

Why we think that psychoemotional self- and community defense is necessary

Project outline and discussion paper
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Introduction

The following reflections come from our lived experiences, from our pain and sorrows when confronted with the numerous manifestations of domination within us – as well as from the joy that we feel when we witness the expansion of our freedoms: when emotions are reclaimed, when our connection to our bodies and communities can be experienced deeply again, when we see and feel shackles torn and chains broken.

We are heartbroken and desperate when we and our friends and loved ones are suffering from toxic guilt and shame, from debilitating anxieties, from internalized feelings of hopelessness, from overwhelm and the many other internalized manifestations of authority.

Our hearts are burning with rage when we see oppression reproduced even within so called-anarchist circles that we came to in search of safer spaces.

This text can be read as a self critique to and reflection upon the current state of our movements on the one hand – and also as a sort of “love confession” to the (still or not yet) burning hearts whose love and rage aim to bring down domination in all its manifestations in order to meet each other on eye level.

With this text, we want to share our reflections so as to inspire discussions, exchanges and experiments, and to encourage each other to share our vulnerabilities.

I. General definition

Under psycho-emotional self defense we understand the individual and collective ability to

- be aware of
- support each other against
- withstand/ be resilient against
- actively resist

the somatic, emotional, mental and behavioral manifestations of domination that are corrupting our relating and organizing, ergo: our lives.

This agency encompasses among many other: agency when struggling with (the consequences of) trauma/overwhelm/neglect/violence, (police/medical/educational..) repression, counterinsurgency, when confronted with power dynamics and abuse within our movements or the recuperation of anarchist fights etc. both on an individual and collective level.

The following citation by the Jane Addams Collective points out why building strategies of psychoemotional self defense is so crucial for the survival and (in best case) thriving of our resistency and aliveness:

“In fact, without trauma there would be little to stop power structures from being dismantled by rebels. Trauma is both a relatively cheap and effective tool for maintaining tyrannical systems, whether they are familial or national. It is not the trauma per se that is effective (often times it is not)—it is the corollaries (fear, shame and debilitating post-trauma injuries) of trauma that make it the go-to of tyrants everywhere, from the halls of governments to our dinner tables. Individuals, groups,

organizations, and whole communities can be neutralized by the effects of traumatizing events orchestrated by oppositional forces.“

Trauma (from ancient greek τραύμα - „wound“) is very often only or mainly referred to as being a severe lesion or shock through sexualized violence, severe physical violence, war and “natural“ catastrophes. Another topic more and more discussed is developmental trauma where treatment often focusses on the inter-relational level between (those who should be) caregivers and kids, whilst missing out structural layers and a search for agency also on that layers.

Even though we of course acknowledge these severe cases of violence and overwhelm and how they traumatize individuals and/or groups, we share a broader analysis of trauma. From being gendered at birth to being forced into school, from the whole process of domesticating a child into submitting to authoritarian values to being disconnected from the ecosystems that (should) surround us – there is a lot of destructive survival patterns stemming from trauma in *all of us* – even though many of us have developed quite “functional“ ways of coping with it. But what may be “functional“ in a capitalist patriarchal society is often a huge hindrance for the embodiment of our anarchist values – within ourselves and in our communities -, and is often a symptom of (hidden/suppressed) trauma itself.

We want to find collective ways of dealing with these traumas, wounds, struggles in order to self defend ourselves, our friendships, crews and networks from patriarchal_capitalist intrusions. That’s the main content of our reflections and propositions.

II. Status quo – Where are we at the moment?

Confronted with state repression, fascist violence and injury after specific acts of resistance, our movements sometimes, at least in the immediate aftermath, make supporting each other a priority, as the author(s) of “The Importance of Support” point out:

“In many experiences, it seems support is strongest immediately after a traumatic or tragic situation. We have experienced our communities to be impressively good at this: we throw benefits, we join our friends at their hospital beds or at their court hearings. But what happens six months or two years later? Are those support efforts maintained? Too often the answer is no. After the overt urgency of a situation subsides, it can become harder to determine what sort of support is needed, and the attention of people we need support from sometimes begins to drift elsewhere prematurely. This responsiveness to urgent situations is useful and even inspirational, but we need to build on this to be stronger in providing support more generally. “

Concerning long-term consequences, when trauma and injury that is not directly linked to an act of resistance (like police repression after a riot) or when it is about the psychological, emotional, somatic effects of domination that are present since long-term, many of us are left without proper support, helpless and hugely overwhelmed. We see this as a symptom of the lack of consciously and voluntarily interdependent communities and crews, embedded in larger support structures and networks.

