

QUEERING ANARCHISM

Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire

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Tyranny of the State and Trans Liberation

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“STAR is a Revolutionary Group. We believe in picking up the gun and starting a revolution if necessary. Our main goal is to see ‘gay’ people liberated and free”

—Marsha P. Johnson, “Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary”[1]

“Trans Liberation is the phrase that has come to refer to all those who blur or bridge the boundary of the sex or gender expression they were assigned at birth: cross-dressers, transsexuals, intersex people, Two Spirits, bearded females, masculine females and feminine males, drag kings and drag queens. Trans Liberation is a call to action for all those who care about civil rights and creating a just and equitable society”

—Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*[2]

Anarchists (should) understand the importance in opposing the regulation of sexual and gender behavior by governments and other allied forces such as the church and capitalism. In fact there has been a long history of anarchism as a movement and a philosophy recognizing and embracing the pivotal importance of sexual and gender liberation. Within this history there has been a prominent role of queer anarchist sex radicals who kept this significant engagement at the forefront of the anarchist movement and philosophy. Yet despite the pioneering anarchist sex radicals at the turn of the century and those during the heyday of the (gay, feminist, black) liberation movements of the sixties and seventies, there has been an increasing trend by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) liberation movement toward embracing the government and its role in regulating sexual and gender behavior. And this current “liberation” movement has worked in complicity with the state simply to broaden and *reform* the definitions and social norms of sex and gender, as well as focus on the assimilation of LGBT within the State through marriage reform, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, and by enacting laws that seek to entrench and empower the police and incarceration system through increased funding and engagement through hate crime legislation. And so we see a liberation movement that moved from a focus on fighting the state and its associated systems of corrupt police, politics, and social norms to a liberation model complicit with a state and its allied power structures that makes no excuse regarding its control, regulation, definition of, and legal boundaries regarding, sexual behavior and gender identity and expression.

This chapter details the historical roots of sex and gender radicals within the anarchist movement as well as within other allied liberation movements. From this historical perspective, we can reexamine the state of the LGBT liberation movement, and attempt to solidify and redefine a trans liberation movement outside the current so-called LGBT liberation movement. The aim of this chapter is to reconsider Trans liberation within the contexts of the current social, economic, and political environments within primarily the United States, though given the penetration of a global LGBT movement led by marriage advocates, it can also be viewed from a global lens. In this process, it is hoped to reveal that the core of the trans existence and persona is radical and anarchistic, if not insurrectionary, in its embodiment—such that pure liberation of sex and gender will not come through complicit reform within the state but rather through rejecting the state and its many social constructs.

Queer Anarchists/Sexual Radicals 1850–1930 (aka First-Wave Sexual Liberation)

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there emerged an articulation of a politics of homosexuality. In 1897 Berlin, the German sexologist and sex radical Magnus Hirschfeld and several colleagues formed the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (SHC)—the world’s first homosexual rights organization. The members of the SHC were radical intellectuals who helped create new understandings of homosexuality and championed new political goals and ideas as well as strong critiques of oppressive social norms and values.[3] During this first wave of sexual liberation many of these radical intellectuals shaped new understandings and forms of same-sex political and social consciousness that had immediate and long-term impacts on the lives of European people. Within the United States, unlike Europe, the politics of sex radicals did not arise from a blossoming homosexual rights movement. Instead, it arose from the anarchist movement of the time. Anarchist sex radicals like Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Leonard Abbott, John William Lloyd, and Benjamin R. Tucker wrote books, articles, and lectured across the United States regarding same-sex love. Emma Goldman [1869–1940] is without question the first person to openly lecture on homosexual liberation (emancipation) and openly supported Oscar Wilde against his persecutors. Though not an anarchist himself, Magnus Hirschfeld praised Emma Goldman as the “first and only woman, indeed, one could say the first and only human being, of importance in America to carry the issue of homosexual love to the broadest layers of the public.”[4] The US anarchists of this time were unique in articulating a political critique of American social and legal rules as well as the societal norms that

regulated relationships. In this effort, and through leveraging the anarchist movement of the time, they were able to center homosexuality within the political debate. By doing so, they created a fundamental shift in the sexual, cultural, and political landscape of the United States, not only during their time but also for decades to follow. As Terence Kissack notes: “The anarchist sex radicals were interested in the ethical, social and cultural place of homosexuality within society, because that question lies at the nexus of individual freedom and state power...The anarchist sex radicals examined the question of same sex love because policeman, moral arbiters, doctors, clergymen and other authorities sought to regulate homosexual behavior.”[5]

