

Vengeance
by Sparrow Ingersoll

“Their actions are meant to beat us into submission. Vengeance is our reaction to that violence...Vengeance as a motivation for liberatory action, allows us to overcome the fear their violence has instilled in us. Vengeance is the refusal of submission.” -queer ultraviolence

“and when i was sixteen a would-be-bully pushed me and called me a faggot. I hit him in the mouth. The intercourse of my fist and his face was far sexier than anything MTV ever offered our generation. With the pre-cum of desire on my lips i knew from then on that i was an anarchist.”-the queerest insurrection

There is a war against queer and trans people, waged through our bodies. We are bashed, murdered, raped, verbally assaulted. I'm not going to try to convince anyone that this is real, that it is happening all the time. If you need to be convinced, it will never be real to you anyway. But for those of us for whom anti-queer/anti-trans violence is a reality; we need to take the war against us seriously. We need to keep each other safe, and we need to be real about what is at stake in this struggle; our lives. We are expected to absorb whatever violence and abuse society chooses to throw at us, to simply accept that we risk our lives by leaving the house; to eat shit and smile about it, to look earnest at a candle light vigil then go home. Fuck that, fuck being reasonable. I'd rather be on fire.

The processes that anarchist community and larger society have developed for dealing with interpersonal violence are completely inadequate for dealing with bashings. Anarchists propose accountability circles, which are based on the idea that perpetrators can change through a combination of education and therapy and that they can be a part of healing/healing from the harm they have caused. The central flaw in the restorative justice framework in this case is that it is predicated on two entirely false ideas; one, that it is possible for us to engage with our assailants as two reasonable parties with equal stake in the process and two, that homophobia/transphobia are on

some level reasonable; that they are perspectives people “bring to the table”. The second is by far the most insidious; it seeps into every conversation about the violence against us, into every space; the stupidity that homophobia and transphobia are reasonable, if gouache, expressions of “the hurt this society causes everyone”. Asking us to be actively engaged in healing our attackers, in repairing the society that tries to kill us, is itself an attack. It is a complicated form of victim blaming; we are positioned as responsible for the education/healing/progress of the very people who are trying to destroy us, and if we refuse to take on a project that amounts to emotional suicide, we are then retroactively responsible for that (homo)(trans)phobic violence. It shifts the responsibility of homophobic and transphobic violence onto us and away from the people who actually commit it. We are not responsible for the violence against us. And we are not responsible for helping cis and heterosupremacists (or racists or misogynists or ableists for that matter) deal with their bullshit. We are not responsible for the health and well being of people who want us dead. The expectation that we should be invested in their healing is collaborative, to say the least; it entitles them to our time, our bodies, our resources, our energy. It seeks to shield bashers from the consequences of their actions; specifically, our rage. It is another way they can hold us down.

Justice as a framework (both in the statist sense and the anarchist, restorative sense), in addition to being reparative of social order (a social order we find poisonous) affirms state power and authority; it is juridical in the most literal sense. It is the process by which our rage and power can be recuperated and diffused by the state; mis- and re-directed through endless bureaucratic channels so that it never really reaches its target and loses what force it had to affect anything. The push for justice leaves us very much within the purview of the state, of the police, of social order. It cannot produce an end to capitalism or of the state because it is simultaneously pacifying and reformist; it seeks to revise and reconcile rather than to destroy. It affirms the existing social order and cannot reach beyond it because it takes the social order itself as its starting point; it seeks to remediate us back to the point just before the violation occurred, but cannot destroy the

systems that allowed (not just allowed, created) that violation. A process that sets equilibrium as its goal and measure of success cannot serve those of us who seek either to assert our power or, better, to explode order. Justice, in the statist sense, treats things like queer bashing as aberrations/exceptions, when in fact they are integral to the functioning of heteropatriarchal capitalism. Queer bashing is inevitable under the state and heteropatriarchal capitalism (as it exists now). The stability of the heterosexual/binary order is leveraged against our bodies. Bashing a mechanism by which heteropatriarchal capitalism balances itself; a sort of release valve. It keeps us in a state of defensive disorder and supplication, so that we can't pose a real threat. Going on the offensive allows us to set the terms of our struggle. Some things should be, need to be, dangerous. Straights should be afraid to bash us, they should fear for their fucking lives. Rather than seeking reconciliation with our attackers (either in the form of "rehabilitation" by the prison industrial complex, or through educational programs designed to teach them that we are people after all), we should seek retribution; Vengeance.

Justice and accountability, which we reference almost continuously in struggle, implies a healing process; a restorative, mutually beneficial process of peace. (What peace? A peace where trans women are murdered in silence and immediately forgotten? A peace where faggots are harassed into suicide if not outright murdered? A peace of candle light vigils? of street harassment? Fuck. Peace.) It makes the claim that the system has something to offer us and has the authority to determine whether or not we should receive it. The state under the name justice, through its ahistoricized authority, seeks to dissolve conflict through one decontextualized act, one assessment and punishment, makes one claim about one act, and deems the matter resolved. It is incapable of recognizing that the very social order it seeks to restore is what is at issue, incapable of destroying the order that empowers it. Justice process intervenes between the survivor and their power; it undermines survivor autonomy by setting limits on what is acceptable for the survivor to do, to say and what they can and cannot ask for. Justice processes attempt to dictate what a community or survivor need, and that is always a restoration of the existing order.