In our experience, many current “anarchist“ communities (affinity groups, organizations, scenes...) are definitely not sufficiently able to support individuals and relationships in defending themselves against authority extensively, that is longer term as well as on internalized layers. For many, this is not even part of their outspoken goals and not seldomly gets “outsourced” from the so-called “political” into the “private” sphere – while the focus lies on fighting the external manifestations of authority (which is, of course, also necessary).

Additionally, instead of finding safer spaces in our communities, we often have to deal with open and subtle power dynamics, racism, classism, essentialist gender norms, moralistic identity politics, ... in short: often the whole spectrum of what we fight against on “the external”.

It’s no surprise then that oftentimes people are either left alone to “work on themselves“ or actively choose to do so out of missing trust, not counting on their communities or even lacking close communities in the first place. For some people it is possible to seek the support of professional psychotherapy, but for numerous reasons, particularly lack of privileges, for many this is not a viable option.

And even for those who get psychotherapeutic support, it might be irritating that often, in narratives of psychotherapists, systems of domination aren’t recognized as a cause for traumatic experience. Due to the individualized analysis of one’s life and wounds, the proposed dealings are, as a result, also searched for within the person – without looking at, fighting and changing the circumstances one lives in.

“Often, the common narrative of self-care commodifies our emotional needs instead of satisfying them. In the medicalized field of psychotherapy, one is subjected to a client-provider dynamic in which the tools and knowledge one might use to better oneself autonomously are made inaccessible. The therapist postures as if they know the cause of a person’s emotional tensions while monopolizing whatever knowledge they do hold, in order to establish their word as true and accurate and thereby instilling themselves as an authority in the patient’s mind. We find that working among ourselves to change our undesirable emotional and behavioral patterns, in order to alleviate the suffering inflicted on us by oppressive forces, is a collective undertaking and strategic component of building our communities in opposition to power. We see working together to address our needs as an opportunity to make our community stronger, not just by helping each other with our own immediate or chronic problems, but by starting to trust each other with intimacy and vulnerability, as a way to say that the new society we hold in our hearts should not have shame around emotional honesty.“

Along with this quote from the Jane Addams Collective, we are convinced that there is a huge necessity for self-organized anarchist ways of dealing with authorities’ effects on our bodies, emotions, psyches. We further clearly refuse the narrative that acquiring psychoemotional self defense skills and taking care of supporting each other requires superhuman skills, high paid professionals or esoteric pseudo-“knowledge”.

And still, especially confronted with the huge scarcity of emotional and community resources while so much would need to be taken care of, we acknowledge that for many people who have access to it, psychotherapy was and is vital to get better, to change things or even survive. It would be absurd to deny people this survival tool, particularly in a context where there are often seemingly little alternatives.

We don't want to argue against methods that already work for some, rather we want to point out that we believe that we can do a lot better than we do at the moment when it comes to building self-organized ways of caring for each other – while at the same time also acknowledging the limits of both our knowledge and our resources when it comes to confronting all the wounds of being dominated in a self-organized way. We are not interested in spreading messages of salvation or some form of messianic megalomania.

Considering the precarious circumstances of many of us concerning material resources, it's anyways impossible to predominantly or even solely rely on monetary based client-professional relationships for emotional, psychological or somatic support.

All of this leaves us in a situation where for most of us, and for most of our wounds, there simply is no structurally sustainable care. The focus in lots of activist groups rather seems to lie on staying, being and becoming “effective“ – with and despite our uncured wounds. This is also why we are critical of at least some notions of “sustainable activism”.

