

# **Relationship Anarchy Discussions**

Reports from the RAD 2019  
Unconference  
Detroit, MI

Collaboratively authored by unconference attendees

[www.CommunitiesNotCouples.com](http://www.CommunitiesNotCouples.com)

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Relationship Anarchy is...



# Introduction

## collectively written by RAD 2019 attendees

In May 2019, a collection of people met in Detroit with the goal of developing community, theory and practice around applying anarchist principles to interpersonal relationships. The space exploded with questions. This zine is an incomplete record of that gathering-- of that collective questioning-- and of the glimmers of answers on all horizons.

The event was an unconference. We all co-created the schedule and focus of the event, but we weren't starting from scratch: the space was framed by 1) how the purpose of the event was articulated on the website ahead of time, and 2) the "process of mutual discernment" through which organizers and other attendees came to decide whether we would be a good fit for each other. This is the aspirational statement that brought us together:

"This unconference will center the needs, voices, and participation of people applying anarchist principles (anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical, solidarity) to interpersonal relationships. We value queer, authentic, customized, voluntary relating for mutual benefit, and recognize that as part of a larger anarchist project of grassroots community building.

"This is a monogamy-critical space.

"This is not a space for honoring hierarchical polyamory or any rules-based relationships that rely on entitlement, power and control, limiting autonomy, the couple unit, and prioritizing the relationship escalator over friendship and community.

"We recognize the dominant system of monogamism as a patriarchal, heterosexist, cissexist, ethno-nationalist, white supremacist, and capitalist mode of relating to others that

creates unnecessary social conflict and isolates people from their communities. We are finding ways to resist that domination, as well as the proliferation of its spin-offs (hierarchical polyamory) and its effects on our communities.

“What do the alternatives to systemic monogamism and hierarchical polyamory look like? How do we apply the anarchistic values of anti-authoritarianism, individual autonomy, and community cooperation to all of our relationships? What is the connection between anarchy, friendship, the erotic, sex, love, and family? How do we create a more liberatory future for our communities?”

Once the time came for us to share space together in person, we collaboratively generated some Points of Unity:

1. The intimate is a worthwhile domain in the struggle against all hierarchy-based domination
2. This is an anti-monogamy space; we will not prioritize apologism for monogamy or polyamory
3. This is an amatonormativity-critical space
4. This space values autonomy and tearing down structures that limit autonomy
5. This space promotes communities and not couples
6. We are building brave spaces, in which self-advocacy and compassionate conflict are embraced, rather than “safe” spaces in which conflict is avoided or minimized at all costs

And then off we went from there, in so many directions, with many agendas and ideas, coming back to the auditorium between sessions to pick the next block’s topics. We reunited as a large group again the last afternoon and brainstormed about all the institutions and structures that have to fall or change in the process of building a world centered on liberatory relating. It’s every oppressive structure: we need an all-out revolution. And the energy in the room was going there.

It is worth noting that neither the aspirational statement nor the Points of Unity mention “relationship anarchy” by name. That is not a coincidence. It was necessary to avoid those words in order to explain what we meant by them: those words are contested territory. And we continue to contest them. One attendee said:

“I have had too many negative experiences with people calling themselves “relationships anarchists” whose approaches to relationships are devoid of any anarchist sensibilities. Often people championing alternatives to monogamy that still fundamentally privilege sexual and romantic relationships. People trying to nudge the institutions and structures that privilege “couples” to broaden just enough to value people who have more than one couple relationship or “couple” units with more than 2 people, instead of trying to smash those institutions and structures to the ground... I was relieved to discover very early on in the unconference that many other attendees (including some or all of the organizers) had similar ambivalent feelings about the specific words “relationship anarchy” and how those words were so very often being (mis)used. That theme ran powerfully throughout the conference-- at this point in time, when “relationship anarchy” might seem to have been so thoroughly appropriated for assimilationist-poly purposes, can we reclaim those words for insurrectionary ends? Is the term “relationship anarchy” salvageable and (what) are we willing to (do to) fight for it? There were definitely people present who were willing to fight for it. and struggle to define a political project that can make progress towards liberatory relating through an intersectional critique of monogamism.

In some ways, the event felt like a critical moment in the struggle to claim the label of “relationship anarchy”. We have no way to know how the shape of language and discourse around liberatory relating will change. Five or ten years from now, will the liberatory political bite of “relationship anarchy” be long-forgotten, or will its anarchism and lofty prefigurative ideals of liberation be once again its beating heart? We have no way to know. But we came together under that banner, at

this moment in time. We were here. We tried. And we want people to know.

With all the wonderful things the space offered to so many people, it also fell short of living its goals in many ways, as events typically do (especially first attempts like this one). There are always issues of who is and isn't in the room-- and why. While we were a widely varied group, our diversity was limited in critical ways:

Nobody present was using visible mobility aids, which was likely related to incomplete information about the physical accessibility of the space provided beforehand, which communicates that the presence of people who need to ask isn't especially valued. The vast majority of people present were between the ages of 20 and 50, were predominantly white, and there were very few parents (or others raising children). Even the range of body diversity was rather limited. There wasn't any specific outreach to parents, to youth, to mature adults of various ages, even though these groups are often excluded from the communities that exist around relationship anarchy, which tend to skew toward young(ish) adults without children. These communities are affected by the omnipresent racism and white-centrism that pervade the larger social context. If we're serious about our liberatory goals and building the kinds of communities this entails, we need to be building meaningful intergenerational relationships, offering real support to parents and other caregivers (of children and others who need care), and actively engaging in substantive racial solidarity. Clearly we're not there yet. And that limits the experiences we collectively bring to the table as a group, and the analyses that can develop as a result. It limits our visions of our shared liberation. There is a lot of work we need to do to get where we need to be; hopefully we are collectively up for it.