So we see that during this first wave period within Europe much of the dialogue by sex radicals was around a civil rights and educational venue with a focus on acceptance within the constructs of the state. However, the anarchist US sex radicals did not come to the issue of sexual liberation through a lens of homosexual identity and reform, but rather from a more fundamental and radical anarchist alternative denouncing the principles of the state and its allied power structures within the church and its mandate of adherence to social norms. Following World War I and the passing of the 1918 Sedition Act, sex radicals and the anarchist movement began a sharp decline as many of the activists were imprisoned or deported and their vital propaganda vehicles were shut down. And not much later, on May 6, 1933, the Nazis took power within Germany and attacked Hirschfeld’s Institute and burned many of its books. So there came about a closing to this first-wave sexual liberation as the state (in both the United States and Germany) commenced its crackdown on the sex radicals and the revolutionary dialogue around sexual liberation that they had created.

Homophile Movement 1930-1969 (aka Second-Wave Sexual Liberation)

By the late 1930s the anarchist movement and sex radicals were a shell of their original heyday of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Coincidental with this decline in the anarchist movement we saw the rise of the Communist Party (CP) as the primary vehicle of the left. Sex radicals of this period began to work under a left that was dominated by the CP, which marginalized the ideas and ideologies of their anarchist predecessors.[6] The CP was an organization that, contrary to the anarchists, enforced uniformity of belief and action. And in regards to homosexuality, the CP had a policy of discouraging membership of gays and lesbians who refused to be silent about their private lives (clearly a 180 degree reversal from the beliefs and actions of anarchist sex radicals like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman). In theory the CP enacted the first “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy” against homosexuals, even though many prominent sex

radicals and homosexuals of the left were members of CP.

Whether it was state actions against sex radicals and anarchists following World War I, or the rise of the sex radical oppressive CP, the second stirrings of a sexual liberation movement did not begin to arise until after World War II. And sadly, many contemporary histories of the gay movement in the United States have focused not on the sex radicals and anarchists of the first wave of sexual liberation, but rather on this second-wave postwar era with a focus on the organizations and individuals who shared the primarily reformist view of gay liberation.

Following WWI there were no sustained homosexual or sex radical movements until 1948 with the publication of the Kinsey report titled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and in 1953 with the publication of the study titled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Both of these reports astounded the general public and were instantly controversial and sensational. “The findings caused shock and outrage, both because they challenged conventional beliefs about sexuality and because they discussed subjects that had previously been taboo.”[7] Yet as we learned from the first-wave sex radicals, this was far from the first open discussion about sex, sexuality, and gender. Rather than this dialogue arising from radical intellectuals and anarchists, it instead arose from the mainstream scientific community and sexologists. These reports, as did the writings and lectures of the first wave sex radicals, permanently altered “the nature of the public discourse of sexuality as well as society’s perception of its own behavior.”[8] These publications were widely read and revealed to the general public that a large number of men and women engaged in same-sex love. Also during this period Harry Hay (1912–2002), a prominent gay man within the second-wave sexual liberation movement, founded in 1950 the *Mattachine Society*, the first enduring LGBT rights organization within the United States. Harry Hay was a prolific and vocal advocate for the gay liberation movement (or as Hay framed in it those days “the homophile movement”). Hay learned about activism and organizing during his early days within the CP, however in order for him to pursue his sexual politics he needed to leave the CP since the CP did not allow gays to be members.[9] During this onset of the Mattachine Society and the homophile movement, we saw the rise of the lesbian counterpart to Mattachine—Daughters of Bilitis, as well as One, Inc., the publishers of *ONE Magazine*, the first US pro-gay publication. However, the dialogue was far different from that of the first-wave sex radicals who challenged and critiqued the constraints and oppressions of the state. The second-wave dialogue was centered on identity, whether homosexuality was a mental illness, and improving homosexuals’ standing within a capitalistic and hierarchical state, as well as

seeking to exercise the rights to congregate in bars without fear of arrest and to distribute their magazines through the state-controlled postal system.