We believe that dealing with all the wounds and impairments that domination has caused us takes a determined (un/re)learning process supported by radical communities and is for sure not an easy task. With the author(s) of the text “Against Self-Work” we share the view that “processing trauma, mistakes, and insecurities are a lifelong process.”

This necessity of a “lifelong process” intimidates many of us that were socialized in a culture where capitalism offers quick and easy distractions and compensations aka “solutions”. We quite regularly see this also manifested in anarchist discussions and publications.

Confronted with the fact that there is no “easy solution” to the problem, often paired with a lot of social pessimism based on minor to violent disappointments, many of us are engulfed in hopelessness, the feeling that everything we do is just too little, that our wounds are just too many, that authority is total, omnipresent, that we can't escape it – debilitating feelings that are among the most cunning effects of domination on our psyches.

Even though it is certainly not helpful to pretend that everything is fine or to avoid confronting all the destruction, all the domination that is all around and also inside of us, we want to take care of not letting authority invade our dreams and our will to live fully.

III. Pointing out necessities – What do we need?

In order to become and stay as autonomous as possible from capitalist and state infrastructures, we think that especially in these times of increasing dependency on both state and technology for fulfilling our basic needs and even for relating to each other, we have to develop and defend as much autonomy concerning our somatic, emotional and mental needs as possible. In fact, we see this kind of autonomy as an essential base for other areas of autonomy we want and need to strengthen and explore.

There are some analysis and tools from “below” already that we can build on: From “radical therapy”, a self organized group therapy setting that was developed in the 1970s, to the tools and strategies ACT-UP/CSAC developed in the face of trauma, burnout and homophobic police violence

in the midst of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s, to trauma-informed Out of Action collectives and the MAST program developed by the Jane Addams Collective ...

In this sense, we are convinced that there is not only the necessity but also the possibility to actively self organize to fight authority as well on the individually-internalized as on the community-internalized level (– all the other fights remain as important, of course!). Without this, we think that our ideals will just stay cloud castles or mere theories to be discussed that have no or little implications on our lived reality.

Somatic consciousness

Healing and recovering from authorities' wounds needs to happen embodiedly, on a somatic level.

“Somatic” is often used equivalent with “body”. We use the definition various somatic practices also use which defines “soma” as the “body experienced from within”. Inner body consciousness is about consciously sensing and feeling how sensations and emotions move through our different bodily tissues, seizing its physiological expression in a direct experiential way.

Without reconnecting to our bodies somatically and emotionally, there is no way to connect to others and what surrounds us – it is one of the preconditions for transforming all that authority has corrupted, occupied and engrossed within and outside of us.

We simply cannot deny how all these years that many of us were forced into certain movement and behavioral patterns restricted and limited our somatic and emotional ability to feel and express ourselves and act connectedly. Trauma from abuse, classism, racism, from being gendered etc. manifests in the way we (don't) move and act. When it comes to our ability to resist in action, to “motor out“ our fight reflex against those who harm us, to liberate our criminal energies and revolutionary urges in this way, caring for and transforming oppressive and disabling somatic traces of authority inside of us becomes vital.

For us, it is an essential aspect of freedom to regain as much agency here as possible.

Emotional literacy & agency

In our analysis, we need to specifically focus on how to liberate our emotions from patriarchal_capitalist corruption and the way we're (often toxically) used to “deal” with them. We feel a need and strong motivation to educate ourselves, to learn from each other and from people who spent lots of time in their lives understanding the impacts of traumas on our psyches. We believe it's necessary to have a trauma-informed approach to our resistancy, in order to free ourselves from toxic grips of trauma vortexes, freezing helplessness, overwhelmed panic or numbing shut-downs where everything turns indifferent. We don't want indifference, we want to stay related and keep the fight up. Not the desperate fight of burn-out, but the strong connected fight of loving friendship, against racist violence, sexist exploitation, ableist belittling, lifestyle normalizations of speciesism and instrumentalist anti-life forms of organizing.

We want to get to know each other better, understand what sounds, images, behaviors trigger us, how it expresses when implicit trauma memory invades our perceptions and feelings and we want

to learn from each other, from science and experience, what is needed, to get ourselves and each other back into the very moment. We want to re-relate, even when patriarchy_capitalism tears us apart, we want to build secure attachment to ourselves and our friends. We want to care for the parts of ourselves that suffer from traces of trauma attachment that keep us partly engaged in the past, - personally and collectively.