At the same time, some people were kept out of the room on purpose, so that we could create a space where the "beyond 201" conversations could become possible-- the process of "mutual discernment" helped people screen themselves out if they weren't on board with the expressed politics of the space, and allowed organizers to screen out those who weren't on board and who angrily

disagreed with those politics. (And some people **were** angry.) This wasn't a space for people who wanted or needed introductory education about non-monogamy or the idea that interpersonal relating is a political action. It wasn't a space for polyamorous people who value assimilation into monogamous culture. Without that screening, the space would have been fundamentally different, and would probably have offered a lot less to so many of us freaks who made it there, who are so often undervalued in more mainstream spaces. A lot of us were trans and/or nonbinary; a lot of us queer; a lot of us survivors of various kinds of violence and trauma; a lot of us only able to attend in the first place because food and co-housing were offered and no set minimum "registration fee" was required. The event was a "closed" space, and that mattered – it allowed the attendees to pursue threads of discourse that are drowned out in more politically inclusive spaces when (almost) all efforts are driven towards basic education or defense of the very idea that interpersonal relating can be the subject of political critique.




# Queering Space



→ A network of people and communal resources

"[Houses] are emotional cages" "Get out of one of these cement boxes doing the end-of-the-cul-de-sac thing"

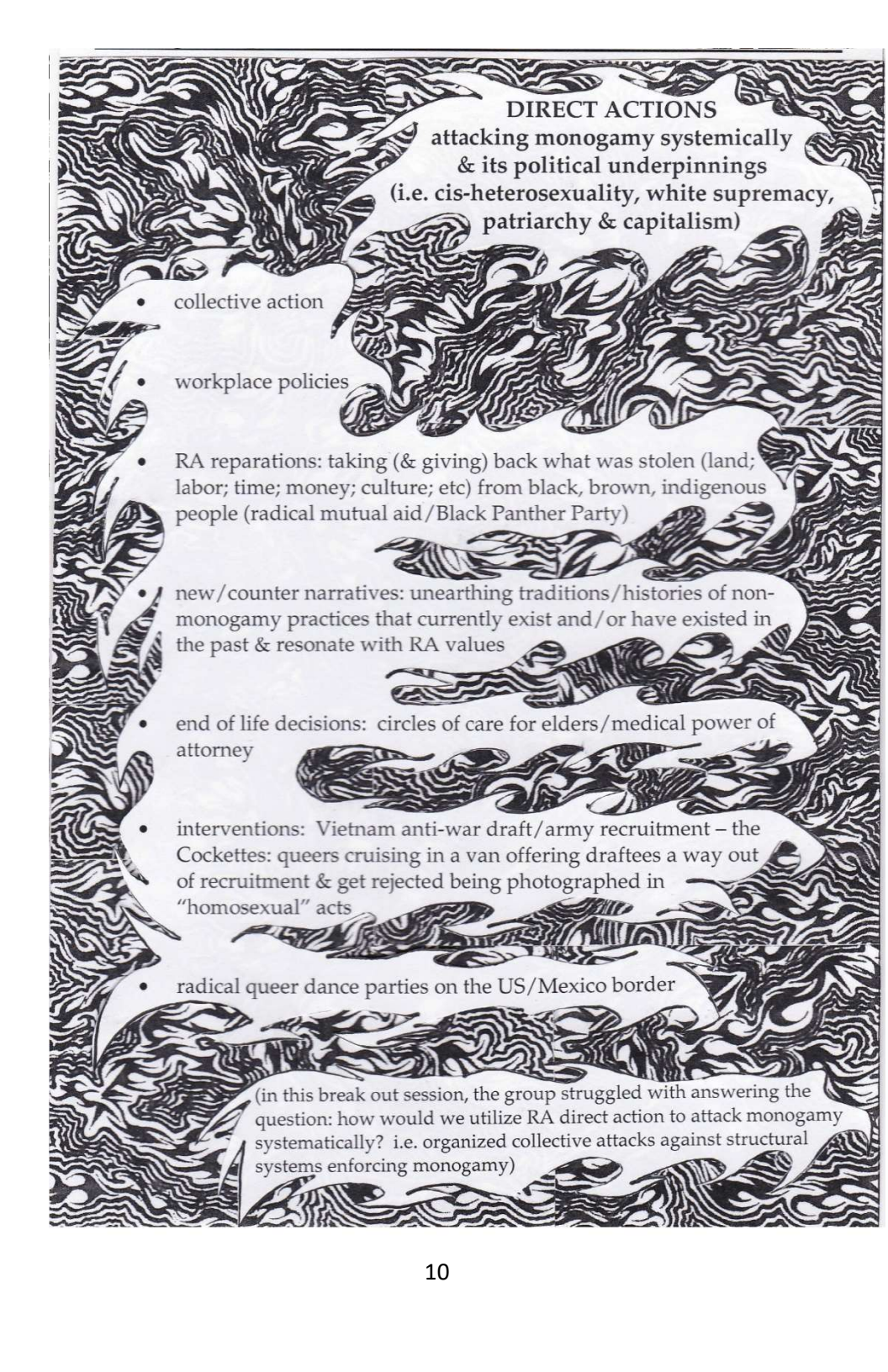


*(incomplete) notes on*  
**Relationship Anarchy & DIRECT ACTION:**  
*intimacy as a frontline struggle for liberation\**

- throwing anti-couple parties/couple busting:
  - structuring parties to systematically take action against couples
  - anti-couple parties as a form of coalition building
  - sexually/sensually open spaces: de-pedestalizing sex
- strategic shaming of couples
- dialogue/explaining/clarifying
- language: fence vs unfenced
- experimentation/practice: let others see it (RA practices & embodied values) & show off how FUCKING great it is!
- seduction
- radical cuddle puddles: cuddle puddle actions that take over public space/taking back the commons/ "occupying" institutions (churches/schools/museums/ banks)

\*incomplete notes from the 2019 RA unconference break out session entitled: relationship anarchy & direct action. this was/is a collective effort of knowledge "sharing out."





