



**(this  
heart's  
on  
fire)**

Despite its problematic affinities for primitivist idealism, and despite—or because of—the current vogue for equating non-monogamy with “lifestylism,” THIS PIECE DESERVES TO BE READ. There is an ongoing popular “wisdom” which says it is reasonable for people navigating the murky waters of relationships to resolve emotional discrepancies through the creation of rules, “compromises” that no one is really happy with and that only lead to control games and catastrophes later on. This essay calls our attention to what is difficult, but most important: the emotional content and dynamics of relationships rather than any formal structures we attempt to impose on them, with whatever intention, and the importance of free relationships to the project of a free world. Here is one moment in a long and vital dialogue.

*an  
anarchist  
project  
on*  
FREEDOM  
*and*  
LOVE



of the greatest poverties for us in mass society. Dredging up dysfunctional childhoods or storing pensions for our old age deny us the being alive of the present. Sitting in an office dreaming of the weekend or spending free time engaging with mythical soap opera characters instead of real people is clearly not healthy. Equally unwell-making is having feelings incompatible with the here and now. Sitting in the woods with a lover but being miserably occupied with something that happened as a child is the same as not enjoying a feast because once you had felt hungry.

*The past is behind us. The future might never happen.*

Happiness is also located in the here and now, in the moment. We have spent our lives unlearning this but we catch glimpses of it through sex, love, pain, reunion, the unexpected etc. For our relations to be happy ones they must also be in the here and now, because, really, they only exist in the here and now. The famous quote “there is no such thing as heterosexuality and homosexuality, only heterosexual and homosexual acts” can be extended to realize that sexual unions are sexual only in that defining moment, not the day before or the day after. It is delusional and painful to insist on consistent sexual desire, to demand your lover of today still loves you tomorrow.

Gay, straight, my lover, your primary partner, it’s all identity politics of ongoing contracts unbefitting to lives of mutual desires. We do not need to “work at our relationships,” merely have them—without contract, demand, competition or coercion.

**I hate all those who, by ceding through fear and resignation, a part of their potential as human beings to others, not only crush themselves but also me and those i love, with the weight of their fearful complicity or with their idiotic inertia.**

**—Albert Libertad, “I hate the resigned”**

anarchistic communities we must also forsake the idea of sacrificing individual desires for the sake of the community. We have been so programmed by the megamachine that it is hard to imagine such a world where cooperation rather than competition does not elicit us as without. Even harder to imagine is a world where we are free to take our pleasures and our desires openly. But if these are the communities we are in the process of creating then we must be honest and open and challenging. These communities will not prosper by shying from conflict but rather by not fearing it.

An argument often given by those who do not necessarily preach coercive relationships but are restricted by the ideology is this:

*It is reasonable for A to not kiss B in front of C.*

*It is reasonable because A cares for C as much as she does for B.*

*A does not want to upset C.*

Nobody wants to upset those we care for, but if we restrict or inhibit our own desires for the false peace of not upsetting others, then we are left in a passionately deficit world. What then if C was upset because A and B were both female and C's masculinity was threatened by queer sex? Or if C was upset because A was black and B was white and C's security as a black man was upset by mixed race love?

As radicals we would inevitably say the lovers should challenge homophobia and racism, that the onus is on C to deal with his feelings. And rightly so. Homophobia and racism are internalized and damaging dynamics of control and power that must be challenged. So are rule relationships.

*Would you kiss B in front of C if C would be upset?*

***right here, right now***

THE DEFINING FEATURES of anarchy include a desire to live in small, self-governing communities, individual and collective self-determination, a reconnection with the wild and an understanding that we live only in the present, in the here and now.

Living in the real here and now instead of in the unreal past/future is a discerning feature of many nature-based societies and one

## ***an anarchist project on freedom and love***

EDITOR'S NOTE, MAY 2010: *Despite its problematic affinities for primitivist idealism, and despite—or because of—the current vogue for equating non-monogamy with “lifestylism,” this piece deserves to be read. There is an ongoing popular “wisdom” which says it is reasonable for people navigating the murky waters of relationships to resolve emotional discrepancies through the creation of rules, “compromises” that no one is really happy with and that only lead to control games and catastrophes later on. This essay calls our attention to what is difficult, but most important: the emotional content and dynamics of relationships rather than any formal structures we attempt to impose on them, with whatever intention, and the importance of free relationships to the project of a free world. Here is one moment in a long and vital dialogue.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE, JUNE 2004: *While this short piece hopes to inspire thoughts it is not meant to be complete: much is missing from it... And if it causes controversy I hope that is to arouse emotions, discussion and hopefully other writings, rather than cause upset. It is merely my current contribution to something ongoing rather than a final word.*

THIS PIECE IS NOT ADVOCATING another option, another “choice” of relating for couples. It is rather a recognition that our “common project”—the abolition of all power relations—includes the abolition of coercive/closed relationships. These are those relationships with fixed stature, those relationships with rules or permanent contracts. These relationships cannot really be part of a free society. And just as with other coercive relations at odds with our freedom they must be confronted by all who seek such freedom and communities.