Connection to ecosystems

Not only our intuition but also brain science (what a surprise...) show clearly our need for being surrounded by and being aware of healthy ecosystems.

“(...) The experience stopped at my eyes. I couldn’t let it inside me. I felt nothing. Something had gone wrong with me. I remember childhood moments when the mere sight of the sky or grass or trees would send waves of physical pleasure through me. Yet now... I felt dead. I had the impulse to repeat a phrase that was popular among friends of mine, “Nature is boring.” What was terrifying even then was that I knew the problem was me, not nature. It was that nature had become irrelevant to me, absent from my life. Through mere lack of exposure and practice, I’d lost the ability to feel it, tune into it, or care about it. Life moved too fast for that now...” (re-quoted from: I Am Not A Machine, I Am A Human Being)

For us, this quote can also point towards our conviction that without connection to ourselves, to our bodies with its needs and own timing, and without the ability to be aware of our alienating thoughts and where they come from, there is hardly the possibility to connect to what surrounds us.

We notice among our comrades and friends that ecosystem connection often seems to be one important resource that is missing when trying to fight authority in all its manifestations. Being separated of one important layer that defines us is obviously having a huge impact on how resourceful, oriented and grounded we are. Also, how can we sincerely take responsibility of our livelihoods and protect them sustainably and strategically (meta layer) if we don’t feel connected to them? We need ample somatic connection (sensing, feeling) to what surrounds us in order to be emotionally deeply touched and motivated to care!

Instead of capitalist_patriarchal values that reduce living beings to usability and market value, we stand behind a care-centric approach that focuses on needs, and also encompasses care for nonhuman animals as well as ecosystems.

Confronting mental aspects of domination

As much as we would wish for it, we don’t believe that we can simply “find back“ to our “instinct of freedom“ or “true revolutionary self” and everything will be well, as quite some anarchist texts from the last decade(s) seem to suggest.

The following quote from the text “We are all very anxious” points out quite bluntly what we’ve encountered ourselves, too:

“We’ve noticed a certain tendency for insurrectionists to refuse to take seriously the existence of psychological barriers to militant action. Their response tends to be, “Just

do it!” But anxiety is a real, material force – not simply a spook. To be sure, its sources are often rooted in spooks, but the question of overcoming the grip of a spook is rarely as simple as consciously rejecting it. There’s a whole series of psychological blockages underlying the spook’s illusory power, which is ultimately an effect of reactive affect. Saying “Just do it” is like saying to someone with a broken leg, “Just walk!””

Given the fact that our brains’ neuroplasticity is on the height in the childhood phases in which most people are heavily dominated and under permanent vicious authoritarian attack in the name of civilized education, we surely can’t give in to the illusion that everything will just fade away with time, die off with the advent of revolution, burn in the cleansing fires of insurrection. Let’s not give in to polemics here, but millenarian, messianic salvation thinking is just another way of our brains being determined by dominated narratives (salvation fantasies) and emotional states (e.g. that this kind of hope for many of us actually does feel “good”).

We have to face the fact that our primate brains are not at all well adapted to modern day environment (modern civilization, nation states, jobs...) and that there are numerous ways for authoritarian structures to make use of that.

Domination, the way authority has socialized, domesticated us, the narratives, cultural values and morale that has been forced upon us over years and years – this all has a lot to do with the way we are (un)able to feel, which neuronal pathways get strengthened or weakened, the way we secrete hormones and neurotransmitters, the shaping of our fears, what we perceive as happiness and freedom, it even has to do with the thoughts that “come into our mind” – and those who don’t!

There is a lot of knowledge out there on what it takes to make our primate brains feel too overwhelmed to feel agent on their own, what it needs to pacify our “evil” impulses in different contexts, what it takes so they keep enduring misery and internalize hopelessness – and authoritarian systems of all sorts are of course making ample use of that.