## DIRECT ACTIONS

attacking monogamy systemically  
& its political underpinnings  
(i.e. cis-heterosexuality, white supremacy,  
patriarchy & capitalism)

- collective action
- workplace policies
- RA reparations: taking (& giving) back what was stolen (land; labor; time; money; culture; etc) from black, brown, indigenous people (radical mutual aid/Black Panther Party)
- new/counter narratives: unearthing traditions/histories of non-monogamy practices that currently exist and/or have existed in the past & resonate with RA values
- end of life decisions: circles of care for elders/medical power of attorney
- interventions: Vietnam anti-war draft/army recruitment – the Cockettes: queers cruising in a van offering draftees a way out of recruitment & get rejected being photographed in “homosexual” acts
- radical queer dance parties on the US/Mexico border

(in this break out session, the group struggled with answering the question: how would we utilize RA direct action to attack monogamy systematically? i.e. organized collective attacks against structural systems enforcing monogamy)

## Some Reflections:

### Looking back at RAD a month later

“Relationship anarchist” isn’t a label I typically use for myself— as an aroace who does neither romantic nor sexual relationships, I had to get to a place of politicised anarchistic relating on my own, with tools and language of ace and anarchist communities. There’s a lot of social/cultural baggage around how people are “supposed” to relate and what kinds of interactions are “supposed to be” more intimate or more important. Overcoming those norms and expectations, especially the ones that typically go without saying, takes work. It’s intentional; it’s political; it’s ongoing. There aren’t any shortcuts, and using the term “relationship anarchy” doesn’t simply melt away all the internalised norms and expectations. In the years since I’ve started encountering “relationship anarchists,” my experiences with people describing themselves that way have largely been with people shoving their relationship hierarchies down my throat while insisting they didn’t have any. People who had nothing remotely anarchist in their “relationship anarchy”. The unconference was different.

It was a “relationship anarchy” space that centred the anarchism, populated by people who had also had far too many experiences with so-called “relationship anarchists” whose relational practices were about anything but liberation. I’m glad I was there. The way I relate to people is “so far off the map” for most people that most of the time, I’m kind of just talking to myself (or doing 101 educational work). I was still a bit “out there” in this space— I was probably the only person present who doesn’t ever, under any circumstance, want to have any kind of sexual contact with anyone, for instance; and not everyone had encountered the ideas of asexuality or aromanticism. But I wasn’t too far out to be able to have conversations. At the same time, some of the issues that are most pressing for me weren’t really part of the larger consciousness (yet).

I'm someone who is invisibly chronically ill and who sometimes has difficulty walking (and in those times needs to use a cane); is autistic and otherwise neurodivergent; who has specific memory issues; and who has fluctuating but seriously limited spoons<sup>1</sup>. My limitations and mind-freakishness are central to how I do and don't connect with people. (I'm also a non-binary trans person.) Sometimes I have difficulty talking or getting words out (and often in those moments people spectacularly underestimate my cognitive capacity or treat me like a child). Sometimes, even when I can talk, I can't figure out how to interact with people or how to start or end conversations.

Before deciding whether to attend the conference, I struggled with whether or not to ask the organisers if issues of ableism and disability were part of their liberatory politics. I wasn't worried about whether I could get into the space because I knew that even on a really bad day I would be able to. I was worried about whether people would understand how analyses of disability and disabled experiences need to be part of the larger agenda for relational liberation. I didn't get the impression it was something that people had really thought about (beyond recognising an impact of trauma), but they were open to my questions and suggestions. Without that reaction, I would not have been at the event. But I also recognise that because it was necessary to ask, so many people weren't. Ultimately, the space was kind of hit and miss in that respect.

For some context, I'm not good with groups and I have a lot of difficulty talking with more than one person at once. And I need a lot of recovery time after social situations. The scenarios where adults

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1 If you haven't encountered "spoon theory" you can find an explanation here: <https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/>

normatively build relationships don't work for me (i.e., group hang-outs, often with the casual consumption of substances that people set on fire and whose smoke makes me sick). I don't function well at parties or in crowded/loud places. And even more intimate groups tend to be situations where I might be able to observe (or info-dump on a particular topic) but not participate (even if I want to). Those are situations where relationships—community and more personal relationships in particular—get built. But they don't work like that for me— even when I'm present, they don't usually result in the kinds of social integration for me that they do for others. And because I'm sufficiently weird / socially awkward (and people know that), I'm usually actually not even around for those situations, not even when the people I interact with regularly in the context of more scaffolded groups get together socially with each other.

Sometimes it's active exclusion— for example, people don't invite me to go dancing in a loud club or hang out in a noisy pub because they assume that I wouldn't enjoy it. (They're usually correct, but I'd actually sometimes choose to go to things I don't enjoy or have a hard time with, if given the choice, because that's what it takes to be part of the social circle). But because I'm not there for those situations, I also don't get invited to other things— I'm not part of who people think about as part of their “community”. And I find that many of the people I understand as and behave toward as part of my community don't treat me that way in return. I'm kind of a ghost. I care a lot about community, but community is hard for me. I think it's hard for a lot of brain-freaks. Connecting with anyone on a personal level is just not something I'm able to do very often. (To be fair, a lot of more “socially normal” people don't know how to interact with *me*— although they don't usually understand it that way... and as the freak, it's always my job to do the invisible work of bridging the gap.) It takes a lot of time and energy for me to build relationships at all, and even more-so for more personal ones. And I need a lot of recovery time after social situations. All that means that I'm going to have fewer personal or

intimate relationships than other people might, just because of my limited capacity.