**We need to pursue our sexual encounters as we do all of our relationships, in total opposition to this society, not out of any sense of revolutionary duty, but because it is the only way possible to have full, rich uninhibited sexual relations in which love ceases to be a desperate mutual dependence and instead becomes an expansive exploration of the unknown.**

—“On sexual poverty,”  
***Willful Disobedience #4***

At best, then, anarchism is a convenient label used to characterize diverse individuals with a common project: the abolition of all power relations—structures of control, coercion, domination and exploitation—and the creation of a form of community that excludes such relations.

## *rules of engagement*

I AM GOING TO use the term *rule relationships* or sometimes *coercive* or *restricted relationships* because i do not know another generic term for monogamous relationships and those which claim to be polyamorous or open but have rules. By the latter i mean those where the consenting coercion is that while a loved one is not restricted to one person only, they are still not at liberty or encouraged to follow their desires.

From a political view these two relationship options are the

for the consent of one person to sleep with another anymore than we would ask a father for the “right” to marry his daughter. And here and now, we can also live that out. To “respect” restrictive relationships is to uphold them.

**The middle person in the triangle often manifests a certain compassion for the suffering of the jealous one, respecting his “humanity” even though she regrets the unpleasant effects of misery’s manipulations and melodramatics. This complicity remains loyal to the couple form, because it respects the traditional rules of love.**

—Isaac Cronin

## *direct action*

WOULD IT BE SO controversial to call a war on monogamy? To seduce the lovers of the possessive? Could we help those trapped by their timid jealousies to grow into freedom by “stealing” kisses from those forbidden lips in front of their terrified eyes? If this shocks or offends you, perhaps you should ask yourself why.

## *communities not couples*

RULE RELATIONSHIPS, and the acceptance of them, betray an internalized hierarchy: the relationship of a “couple” is of greater worth than others in the community. It would be equally unrealistic and undesirable to hope for everyone to feel as much love and connection with every single one of their community—down that path lie formalized and institutionalized groups or other coercive ways of relating which are just as damaging as rule relationships and coupledness.

Community is more than one and it is more than two also. To create self-governing, self-sufficient small communities there cannot be the tyranny of individualism or of coupledness. To create wild and

wronged anyone else. This is tricky land to negotiate but it is far from impossible. To openly accept feelings of jealousy and fear without asking or expecting another to restrict their behavior thereby “solving” those feelings forces us to be the possessors not of another but of our own emotions. My hurt is my hurt. We can ask loved ones to love us through the hurt, and like the infant, we will probably find that hurt lessen and often leave. In particular, the victim culture of women—even amongst anarchists and feminists—is shackled by concepts that someone else is responsible for our feelings of rejection or upset. It is pitiful to blame our lovers for wanting someone else, even desiring someone else more than you, and even desiring someone else and not you.

## *break out or break up*

DUE TO OUR POSITION of existing in mass society, and our needs to survive, some co-options and compromises are inevitable. Our need to eat and have shelter makes us exploitative consumers, whether of “fair trade” products or of pepperoni pizza. We are not connected with nature at any meaningful level even if we do grow our own vegetables in the “countryside.” We all use technology to a greater or lesser degree. Our relations, meanwhile, are one of the places we are most free to try to be wild—to live in the here and now and without owning and oppressing each other.

To accept coercive relations as well as free ones is as full of folly as hoping industrial societies, or societies with governments, can exist alongside nature based ones. If my love is free, but yours is not, then scarcity is created. To say i am at liberty to not possess land but you are at liberty to possess land is ludicrous. Fortunately, your possession relies on my compliance with it, and as anarchists we do not accept your ownership and possession.

If we believe love should be freely given from desire than we cannot respect the culture of love-as-commodity-lover-as-possession. This means that for me to not act on my desiring in loving who i will when i will, is to be complicit in a system of coercion, of control and of ownership that i am opposed to. No, i do not and cannot, accept the rules of “your” relationship. In a free society we will not be asking

same. If your reasons for non-monogamy are merely about increased sexual gratification with an increased number of people than rule relationships may serve that purpose. If, however, it is through the desire to create communities not couples, for desire not consent, for trust not fear... why then, the “banned list,” the “not in my company,” the regulations must all go. When *open relationships* or *free relationships* are referred to in this text, i mean exactly that.