At the same time, we see the potential of using these same findings for our own purposes of empowerment and agency, to help us to understand the functioning of our primate brains in the context of our resistance.

We think it is essential to acquire basic knowledge on how our bodies and particularly our nervous systems work, which biases and traps we are vulnerable to, individually as well as collectively, and what to do to avoid them so that we don’t feel like a ship in the storm when emotions, thoughts and subtle or even unconscious narratives – that were formed, strengthened, or weakened and inhibited by authority – (don’t) kick in.

Furthermore, what we perceive as central is the development of a meta-awareness about what’s going on in our internal systems when confronted with domination.

Meta-awareness can be defined as the ability to observe one’s own thoughts, feelings, sensations and impulses as they are happening. This is particularly important when we take into account that many of exactly these feelings, sensations and impulses are linked to or even originated by oppression.

Part of it is metacognitive insight, which means experiencing thoughts as mental events and not as the things that they seem to represent – which allows us to analyze our own mental processes from an anti-authoritarian point of view.

On a broader level, meta-awareness is the capacity to observe and describe experiences from an individual, group, and system-wide perspective rather than being confined solely within any individual's personal experience. Not an either/or — it's all of the above. One notices one's own individual perspective and that of the collective as a whole, all within some degree of awareness of the system in its entirety.

Radically caring communities

In order to heal from trauma and PTS (post traumatic stress), in order to overcome our toxic socializations, in order to liberate our bodies and minds from the effects of years and years of domination, we need radically caring communities, we need other people that can support us, with whom we can and want to develop mutual trust and aid.

We acknowledge that there *are* close friendships where the individuals involved do care for each other. Still, it's rather rare to find such relationships, - and this lack often tends to be substituted by a romantic couple form that entails codependency and reproduction of toxic socialized behavior norms.

Considering anarchist networks, it's not uncommon that people who are new to anarchist ideas spend years and years finding communities that they feel at least somewhat good in.

And even the close friendships and crews that exist are often overwhelmed when confronted with longer-lasting intrusions by patriarchy_capitalism, also they come to their limits when it becomes necessary to leave the safer “bubbles” they created for themselves (note: we certainly don't want to criticize these safer bubbles as such – often they are important for being well, and important base to come back to, or even an emergency solution for survival). In our experience, also those caring friendships thus require tools to defend themselves against domination.

According to our more general experience concerning so called anarchist circles and groups, they are often far from being able to offer even a fraction of what is necessary so that all individuals within them could feel safe and cared for. This confronts us with a serious dilemma:

How can we build and live these radically communities among us as in many ways wounded, broken, alienated, emotionally and somatically disconnected individuals that domination has forced us to become? How do we build spaces where we feel safe enough to collectively take care of our disconnections, alienation, wounds and traumas, caused by capitalism_patriarchy?

We find this no easy questions and certainly there is no simple, one-way solution. We perceive radically caring friendships and communities also as an “emergent process” – that is rooted in the individuals' connection to and awareness about oneself – somatically, mentally, emotionally – as well as in the courage of opening up to and meeting other individuals on eye level. As such, we understand individual liberating and healing processes, alongside with (re)learning to showing

oneself vulnerable and sincerely listening to one another, as central – since they in turn can strengthen and even enable the formation of more and more radically caring relationships to others.

At the same time, individuals need the support of radical and caring communities, close and caring friendships that can support them in the process of (re)connecting to one's body, emotions, thoughts which can imply going through quite painful processes. We need individual *and* community liberating and healing processes - both is important and necessary.

To be sure: we certainly don't speak about submitting individuals to rigid "communities", organizations, parties, political sects or ideologies.

How interdependent we are, shows the following example: If a person is part of a community, the fact of whether people care about them or not also changes who they are – they and their well being, they and their psyche. There are thus also changes in what is going on within their body on a physiological level. They as an individual are modified and modify in relation to contextual pressures, pulls, support etc. – especially over time. The same happens when an individual inside of a community does (not) care about others: this also changes the community they are part of (that is, all the other individuals who are part of that community).