And yet, even the more anarchistic, insurrectionist relationship anarchists tend to privilege (either explicitly or by default) the more extroverted, neurotypical ways of relating. Within the grand narratives of liberatory relationships, a large number of group and individual intimacies is often cast as a necessary part of the prefigurative practice. Those expectations and norms are ableist. They will never be expectations I can fulfil, partly because of my own limitations and social needs, and partly because of how other people's treatment of me actively disables me socially. The (necessarily-) "socially busy" version of post-revolution utopia is alienating to me. And I'm not the only one. I want to build a world where our social diversity is honoured.

On the first day of the unconference, there was a (small but) powerful session about RA and neurodivergence (where more than half of us were also ace). That hour alone made my conference experience. (I had other high points too, including talking about prison letter-writing, discussions of meaningful circles of care, and the ace/aro hang-out<sup>2</sup>) Very quickly, I was able to find people who shared these experiences of alienation and social exclusion. We were able to help each other put words to things we hadn't necessarily been able to name. And we also had an opportunity to share our own unconference accessibility needs, offering to look out for each other over the weekend. It was a wonderful moment of introverted brain-freak solidarity. And I feel that it deserves to be acknowledged.

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2 Not all aces and aros present at the conference were at the hang-out. One was interested but had other commitments. And from what I can tell, there were at least a couple other aces at the event who didn't need or want that space, which is cool too. But I'm glad most of us who wanted to be there had the chance to talk to each other about ace and arospec stuff.

We didn't manage to get to that place around physical disability and chronic illness, at least not at any point I witnessed over the weekend. Despite a number of other (invisibly) chronically ill folks being present, people weren't quite ready to have those conversations this time around. These are some of the things I'm mostly struggling to articulate for myself and I would really appreciate the opportunity to work some of it out with other people who have similar experiences. That disability piece just wasn't really part of the analysis. It needs to be. I hope next time it will be.

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Arriving and meeting people, I felt a little intimidated by all the knowledge and experience and energy that people brought, and I worried a little that I might not have much to contribute. Ultimately, I don't think my concern was well-founded-- I forget sometimes how much of the analysis ace communities have developed isn't "common knowledge" even though it has a lot to offer everyone. One thing I've found useful in doing ace and arospec educational work is showing people how the larger social structures that harm aces and arospec folks also harm them too— there are ways to show people how important it is to eliminate these structures and get them on board with doing that work even if they don't care about asexuality or aromanticism. It applies to anarchistic relating and anti-monogamy too. I don't think we have to convince people who are into monogamy that it's bad for them personally— at least not right away. There are larger social structures that we need to eliminate in our process of building the world we're trying to build, and we can build solidarity around destroying those social structures without having to say anything about monogamy specifically. (Because so many of the social structures that support romantic-sexual monogamy— as the basis for nuclear families, prescribed as the capitalist consumer unit— are so much broader than monogamy per se.)



About a month before the unconference, I was on a panel at an ace conference where I was asked to describe (my) ace utopia. I outlined, one by one, how various institutions— from white-supremacy and colonialism, to prisons and borders, to nuclear families, etc.-- all need to be destroyed in order to build a world that is ideal for ace (and arospec!) folks. These things are intricately connected— we need a full-scale revolution. The last day of the unconference there was an entire group session brainstorming all the social structures that promote and enforce coercive interpersonal relationships (including but not limited to monogamy). It was an extensive list covering two full blackboards. But one thing that really resonated with me was how that list was so very much a fleshed out, more detailed version of the collection of institutions I'd name at the ace conference. It's the same revolution we need. That wasn't new information to me, but it was powerful to see the parallel so vividly.

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As the unconference was drawing to a close, I was thinking about what I was going to tell my roommate when I got home. I knew they would be interested in hearing about it and would let me tell my story without interrupting me, but I also knew there were two things they'd really want to know about the space: how many of the people there were using visible mobility devices and how many were very fat (and visibly trans)? They'd want to know if there were any bodies like theirs present at all— whether they would have felt like a spectacle by just being in the room. I think they would have. I don't think anyone at all was using a visible mobility device. And hardly anyone was very fat. That matters. I'm sure there are so many reasons for that.

While sizeist issues maybe came up a couple times, fat liberation was very much not part of the larger analysis. It think it needs to be. We need to be deconstructing social norms of who is a valued and desirable person (and why) before we can ever fully deconstruct ideas of commodification of bodies and intimacy and sexuality that are central to upholding monogamy. We need to be deconstructing all forms of dehumanisation which justify and uphold other forms of violence. Size and weight-based discrimination and marginalisation are some of the last “socially acceptable” forms of oppression (that are even encouraged by the medical establishment despite the extensive evidence supporting the importance of weight-neutral healthcare and highlighting the extensive harm of fat stigma and discrimination). These things (and general fatphobia) pervade even the most radical and anti-oppressive communities— communities that generally claim solidarity with other “socially acceptable” targets of violence and marginalisation (e.g., people who use various substance, or do paid sex work, etc.). We're never going to be able to build the kinds of communities we claim to be trying to build without first making explicit and deconstructing the violence and oppression within our own communities and perspectives. As long as anyone's body would be a “spectacle” in a relationship anarchy space, we have a long way to go. But again, I am hopeful we can get there.



## Teach Me: A Memoir

We were in a house, in a specific house, big and old and creaking in the right ways. On a specific street, two blocks from the church/school/universe where the elementary-school league has baseball games and the children (or, a few dozen specific children each year) spend most of their energy shouting and drawing in the dirt and their few dozen specific chaperones decide, for concrete reasons, they don't care to redirect.