## *choice and respect*

WHILE THERE IS an acceptance of open relationships within our anarchist communities, there is equal acceptance of restricted relationships. This comes in part from sound motives: people can be at liberty to agree their own relationships, there are no set patterns, etc. However, there are a host of reasons why this outlook is an idle one.

Firstly, in mass societies we consent to all sorts of coercive relationships. working for a wage, signing on, being a customer and therefore an exploiter of workers... indeed it is difficult to find many relations which are not based on some degree of coercion or exploitation. Consenting to coercive relations in no way indicates that we desire them. Since the 1970s (at least!) radical feminism has been exploring the very major differences between consent and desire, particularly in the realm of love and sex. Many women consent to sex to avoid rape, for example. Consent is rooted in the language of law and of property rights. This is why it is useful for mass societies but useless for creating radical ones. It is certainly not a radical place in which to understand a world based on desire. And surely, our sexual relationships are one of the more obvious places to situate desire and not consent.

So, people consent to rule relationships as they do to other coercive relations but do they desire them? Fundamentally, this is an oxymoron. We do not need to make rules about things we do not fear. If two people only desired to have sexual relations with each other then there would not need to be rules made to govern this. This does not make it a coercive relationship, although it makes it literal monogamy. The coercion is in the governing of that desire, not just for oneself but for the one you desire and love.

Monogamy is a contract precisely because we do not expect literal monogamy, because we expect our lover to desire sex with others who are not us. Maybe not now, but certainly in the future. We also expect our lover to make rules to govern our desire because we have no trust in the singleness of our sexual desire either. It is ridiculous, then, for monogamists to claim they have forbidden each other to have sex with others because they only desire sex with each other.

Rule relationships, then, operate on sexual consent but not desire. Although, of course, there are reasons we do desire to coerce and be coerced. We desire this because we desire to control, own and possess that which is around us. This is a desire fixed in the myth that we can do this with living beings, and worse, that we can do this in the name of love when really it is only control. If we cannot give up our belief in possession of the limitless: and by that i mean things like love, affection, sexual desire... how do we begin to relinquish control of that which is limited: such as the resources of the world? An inability, or rather a lack of desire, to free the ones we love the most—and at no real cost to ourselves—suggests we are so far gone in the madness of mass society that there is no going forward, no coming home to freedom.

It is worth mentioning here, although only as an incidental aside, that outside of using constant surveillance and/or force, nobody can really stop their loved one loving or fucking another. They can only choose to believe they can, which to me would suggest a form of mental illness.

## *jealousy and other feelings*

THE INFANT often reacts to a new sibling at its mother's body with extreme jealousy, intense feelings of rivalry and anger, and ultimately ownership. As adults we watch with sympathy but not horror. We do not expect the mother to put the newcomer away or keep her love for the new one out of the older child's eyeshot. We expect instead that the mother will reassure the first child that she still loves and cares for it as well as assuring the child that she loves and cares for the new baby also. Except in very rare cases the child's jealousy lessens and the child accepts the situation.

In comparison we have the relationship of adults:

The adult often reacts to a new person at its lover's body with extreme jealousy, intense feelings of rivalry and anger, and ultimately ownership. As adults we expect either the newcomer to be put away (monogamy) or for a code of conduct to be obeyed, such as love for the new one to be out of the first one's eyeshot (restrictive relationships). Of all the complex and different emotions between the three, or more, people, we give the jealousy and rivalry of the first lover priority.

How can this possibly happen? This seems to demonstrate a civilized and artificial separation of the potentials of children and of adults. We deem children's emotions unreasonable and therefore not masters of a situation, but adult's emotions reasonable and allowed to govern.

The confusion of restricted relationships is that we do not think other feelings, i.e. desire for another's body, unreasonable, but just that those particular feelings are the ones to be controlled. The desire to possess and own takes precedence over other desires. (It is worth noting that this is particular to certain cultures and sexual jealousy is not comprehended in some. While it is "natural" for those of us raised in monogamous society to feel jealous, this does not mean those raised in polyamorous societies are just repressing their emotions!)

Another key difference is that civilized/hierarchal society believes emotional growth occurs in childhood, not adulthood. Learning is not for life. This means the child can be given the opportunity to grow and develop but the adult is now retarded and incapable of learning.

And this brings us to respect. Coercive relationships are *not respectful*, for they are denial not only of desire but of growth. If i am bound by my lover's jealousy i presuppose them incapable of dealing with their emotions and too retarded to change. There is of course some truth in this. It is harder to be flexible at 30 than it is at 3. At 30 i have had 30 years of the megamachine and its myths of personal ownership. I have more shit to wade through, and i am likely to be hampered by well-meaning others trying not to 'hurt' me. That hurt is just growing pains.

For someone to feel hurt by another does not mean anyone has