We acknowledge that creating communities against the various counter-community forces that surround us, of which our own socialization is a big one, is not an easy task – probably due to the decrease of social and emotional skills or even basic emotional literacy on the one hand and the increase in social complexity and technologically reinforced alienation on the other hand, it may be the biggest challenge of all.

We think of radically caring communities as interpersonal spaces where we really take care of each other, where we do and wish to learn to encounter each other on eye level, i.e. with the shared intention of dismantling power dynamics, consumerist mindsets etc. and where we support each other and those we feel close to in liberating themselves from the shackles of authority. This will necessarily also include finding better and more trauma-informed ways of dealing with conflicts, power dynamics and abuse in our circles.

The primary aim of building communities of course should not be an ideological one such as "self-defense" as a new political program. – Community is part of the basic needs of most people, a need which capitalism_patriarchy has alienated many of us from – partly for centuries. We regard self-defense rather as a necessity for radically caring communities to be able to survive in a highly intrusive patriarchal_capitalist context.

IV. Proposals on where to start with dismantling the internal manifestations of domination

According to our analysis, we think it is necessary for us who are fighting domination to learn and share experiential and scientific* knowledge about authorities' effects on our psyches and bodies, on our nervous and other somatic systems.

Together with our experiences, this knowledge can support us when we acquire, remodel and experiment with tools and skills that can then be used in accordance with our anarchist values in order to free ourselves from domination on the psychoemotional level.

We additionally believe that fostering individual and collective anti-authoritarian resiliency, ability and awareness will increase our agency and support ground in attacking authority also on the more external levels.

We think it can make sense to build on caring, committed friendships, crews and/or affinity groups who share the analysis that self defense on the psychoemotional level is central for and part of our resistency and aliveness.

As part of and to support those endeavors, we also want and think it is necessary to build a broader affinity based network for exchange, discussion, research and skill-share.

Additionally, we regard the creation of material infrastructures as helpful or even vital, - which actively designate space for this individual and collective learning, skillsharing and experimentation process and at the same time provide space and possibility for direct community.

We think that a certain degree of living together, of sharing our lives and thus futures, at least for the time certain commitments are given, is vital for not reproducing and staying stuck in our internalized randomness which, in our analysis, often is one of the problematic results of our socialization in a neoliberal context.

To be sure: the aim of what we propose to build together is not our own personal “self-development“, “enlightenment“ or some other neoliberal conception of self absorbed pseudo-liberation, and also not a “feel good bubble” where we hide behind our privileges, but to contribute to defend our collective, embodied anarchist resistency in a context of ever increasing alienation and psychological intrusions.

We are aware of our thoughts and experiences being limited by our own backgrounds and by the fact of being shaped by authority ourselves, which of course makes us biased a lot towards certain issues.

Since our aim is definitely not about delivering a finished program or solution (resp. pretending to be able to do so), we want to connect with people who might share our affinities so we can exchange and learn from each other and avoid being misled by background biases.

We hope that with our experiences we can inspire others, of whom to then be re-inspired again. As for now, we are, among others, heavily influenced and inspired by anticolonial, anticiv-antispe, black anarchist, indigenous, queer-feminist, queer-nihilist and trans texts and voices. Without their work, these ideas would not exist.

**a note on science: while using so-called scientific methods and findings in deepening our understanding, we are far from idealizing patriarchal_capitalist “science” and want to make clear that we think that there are many reasons why science and scientific findings should be criticized from an anarchist point of view. As just one very tangible example of many, the very thought of all those numerous encaged, tortured and killed laboratory non-human animals that were used to research brain sciences for example makes us furious and sad.*

V. What do we not mean with psycho-emotional self defense?

– Liberal concepts of self optimization – self care – self work

Since we could not formulate it better we want to share two quotes of the text: “Against Self-Work”

“The concept of self-work itself leads us along a slippery slope in the name of progress and bettering oneself or, even more alarming, accumulating emotional capital. This last concept, of being “rich in emotional capital,” has been explained by psychologist Paul Thagard as “high in self-esteem, self-regulation, emotional energy, attachment, resilience, agreeableness, and optimism.” This idea of emotional accumulation diminishes the way that processing trauma, mistakes, and insecurities are a lifelong process.”

