes in political reform, they (and many other identity-politics organizations) have become embedded in the dominant political discourse. It is here that we encounter one of the main problems of identity politics: the groups which sought to challenge identity-based oppression have instead merely entered into a partnership with those who benefit from oppression. This partnership concerns the ability to define the political agenda for a certain identity. This is clearly demonstrated in the queer community by the HRC, with their push for hate crime laws, marriage, and military service. These demands show that the HRC has accepted the logic of and requested partnership in the government and the marketplace. Essentially, the HRC is fighting for assimilation into, rather than the destruction of, a system that creates and enforces the very oppression they are allegedly struggling against.

However, even identity politics does not have unfettered power in the political mainstream. Even the appearance of altering power relations in this society is, to some, a threat. These reactionaries claim that identity politics seeks special rights for certain groups. This flawed logic rests on the idea that, since people are guaranteed equality under the Constitution, then the problem of legal inequality is non-existent. Even if one accepts the logic of the state, the discrepancy between legal/political equality and social equality is telling.