We were there for three days, and I fell in love so many times. Over and over, a roiling pot where just as one instance of loving bubbled to the surface and escaped, a hundred more seeded themselves. I fell in love in ideas and also in real bodies. Here, this look, his actual eyes how they moved that time when he said this thing. It was rehearsed, I know, like all our movements, but it was actually here this one time and I loved it for all it was, the literal body moving through our literal, liminal space. The trip, the cough, the stutter, the moan. The leaving with no goodbye, the frank power of trusting that we are all bent on destroying reflexive obligation, and where one isn't they will recognize that none of us can save them.

And in the power: to disagree and anger and quiet and stammer and understand still the love. To fall beyond caring if anyone would call this love. Call it touch. Call it discussion. Call it spaghetti. I will let it run down my chin. I will savor every bite. I will tell you about it with my face, with my body, with my being. I will tell you in the warm spaces we make when we love each other against odds and convention - when we love each other in disorder, in chaos,

in fertile decay. Love me against the state. Love me against families. Love me against money, where we give and give and give and give. Love me with empty pockets and bursting mouth. Love me and never touch me again. Love me and forget my face.

Teach me to love against restriction. Teach me to love against erasure. Teach me to love through prison bars. Teach me to love myself in you and you and you and you and all of them. Teach me the tender ways to say "no", "fuck you", "destroy it", and all the other sweet beautiful things. Teach me to fear the false flags of my own violent safety. Teach me to explode the security theater, to spoil the script, to dash the ticket booth window and cry all free, all free, all of us we are the stage and the play and the point of it anyways! Love me through the door until the lock breaks. Love me onto a ruined billboard. Love me in the shuttered clinic, the burned school, the roadkill, the farmkill, the neglected body, the nursing home, the dead slab. Watch: one day I will make them all my lovers, too.

## The RA branch-root by: taosen-yaks

The thoughts, reflections, questions, and critiques that make up this piece arose from the incredible practice and discussions we took part in at RAD. We want to thank and acknowledge everyone who inspired, pushed, challenged and excited us. What follows is an invitation for further discussion on how to make RA a more inclusive, liberating movement.

Here are a few questions left unanswered by RAD: Simply put, as a practice and philosophy, is RA inclusive? Will the conversations we had at RAD be able to move across cultural, racial, and class lines? How can we decenter our particular practice, while bringing in movements with the same foundational values: liberated non-coercive, non-hierarchical relating? How can we not just stand in solidarity, but fight side-by-side with movements resisting colonialism and the restrictive forms of relating it deems acceptable? How could RA work alongside and within Black Lives Matter, Indigenous border resistance, queer liberation, or prison abolition movements? Where and why are divisions drawn when the fundamentals of anti-amatonormativity, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, and anti-authoritarianism are often held in common?

### The Liberatory Banyan Tree

One question that arose in multiple discussion during RAD was, how might the practice of RA be received by communities fighting for autonomy in a world where Western, white colonists have dictated how, and with who, they can relate for centuries? With a keen eye on the agency of the oppressed, how do we quiet the voice of the colonizer? In the US, the settler-colonialist state has systematically and violently shaped how people of color, queer folk, immigrants, and indigenous peoples have created families and other networks of care. As we strive to familiarize the world with RA through practice and direct action, we need to reflect on our own positions, the context we are in and the power dynamics we may be replicating. We need to emphasise the voices and agency of those that have resisted coercive relating throughout history and across the world.

One way forward could be to change the way we frame RA as **one** practice of liberatory relating and not as **the** practice of

liberatory relating. We could write, speak, and think about RA as one unique reflection of liberatory relating, rather than as the sole form in which liberatory relating can take. This would mean decentering our practice and our expression of RA, while creating room for other forms of liberatory/anarchic relating to take hold. Through the act of decentering, we are simulatenously creating space, inviting others to join, and recognizing RA as *fundamentally* part of the many movements resisting the invisible, insidious hands of hetero-patriarchal-capitalism and colonialism. Our enemies are concrete and common.

Maia Ramnath articulates this beautifully in her book 'Decolonising Anarchism'. She refers to North American/Western European anarchism as one branch-root of a liberatory banyan tree. This rich imagery helps us visualize the variety of influences that shape the foundations for the tree of liberation. This helps us view anarchism as one articulation of liberatory practices within a much larger ecosystem of movements fighting hierarchy and oppression.

Is this banyan tree a useful tool for visualizing RA? Is RA one articulation of a much larger, more expansive and inclusive ecosystem of liberatory struggles? Can this include decolonial movements?

### **Explicit Accomplices**

To be an explicit accomplice is to be clear about your so-called "mischievous" intentions. We are proposing becoming active and intentional accomplices (not allies) in the struggles of oppressed peoples. Indigenous Action published the zine 'Accomplices not Allies' in which they fiercely critique the ally industrial complex and propose an alternative: accomplices. The ally industrial complex is when a movement is co-opted by 'allies' for an inevitably reformist agenda. When struggle is a commodity, allyship is a currency. Accomplices on the other hand, see their liberation as inherently tied up with the liberation of the people they stand and fight with. As Indigenous Action says, "When we fight back or forward, together, becoming complicit in a struggle towards liberation we are accomplices".

As miscreant accomplices practicing RA, we want to shift our perception of RA and actively adapt our practice to encompass

decolonizing values. This means bringing our practices and our bodies to the frontlines -- fighting as accomplices, not as allies -- with communities struggling for liberation.