In practice, both of these related frameworks involve allowing someone else to determine what makes us safe, what makes us powerful. However, we know that the only thing the state and the police have to offer is slavery, beatings, humiliation and death. We can and will never get anything worth having from the state or capitalism, much less from our bashers. We can offer them only attack. By refusing to allow our conflicts and safety to be mediated by the state (or by our comrades mimicking the state), we demonstrate that the state has nothing we want. On the other hand, allowing the state to arbitrate our conflicts (indeed, to define them for us; hate crimes, for example is a concept which outside of statist discourse has no meaning) is intensely alienating; it alienates us from our own conflict, from our power.

Just as justice and reconciliation processes can not prevent future violations because they seeks to affirm and recreate the conditions under which the assault occurred, they cannot give us what we actually want. What we want is for the violation (the rape, the bashing, the cat calls, the street harassment) to have *never occurred in the first place*. So we are always already in a position of compromise; we have always already been violated by homophobia, by transphobia, by misogyny. We can either abdicate more of our power by allowing it to be diffused by process, or we can reclaim it by meeting our own needs and protecting each other. The state cannot make us safe; indeed, we will never be safe as long as the state or the current social order exists. We will never be safe but we can be powerful. We can be monstrous. In refusing to be victims, in refusing to allow violence to remain in the hands of queer bashers and cops, we step outside of what is acceptable or sometimes even intelligible. We become the horrible monsters of our favorite nightmares.

They correctly name our power when they call us monsters. We are destabilizing, outside of the order of the natural. We are a dis-ease, a threat to the reproductive familial order. At once utterly alien and inevitable, we are the monstrous other normative heterosexuality defines itself against. Our power lies in refusing to be ordered. This

means both refusing to allow the state to manage our bodies and in refusing to allow someone else to set the terms of our conflict or resistance. We cannot allow the state to alienate us from our own needs, from the intimacy that comes with protecting and avenging each other. When we take control of our own safety and abandon the project of justice, we create distance between ourselves and the state, and just as importantly, *between ourselves and society*. When we beat the shit out of our bashers, we discover that our bodies and lives are worth fighting for. And, rather than producing the 'endless cycle of violence fear mongers invoke (as if we don't live with that already), we build affinity, we build intimacy, we build community. Bashing is an intensely isolating experience, but when we take control of our bodies, of public space, of our struggle we discover that we have more power and community than we ever thought possible. When we fight back, we build a space from which to launch and, capacity for, future attacks. Fighting back against our bashers creates a point of rupture, a fissure. It is a reclamation of the violence wielded against us. It is ecstatic.

By shifting our focus to vengeance and away from justice, we absolve ourselves of the burden of healing our attackers. We also acknowledge what we all know to be true; that they have little to offer us; and what is there, was in the first place stolen, and secondly, must be taken not given. The conflict we are responding to occurs in our bodies, and so resistance must happen there too. We can take our bodies back, make our bodies tools of power and agency rather than a place where we keep trauma or the contested nexus of racist/homophobic/transphobic/misogynist violence. Attacking our bashers allows us to harness the massive power focused on and flowing through our bodies; to direct it.

Revenge cannot make us whole (some things are lost to us forever); but it can give us something better; it can make us dangerous. (Refusing to be reasoned with, to be placated allows us to tap into power and to remake ourselves as whatever singularities, terrifying monsters) We give our lives and community value by fighting back, by refusing to be the passive containers society pours its instability and violence into. Allies and assimilationists try to demand passivity in the

face of violence, try to convince us that we haven't begged elaborately enough (through lobbying, candle light vigils, petitions, legislative process) because when we connect to our power through vengeance/violence, we upset the social order they are trying so desperately to uphold. When Cece McDonald's (a black trans woman from the mid-west who was brutally attacked and is currently serving an absurd sentence for killing her one of her attackers) case is discussed at all, people frequently try to position her as a victim rather than as an agent, a heroine. That nazi shit bag she killed deserved to die; in fact chose to die by her hand. (He manufactured a situation in which his life was in danger and then died as a result.) While i don't think that murder should always be our goal, when we find ourselves in the position of fighting for our lives, we should not make excuses about doing what we have to, to survive. Similarly, I don't have any illusions about that moment being "the revolution", but it is incredibly powerful (hence the retaliation by the state and the absurd mishandling of her case. We should always expect to be punished for surviving). That moment should be an inspiration to us all; we can stop a bashing while it's happening. We can act without fear or hesitation to protect ourselves and our loved ones. We don't have to focus on "preventing future bashings", a goal that recedes like the horizon. We can defend ourselves *now*, be powerful together *now*. My body sings with the possibility.

And possibility is what this is about, ultimately. To open up the possibility for resistance, to widen our options of attack. Rather than allowing the state or straights or non-profits to set the agenda of our resistance, we can meet our own needs and determine for ourselves what those needs are. For those of us who hate the world we live in, who hate heteropatriarchal capitalism, attack is the only real option. Once we face that reality, we can move out of victimhood and create something beautiful; we can destroy everything.