In many respects, this movement represented an organizational movement like Hirschfeld's SHC, as opposed to the individual discourses and writings of the anarchist sex radicals. In 1948 Harry Hay understood that "[a]ctivating the political potential of homosexuals in the United States depends, in Marxist terms, on their becoming a class for itself, aware of their common interests, rather than merely a class within itself...Without consciousness of themselves as a class mobilization of Gays and Lesbians for gay issues is chimerical. Without a broad base of people representing themselves in politics, the project of liberation devolves to political action committees and single-issue lobbying." [10] We see the roots in the United States of a strong sense of identity and its relationship to effecting social change and movement building. This is a very different liberation tactic from that of the anarchist sex radicals who did not seek to reform legal codes or lobby politicians in order to stop bar raids. Instead, the vision for change of anarchist sex radicals was more fundamental—a radical alternative to the existing state system, which cannot be reformed but must be totally dismantled for true liberation of all.

Gay Liberation 1969–1980 (aka Third-Wave Sexual Liberation)

It may be apropos to start this section with a quote from an article by Dennis Altman, whose book *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1972) was viewed as the definitive writing on the subject of ideas that shaped gay liberation of this time: "A relatively small group of white middle-aged males are in a position to make the major decisions to define the boundaries within which all of us must function. It is by and large this group who benefit from the existing distribution of resources; the productivity of American Capitalism and the success of the ideological persuasion are such that the great majority of persons rally to defend the system that enables this minority to maintain their dominance." [11] Altman warned that commercialization and capitalism threatened the sexual revolution. The capitalist class promulgates successfully their dominant ideology and it is reflected in institutions in this society. It is, amongst other things, anti-sex/gender liberatory.

The start of this phase of the liberation movement dates from the Stonewall riots of 1969 when a police raid on a Greenwich Village bar called the Stonewall Inn provoked a series of riots that mobilized drag queens, street hustlers, lesbians, and gay men, many of whom had been politicized by the ongoing police brutalization of queer street youth as well as the civil rights and antiwar movements.

The second wave of sexual liberation viewed the struggle for sexual liberation through a “politically conservative” homophile civil rights movement, although their calls for social acceptance of same-sex love and transgender people were seen as radical views by the dominant culture of the time. However, at the onset of the third wave, the Stonewall riots crystallized a broad grassroots mobilization across the country. Many early participants in the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people’s rights were also involved in various leftist causes of the 1960s, including the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, the student movement, and the feminist movement. However, this early gay liberation movement took a radical departure from their second-wave counterparts. The first political organization formed in wake of the Stonewall riots was the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). The organization was named in honor of the National Liberation Front, the Vietnamese resistance movement, and as a gesture toward the unity of the struggles of blacks, the poor, women, and the colonized in the “Third World.” One early flyer, distributed in the Bay Area in January 1970, proclaimed, “The Gay Liberation Front is a nation-wide coalition of revolutionary homosexual organizations creating a radical Counter Culture within the homosexual lifestyles. Politically it’s part of the radical ‘Movement’ working to suppress and eliminate discrimination and oppression against homosexuals in industry, the mass media, government, schools and churches.”

At this point in the evolution of the liberation movement, we begin to see a transition from a focus on identity-based politics and working within the state and its arms of oppressions (prisons, legal, police, etc) to a consciousness similar to that of the early sex radicals where total radical change of the system was mandated—albeit this consciousness was short-lived during this wave. Still, the importance of the early stages of the gay liberation movement is critical to our eventual understanding of trans liberation. During the 1960s, we saw the rise of an anti-authoritarian movement where full liberation was intricately tied to the liberation of *all* oppressed communities, be it the gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, street youth, trans folks, people of color, or feminists. In these early days, following the rebellions at Compton (1966) and Stonewall, many gay, lesbian and trans activists aligned with organizations like the Gay Liberation Front, the Young Lords, the Black Panthers, etc. The liberation politics of that time aimed at abolishing the oppressive institutions that reinforced traditional sex roles and at freeing individuals from the constraints of a sex/gender system that locked them into mutually exclusive roles of homosexual/heterosexual and feminine/masculine. Gay and, implicitly, trans liberation advocated a radical transformation only after sex and gender categories had been eradicated.

During this period there were two prominent revolutionary organizations that

were formed. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) formed a month after the Stonewall rebellion and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) formed following the occupation of Weinstein Hall at NYU in September of 1970. The GLF's statement of purpose explained: "We are a revolutionary group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society's attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature."