*As accomplices we are compelled to become accountable and responsible to each other. That is the nature of trust.*

### **An Incomplete Invitation**

This piece is wildly incomplete and deeply limited by our lived experiences. However, we would like to offer it as an invitation for further discussion. What are the advantages and limitations of decentering RA as one branch-root of the liberatory banyan tree? What concrete steps can we take as a community to integrate decolonizing values into our practice? How do we utilize RA to build strong connections of mutual aid, trust, and support, while standing as accomplices in the struggles of others?

*Accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust. They don't just have our backs, they are at our side, or in their own spaces confronting and unsettling colonialism.*



## Relationship Anarchy is...

Learning how  
to define ourselves  
by what we're  
for, not [exclusively]  
what we're  
against.

# Relationship Anarchist Direct Action: Targets, Goals, and Strategies

This is an expanded and annotated set of notes based on collective and individual notes taken at RAD 2019 during sessions focused on describing possibilities for direct action against Monogamism and intersecting systems of privilege and power. Participants in these sessions discussed analyses and actions which might move us towards liberatory relating. This writing serves as a brief record of the ideas present and fomenting at RAD 2019, and a jumping-off point for further analyses and visioning.

## What are the targets of RA direct action?

### Our own desires

A central concern of RA action is building communities in which our needs/desires are met, in which we can handle/take responsibility for our own needs/desires, and in which people can learn to self-advocate to meet their own needs/desires. In doing this work, we are up against many years of our own learning/socialization in monogamist culture, many hundreds of years of violent, repressive monogamist culture, and many obstacles in the form of direct and indirect opposition to our goals. How do we create community in which people can flexibly pursue their own desires? How do we create spaces in which we can thrive while living in opposition to such a deeply dominant cultural practice? How do we model / teach others to do this as we figure it out?

### The couple/family unit as the basis of all life

RA analyses and actions should aim to degrade the nuclear family and associated couple-based paradigms of isolating people and making their lives de-politicized machines for consumption. Abolishing the consumerist couple/family unit (and with it abolishing “employment”, or alienated labor), will let people follow our love and passion, expressed as joyful voluntary work and relating (as opposed

to the present state so many of us spend so much time in, of frantic, desperate scrabbling for joy and closeness around the edges of an alienated, exploited existence). This would lead us to voluntary associations focused on substantive community and shared interests/values rather than sexual/“romantic” isolation and work. And while anarchism has long critiqued the nuclear family, but destruction of the family hasn’t happened on anarchist terms. Capitalist isolation and monogamist isolation are well-entwined – imagining a post-capitalist society requires that we imagine a post-monogamy society, a post-family society, a post-“relationship” society. How do we disrupt the hold of monogamism on our bodies, our lives, and our imaginations? How do we imagine and then build alternatives to monogamist isolation that will let us find routes towards liberation from consumerist capitalism? How do we live non-monogamous lives and take anti-monogamous action NOW, from within a crushingly monogamist world, in ways that disrupt the systems of power that oppress us?

### **The scarcity of isolated (coupled) consumerism**

That sex, closeness, intimacy, welfare, health, food, shelter, love, and joy are all supposed to take place in isolation means that each of us must expend more resources to secure these (or opportunities for these) for ourselves than would be necessary outside of capitalism’s artificial scarcity, which is structured so as to divert our time and labor into gain for a few rather than letting us own it ourselves. Directly reclaiming, redistributing, and creating resources that are available to share flexibly and reliably can make opportunities to escape monogamism and its attendant isolation, by making individuals more able to meet their needs and desires outside of a couple unit. With viable communal alternatives, individuals can be less focused on hoarding redundant resources and more focused on exploring ways to meet their desires. An RA-informed movement could help make monogamy obsolete by helping to provide food, clothes, shelter, intimacy, transportation, and meaningful activity for people that isn’t dependent on their participation in monogamist economic and cultural practices. How do we provide these things for people outside of or in defiance of the isolating infrastructure of contemporary couple-

focused consumerist capitalism? What power can we reclaim when we stop artificially producing scarcity in our social lives?

## **Sex as the primary classifier of human relating**

Monogamism insists that sex is the most important part of how we relate to each other, and in doing so uses sex to drastically control and limit our lives. After all, monogamous life supposedly peaks when you throw an expensive party to tell your friends, family, neighbors, and everybody else who will listen that you're only going to fuck one person for the rest of your life. Monogamist expectations around sex are based in domination culture, in which sex is scarce and must be possessed. This ownership of sex (typically men's ownership of women's sexuality) is policed by contractual agreements and social rules around making and enforcing these agreements. This makes sex high-stakes. It makes almost all erotic relating under monogamism into a more-or-less direct form of sex work, where one's access to food, money, transportation, shelter, social contact, emotional support, one's own home and bed, and many other resources are dependent on satisfactory completion of a sexual obligation (sometimes a literal contract). When monogamism transforms sex into work, it degrades our abilities to satisfy our own desires, and to commune with each other compassionately and without conflicted/transactional interests. This high-stakes enforced sexual scarcity also becomes exclusionary and is used as a tool of discrimination: on the basis of identity, class, race, gender, physique, and other dimensions of privilege. Disrupting monogamism is a necessary step in disrupting the oppressive centrality of (socially correct, obligatory) sex in our social order. How do we disrupt this domination, ownership-focused sexual world? How do we free the flow of our eroticism and sensuality? How do we create community sex practices in line with our values and politics in a way that will spill out to suffuse the rest of our lives? How do we unbundle sex from our language and practices of interpersonal relating?

## **Reliance on a few leaders / doers / workers**

Meaningful anarchist social movement will require a diversity of strategies, viewpoints, and actors. Radically re-imagining modes of

relating and developing practices, protocols, and culture to move towards liberatory relating is a hell of a lot of work, that ideally is done in distributed ways that don't rely on bureaucracy or authoritarian leadership. How do we reduce, manage, and distribute the labor of developing and practicing non-hierarchical, horizontal relating? How do we co-create movements in ways that don't feel like endless toiling?