and

*“While caring for oneself is vital, in the mainstream this often looks solely like lighting candles and taking a bath or whatever else has been commonly referred to as a way to self-soothe. Yet in *For All We Care: Reconsidering Self-Care*, while they offer a completely different framework around what self-care could mean, they mention property destruction, fighting, and calling out one’s abusers as alternatives to taking care of oneself. In the company of dominant ideas of self-care and self-work there seems to be a replication of the dichotomies projected by capitalism again: life means either down-time, time spent away from work recuperating, or work, time spent away from down-time. These are harmful dualities to instill as they reinforce that life is as dimensionless as capitalism says it is.”*

– Sustainable activism

One of the many reasons why we think that the “inside” aspects of domination are so disregarded in anarchist circles is exactly an “activist” mentality that focuses on capitalist categories such as “effectiveness”, “outreach” and other quantitative concepts.

To share a quote from the text “Give Up Activism”:

“By ‘an activist mentality’ what I mean is that people think of themselves primarily as activists and as belonging to some wider community of activists. The activist identifies with what they do and thinks of it as their role in life, like a job or career. In the same way some people will identify with their job as a doctor or a teacher, and instead of it being something they just happen to be doing, it becomes an essential part of their self-image. The activist is a specialist or an expert in social change.”

We don’t want to integrate sustainability in our “activism” in order to be long-term effective and so on but rather go along with another quote from the same text as above:

“The key to understanding both the role of the militant and the activist is self-sacrifice — the sacrifice of the self to ‘the cause’ which is seen as being separate from the self. This of course has nothing to do with real revolutionary activity which is the seizing of the self. We don’t want to be or become such experts of social change, rather we want to live our lives as close to anarchy as possible. For that to be possible, we see being resistant, fighting power within and outside of us as vital.”

VI. With whom do we want to connect?

There are uncountable people suffering from authority on the layers we just addressed. F.ex. in regions which are in the grip of consumer capitalism, a lot of people struggle psychologically, have limited access to their emotions and bodies and don't feel psychologically agent. As long as we are forced to live in patriarchal societies, there is and will be trauma. Wherever and whenever capitalism is present, there is and will be disconnection.

This makes us sad and angry, also and above all because many of us and our friends suffer and have suffered a lot under what we desperately seek to destroy.

For the project we propose, we don't address people who's primary aim is to get better in order to function better within this system. We don't blame people who are suffering from authority for striving towards "functioning" better, for taking paths that are different from the ones we propose. There are numerous reasons for people choosing paths inherent to the system in order to survive – and with many of those we feel in solidarity.

Also, we are aware that being able (and having the – even though ,intoxicated', still privileged option) to „function“ is, sadly and enragingly, too often a precondition for being able to guiding ourselves into a nervous system state of relative safety that allows exploring new strategies closer to individual and collective freedom and care.

We don't want to ignore this dilemma, leaving others behind. At the same time, we feel that too much pragmatism and reformism weakens our aliveness and strength to stay connected. That's why we'd rather meet each other from the part of our hearts that burns for the dream of the freedom of all. Whilst within this joint direction and intention, we obviously need and want to deal with the variety of where each one of us is situated, in order to overcome and transform barriers and intrusions together.

Furthermore, we are convinced that for being coherent with our ideas it requires an overcoming of the separation of so-called "activist-life" from "everyday life". Too many times we encountered people who developed their careers parallel to or after their temporary "anarchist phases"; people who amply used anticapitalist rhetorics only to in the end silently privatize their inheritance and are more ready to leave their anarchist communities for good than to risk being confronted with the necessity of sharing or abandoning their privileges; people who tell us they "deserve" or want to treat themselves with a consumerist holiday in postcolonial style (to avoid misunderstandings, of course we are not against laziness and having a good time!), just to name a few examples.

We have understanding for all the desperation and pressures that can lie behind those "pragmatic" choices, and also see them as connected to the lack of caring community and a feeling of safety. Nevertheless, we regard them as dangerous because they normalize behaviors and attitudes that hollow out our anarchist values and communities by f.ex. trivializing exploitative violence on which's ground people are „allowing themselves some luxury“.