STAR advocated for an inclusive gay liberation that strongly embraced trans rights, nurtured homeless street youth, and worked to create a communal trans family unit. They worked to dismantle the very state institutions of a capitalistic society that they deemed responsible for their oppressions. In a publication by STAR, they noted in closing: "We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and all oppressed people are free, and not fucked over by this government who treat us like the scum of the earth and kills us off like flies, one by one, and throw us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death." [12]

Both the GLF and STAR formed during the early stages of this third wave of sexual liberation but were undone by ideological factions within the gay liberation movement. In the case of STAR and the budding trans liberation portion of the movement the severe fractionation of the movement unveiled itself at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day rally. The bitterly public feud—Sylvia Rivera storming the stage to speak out for imprisoned Trans folks and street youth, Jean O'Leary of the Lesbian Feminist Liberation condemning men who impersonated women for entertainment and profit, and Lee Brewster of the Queens Liberation Front castigating lesbians for their refusal to let drag queens be themselves—thereby exposed the dramatically contrasting views on the meaning of gay liberation. [13] In the case of GLF, it was a move from multi-issue movement building to a single-issue, white-dominated, legislative-focused vision dominated by GLF's successor, the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA).

At the beginnings of the third wave we saw an anarchist style tendency similar to the first-wave sex radicals of the United States; who realized that their true liberation was intricately and necessarily tied to the liberation of their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, people of color, and feminists, while maintaining a common fundamental rejection of the state, its capitalistic institutions, and the church. However, from the mid seventies onward the anarchist-style liberationist framework became less important to the dominant gay and lesbian organizations, who increasingly favored an ethnic model that emphasized community identity and cultural difference (as originally championed by the homophile movement).

Today we can see that marriage equality is a core example of identity-based politics and operates to the exclusion of others desiring nontraditional families and relationships not requiring state sanction or regulation. In essence, sexual liberation evolved from the precept of the anarchist liberationists into an assimilationist and identity-based liberation of “different but equal under the law of the State.” During the middle part of this period as the mainstream LGBT organizations, media, and communities embraced assimilation within a capitalistic society, there was the ever-present undercurrent of radical social change organizations such as ACT UP, OutRage, and others that embraced “queer,” not LGBT, as an identity label that pointed to separatist and non-assimilationist politics. And the evolving area of queer theory, which was originally associated with the radical gay politics of these queer organizations, developed out of an examination of perceived limitations in the traditional identity politics of recognition and self-identity.

Trans Liberation (aka Fourth-Wave Sexual and Gender Liberation)

Any semblance of a trans liberation movement of today is rooted within the predominant gay liberation movement from the eighties to present: a hierarchical, identity-based, single issue, gender-conforming, free market, and state/electoral-based movement. Yet, as noted in the introduction, the trans community defies the “accepted” social constructs of sex and gender, of free market capitalism, and the state with its need for society’s adherence to strict social norms/constructs in order to maintain its operating systems of power, keeping its focus on assimilation within a system that by definition constrains the core concept of trans. As we learned from the revolutionary history of gay liberation within the context of GLF and STAR, we understand that their vision for emancipation was dependent upon radical social change. STAR in its call for a “full voice in the struggle for liberation of all peoples” and a demand for “identification of the opposite gender” for transvestites foreshadowed the queer theoretical contention that “biological sex” is not equal to gender, as well as its affirmation of gay liberation’s refusal to assimilate.[14]

With the evolution of queer theory in the early 1990s, more than two decades after Stonewall, we see the promotion of radical social change both similar and yet different to that of the first-wave anarchist sex radicals and the gay and trans liberationists of the early phases of the third wave. Queer theory has expounded upon and extended the challenges set forth by our anarchist sex and gender radicals by challenging not just categories of sexual orientation/identity but also of categories *per se*. The subjective interpretations of sexuality within Queer theory subvert any monolithic traditional notion of sex, sex roles, gender, and

even sexual orientation. (Some)queer theorists, as with anarchist sexual liberationists, rather than demanding inclusion, equal rights, and end of discrimination dominated by the current LGBT mainstream, challenge the core assumptions of society and the normative construction of sexuality. Whereas anarchists and anarchist theory need to look at struggle on the conceptual level that queer theory provides, queer theory needs to be coupled with anarchism's critique of structural domination, such as the state and capitalism.

Trans people, as laid out by anarchist sex radicals, gay liberationists, and queer theorists, defy society's precepts of gender identity and expression and challenge, at its core, societal, religious, and state demands and constructs. Sadly I fear that we, as truly inherently revolutionary peoples, will instead seek the "safe" route of assimilation, as some of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters have done before us. Yet through serious self-reflection, political analysis, and dialogue, particularly through an anarchist lens, I postulate that we can avoid the same reformist road that the majority of the homosexual movement has been trapped in. To this point, I have remarked over many years how ironic it is that the transsexual person defies society's construct of man and woman while at the same time many in our community work so very hard to subscribe to a binary system that our bodies defy. Granted this is a complicated analysis and there are many reasons for so strongly subscribing back to the binaries (major drivers being safety and survival); at the same time it is something that we as a community and as individuals must seriously challenge.