## **Assimilation and exploitation of RA**

RA is unfortunately commonly written-off as just another variety of “personal preference” that people can have towards relating, and shares this list with a variety of assimilationist/assimilated practices including polyamory, non-monogamy, swinging, “dating around”, etc. These practices have been made non-threatening by being declared “personal” (and therefore not political) and assimilated into the dominant socio-sexual landscape. Non-monogamy is often a neo-liberal project, focused on hyper-individualism, and comfortably occupying fragmented social spaces and lives. Non-politicized non-monogamy generally recapitulates dominant modes of finding “partners” as one would find commodities or products: one imagines (or regurgitates) a role that a “partner” should fill, shops for someone to fill that role in social spaces (increasingly commercialized, exploitative, alienated, non-physical social spaces), and disposes of anybody who doesn't fit. Many non-monogamous practices are predicated on contracts, obligation, and isolation in ways that don't provide a meaningful alternative to the loneliness, alienation, or de-politicization of monogamy. For example, polyamorists have often strived to be seen as good, normal family-building people who essentially just want to ride the relationship escalator – to live the essential practices of monogamy – but with a few extra people, and who certainly won't encourage your wife to cheat on you. Importantly, the opportunities to do this are dependent on social and material privilege. The neoliberal project of non-monogamy as the expansion of personal choices for some privileged people lacks the potential to guide us towards radically liberatory relating.

In addition to this large-scale, ideological co-optation, RA spaces are co-opted by monogamists in discrete and distributed ways. We have

witnessed many people move in and out of RA spaces and communities, using them as a “steam valve” for their temporary disaffection with monogamism – hanging around long enough to take a breath and enjoy intimacy without the strictures of monogamy – and then quickly “graduating” from their RA “phase” back into isolationist, monogamist relating, without substantially contributing to the work we are doing. How do we keep our tools, our practices, our minds, and our bodies politicized? How do we keep our spaces and our lives threatening to monogamists? How do we keep our resources from being used only to temporarily absorb the damage of monogamy and the disaffection of monogamists? How do we build robust liberatory community rather than simply offering more “personal” choices to the already-privileged? How do we create conditions for non-neoliberal non-monogamy?

### **What are the goals of RA direct action?**

- foster awareness of the problem(s), grant legitimacy to broader variation in modes of relating (and maybe destroy the concept of social legitimacy of relationships altogether)
- do damage to oppressive systems of power that constrain human relating
- provide/redistributing resources to allow people to be less dependent on monogamy/partnership/family/other compulsory modes of relating
- demonstrate defiance to make it contagious, by showing it as powerful, liberatory, joyful, necessary, possible

Now, how do we do that?

**WE MUST KILL  
THE  
MONOGAMISTS  
INSIDE  
OF US**

## Write new scripts

...in sweeping revisions, and in increments day by day.

- Use no labels for “relationships”. Refuse to use others’ labels. Speak about people as individuals or as members of groups RELEVANT to their interests, goals, practices, etc. (rather than members of arbitrary, symbolic groups like “marriages” or “couples” or “hereditary families”).

- If you use the labels, use scare quotes around them: “boyfriend”, “girlfriend”, “wife”, “partner”, etc.

- Talk about changing relationships drastically. Talk about “breaking up” or leaving your lovers often, loudly, calmly, to make it an every-day thought. Demonstrate that you always have (and are always considering) exit strategies. Suggest breaking up or divorce when people mention their inevitable problems with the shitty framing of their “relationships”.

- Describe monogamy as the extreme, isolating practice and belief set that it is. Kinkshame monogamy! Be HORRIFIED and LET IT SHOW when people talk about being “taken”, “their woman”, “ball and chain” etc. Loudly and publicly identify ownership-based relating as abusive – or at least adjacent to and facilitative of abuse.

- Turn down plus-ones, turn up threesomes!

- Live all of life as affinity groups – convene where desires and goals coincide, and let the affiliation fade when they no longer do.

- Refuse to be middle person in social coordinating across coupled or pseudo-coupled units. Tell people to communicate directly. Don’t speak for people that others assume you can speak for (“I can’t speak for them”, “you should ask them that”, “I don’t know what they’re feeling”).

- Seduce everyone! Proposition people in couples. Make it clear that “couplehood” is irrelevant and that we care not about somebody’s sociosexual “availability” but about their DESIRE and FREEDOM (them: “I have a partner,” us: “I don’t care. What do you want to do?”).



- Focus sex, intimacy, relationship building, on community rather than couples.
- Steer existing relationships AWAY from couplehood and towards community; your own and those of friends. Deprioritize dyadic interactions.
- Act on your desires and tell the story.
- FUCK ROMANCE. Romance needs to be de-prioritized to a point where it doesn't matter
- Respond to monogamism in community the same way you respond to other dehumanizing/counter-liberatory tendencies. Identify and discuss where your relationships deviate from your autonomist / communalist values towards monogamist values.
- Challenge punitive justice systems. Recognize the potential of harm in all of us and implement transformative justice as communities. Develop (and practice) community and communication-focused alternatives to policing.
- Make room for sexual and bodily difference, in conversations, at events, in our daily lives. Normalize sex and sexual difference. Depedestalize sex. Bring up that "relationships" are polite ways to describe the rules about who can fuck whom, and that this is fucked up.
- Assume that sex is political, and that what's political is worth discussing. Ask people about their politics. Ask people about their sex and about how it jives with their politics.
- Assume that sex can happen in community spaces and is a community endeavor. Build / share / model good consent practices and good practices around ascertaining others desires and stating your own. Provide examples of shameless, liberating public / group intimacy and sex.