We want to connect with people who are willing to face how deficient anti-authoritarian self-organized mutual help and collective struggles often are; how much the social webs between us suffer from patriarchy_capitalism and are constantly under attack.

We feel affinity with people who share our conviction that a power critical analysis of the often performance-oriented, power- and privilege-stabilizing and exclusionary ways and forms of how anti-authoritarian people currently network, act collectively and (try to) “care for each other” is crucial.

Furthermore, our affinity goes with those who are ready to face and work on their “abysses”, on how often we ourselves become actors of patriarchy_capitalism_state without intending it.

Inspired by the kurdish freedom movement (which we do not idealize and would not call anarchist), we want to collectively work on a tender to angry culture of critique and self-critique with focus on supporting each other.

Even though we would rather not, we have to face the fact that the research, remodeling and experimentation with psychoemotional self defense skills can require, apart from commitment, quite some privilege – particularly time privilege (which often goes together with some degree of financial privilege) and some kinds of mental ability.

A lot of people who would be in urgent need of the skills that we wish to develop do not have those privileges. That makes us angry and sad, and underlines the importance for us of sharing and making resources and findings accessible.

To sum up, for now our affinities are with those who want to develop and experiment with knowledge and skills, who want to learn and exchange about how to overcome internalized domination and who aim to share this process with others. Share their individual experiences, share their liberation process, share their (=our) findings. Those whose hearts say: Until all are free, no one is free. Our affinities go with those who want to reflect on their self sacrifice narrative as well as on their privileges, who want to support each other, who don't want to hide their vulnerabilities, who value individuality and at the same time care for deep, committed friendships and community.

VII. Final words

“We desire a world better than this one: a world that is more thoughtful, more caring, less isolating, a world that celebrates and nurtures community. Our movements are spaces for practicing new ways of relating to each other, spaces to model relations based in compassion and practical forms of mutual aid, for building and expanding resistance. If we can't love and care for each other here and now our movements will be easily destroyed and unsustainable. On the other hand, if we are able to develop a culture of mutual support, this new way of relating to one another will make our resistance to the dominant culture even more inviting.” (from: “The Importance of Support”)

For us, embracing anarchy means embracing a lifelong and never ending process of caring, resisting, learning.

Disclaimer: This is a short text with the aim of outlining just the core aspects of our ideas. It is intended as a base for discussion and exchange for some events in summer/autumn 2023. Not all members of our group have been able to contribute to this text.

We are together planning to write a more nuanced outline of our ideas, – right now we are not yet at this point.

If you are interested in our project, have questions, ideas, information, resources, feedback or critique you want to share or simply want to get into contact, we are happy to hear from you.

Especially if you felt touched or moved by what you read or are in any way inspired to join our reflections and processes don't hesitate to write us. We are looking for connection and shared motivations, for us it's not about being super high skilled in a specific direction.

contact: apesd@riseup.net (pgp key on request)

Further writings will be published on: apesd.blackblogs.org

Quoted texts:

Andrew X: Give Up Activism

Anonymous: Against Self-Work – A critique of care as a form of labor

Anonymous: The Importance of Support: Building Foundations, Creating Community, Sustaining Movements

Baedan: Against the Gendered Nightmare

CrimethInc.: For All We Care – Reconsidering Self-Care

Institute for Precarious Consciousness: We Are All Very Anxious – Six Theses on Anxiety and Why It is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming It (we recommend to read the afterword by CrimethInc.)

Mia X. Kursions: I Am Not A Machine, I Am A Human Being – Technology As Mediation

The Jane Addams Collective: Mutual Aid, Trauma, and Resiliency

The Jane Addams Collective: Mutual Aid Self/Social Therapy

All texts can be found on theanarchistlibrary.org

Further inspiring reading:

Disclaimer: These texts need anti-authoritarian re-editing and/or extensive critique, reflection and discussion

- “Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors – Overcoming Internal Self-Alienation” (Janina Fisher) → “integrates a neurobiologically informed understanding of trauma, dissociation, and attachment with a practical approach [...]”

- “The Body keeps the Score” (Bessel van der Kolk)