For me, it is clear that any so-called liberation movement for the trans community today is, like its gay and lesbian counterparts, entrenched within an assimilated and capitalistic framework. And in this liberation framework the trans community is still securing its liberation to the same wagon of its gay and lesbian counterparts. If we are to liberate society and ourselves from the tyranny against those who traverse gender and sex, we liberate ourselves from the mental and physical constructs that manipulate us into subordination for the benefit of the "greater good of society, religion, and state." It is now time for the trans community to embrace and continue the militant and revolutionary paths our trans elders laid down for us if we are seeking revolutionary (rather than reformist) changes. So a key tenet of trans liberation lies within the liberation of one's self (and others) from the tyranny of the state, religion, and society; and equally important—from our own self-imposed tyranny.

And with that said, viewing trans liberation with an anarchist lens has proven an invaluable vehicle for such an analysis. As Emma Goldman so eloquently stated in her 1911 essay "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For": "Anarchism is the only philosophy that brings to man [*sic*] the consciousness of himself; which

maintains that God, the State, and society are non-existent, that their promises are null and void, since they can be fulfilled only through man's subordination. Anarchism is therefore the teacher of the unity of life; not merely in nature, but in man."

Challenging the state is a daunting and challenging task for all oppressed peoples (and for me personally—I am a strong believer in civil disobedience and direct action—when the cause and reasons are just). However, the fear of challenging the state as a non-operative trans person is a significant challenge and barrier to putting my beliefs into actions. My heart and soul told me that by not acting upon my beliefs I was allowing the state to control my individual expression—preventing my rebellion of a system that works to subjugate my individual identity. I actually needed to go through a two-year process of dealing with a conscious and subconscious fear of being controlled by the system. It turned out that through a long and convoluted process I was able to put my individual beliefs ahead of those of submission to, and fear of, the state's total control of my gender identity. Oddly, one night before an affinity group and I were to risk arrest shutting down a government building in New York, a dear friend and I saw the opening of *V for Vendetta*. For me the transformation of Evey Hammond was pivotal to my personal transformation. For those not familiar with Evey's transformation, I paste the following from a wiki on V:

In her cell between multiple bouts of interrogation and torture, Evey finds a letter from an inmate named Valerie, an actress who was imprisoned for being a lesbian. Evey's interrogator finally gives her a choice of collaboration or death; inspired by Valerie's courage and quiet defiance, she refuses to give in and is told that she is free. To her shock, Evey learns that her imprisonment was a hoax constructed by V, designed to put her through an ordeal similar to the one that shaped him. He reveals that Valerie was another Larkhill prisoner who died in the cell next to his; the letter that Evey read is the same one that Valerie had passed on to V. Evey's anger finally gives way to acceptance of her identity and freedom.

The heart of this point was reinforced at a recent demo protesting the hypocrisy of Human Rights Campaign, where one of the chants included the words "*Fuck you HRC.*" Several people asked with all seriousness, "Are we *allowed* to say that?" Then when the first police car came, they were convinced that the police were called because of our using the words "*Fuck You.*" In reality the cops didn't really give a damn what we were chanting about. Clearly on the surface this is all kind of silly and a nit, except for the fact that the reaction and fear of this trans person typifies the implicit warnings of Emma Goldman—that

the tyranny, or fear of such tyranny, by the state has a profound impact on our actions and our behaviors. This clearly ties in very closely with our goal of achieving trans liberation.

- 1 Karla Jay and Allen Young, ed., *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: Jove Publications, 1977), 113.
- 2 Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).
- 3 Terence Kissack, *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895–1917* (Oakland: AK Press, 2008), 1.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 6 See *ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, 171.
- 8 “Kinsey Reports,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinsey_Reports (accessed July 14, 2010).
- 9 See Harry Hay, *Radically Gay*, edited by Will Roscoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
- 10 *Ibid.*, 339.
- 11 Jeff Hayler, “Homosexual Oppression: Does Capitalism Really Affect It,” Australian National University, http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/gayleft/oppression_cap.rtf (accessed January 27, 2012).
- 12 Stephan L. Cohen, *The Gay Liberation Youth Movement in New York: An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 37.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 23.