## Organize gatherings

- Direct action anti-monogamist parties: promote love, intimacy, touch, couple-busting, individual and group (NOT COUPLE) awareness in a non-dyadic (anti-dyadic?) setting. Create spaces with support for speaking one's desire with radical freedom. Strive to create temporary autonomous zones with attention to the psychology and histories that keep us chained to violently straight/racist/ableist/classist/sexist/couple-based modes of relating. Spin the bottle, intimacy games, eye contact, touch, talk. Experiment with falling in love with the whole room! One barrier to these parties is their isolation in private architecture – less useful if we only reach our already-weird friends. Have more queerdo BBQs outside / in public / in spaces where you will be encountered and unignorable.

- Create a “sex-o-sphere” where people can come to have sex with others, so it doesn't feel like such a scare “resource”. Make it public and invite everyone.

- Subvert the architecture of coupling and turn it to our ends. Occupy courthouses / churches / marriage venues, distribute literature about building alternatives including “maps” of alternatives in conceptual and physical space.

- Disrupt weddings and wedding venues. Volunteer to officiate weddings and then bail! Pour menstrual blood on wedding dresses, stain them with dye from water guns. Play loud political music (don't forget, promiscuity, sex, pleasure are political) next door to weddings.

- Host un-weddings, anti-weddings, creative rituals and demonstrations to degrade the couple and promote autonomy.

- Hold funerals opposite weddings to mourn the death of the autonomy of the bride and groom, and their buy-in to (racist, sexist, classist) isolationist consumer capitalism.

- Turn isolationist authoritarian architecture into community space! Occupy a space to educate and care for and love people: Sisters Uncut in London occupied a closed prison and turned it into a

women's community space, demonstrated for more resources for women suffering from abuse. The Young Lords occupied a poorly managed Bronx hospital in 1970 for a day to make their demands of the public healthcare system heard. (Learn our history – this is a movement against monogamism and can only gain from becoming entwined with movements against intersecting oppressive systems of power).

- Teach people skills – for work, for navigating housing, healing, legal system, social world, etc. (and art, love, touch, communication, connection, eroticism) - aspects of life that are otherwise provided for by (sexist) partner-based divisions of labor. Throw workshops, discussion groups, teach-ins, and attend when other people offer to teach you something – there is space for mutual education every day.

### **Disrupt the infrastructure of monogamism**

- Move out of isolationist housing and into (more) communal housing. Build it, repurpose it, de-couple spaces and monogamist units. Strive to build physical and cultural alternatives to nuclear-family-focused suburbanism. Houses are emotional cages, let's escape them! No more cement boxes at the end of the cul-de-sac! Let's get rid of cars?

- Work for the commons – share kitchens, yards, streets, bedrooms. Critique “personal space” and seek value in communalizing it.

- Re-radicalize the queer tradition of “chosen family” and communal spaces as refuge / seed for transformation within anti-queer (anti-Black, anti-single, anti-woman, anti-trans, dehumanizing) society.

- Destroy or make useless records and commemorations of marriage. Position yourself in relation to the tradition of civil disobedience and rebellion – understand what you're willing to get taken to jail for, what you're willing to get hurt for, what damages you're willing to do and accept – and learn how to enact those effectively.

- Disrupt, destroy, and make more expensive harmful invasionist monogamist media: tear down billboards, interrupt filming of ads, movies. Be a thorn in the side of monogamist messengers.

- Continue the tradition of subvertising, ad-busting, billboard mapping/destroying/overlaying, stickering, graffiti – to obscure/subvert/replace monogamist messages.
- Boycott monogamist messaging (that's a big boycott!)
- Build "Libera-boratories": spaces literal and conceptual where the architecture of desire can map out what we currently lack. Depot-style community spaces to care for / connect with the whole person / whole community. Inter-generational. Write blueprints and then start building the communal infrastructure to replace the monogamist infrastructure. Commit yourself to improvement of these projects as a long-term (lifelong, multigenerational) process – which includes learning the history of such projects within radical social movements in the past and present.

### **Spread the message**

- Media + internet circumvent isolationist architecture – use them to our ends! But don't think they're complete. DON'T use your media presence to promote monogamism – don't identify as being coupled / familial unless it's functionally relevant (and then take care to emphasize associations of choice vs. those of need vs. those of convenience vs. those of coercion).
- Document and share the ways we challenge monogamism, the ways we live our desires, our queer and norm-breaking and radically-loving and autonomous joys.
- Make and share slogans, logos, t-shirts, patches, pins, tattoos, films, music.
- Mock marriage and "relationships" loudly, publicly, and in many venues – malls, events, wedding expos, wedding venues, literally every fucking gathering where that's all people talk about.
- Think about when you have captive audiences and where you have credibility and how you can use your privilege in those spaces to take risks in promoting anti-monogamism / liberatory relating.

- Take RA to work, on the bus, to the store, to holiday dinners, to every conversation: refuse to use couple-unit identifiers, refuse the assumptions of coupling, co-identification, co-responsibility, family, co-habitation - question them, defy them when they come up. Publicly reject marriage / escalator bullshit and share your joy in being outside of it. Showcase and celebrate narratives of anarchistic relating. Normalize anti-couple, anti-family, anti-natal rhetoric.

- Recruit through seduction – seduce the beloved, the engaged, the married, the bride, the groom, the seeking, and live your joy in ways they can't ignore. Disrupt spaces and cultures that rely on monogamist-focused standards of sex and intimacy. Go to sex addicts anonymous and share your queer RA joy!

- Educate young people about the world of possibilities outside of the relationship escalator. Go to where the kids are (literally, conceptually, aesthetically). Build + volunteer.

- Cuddle in public. Help others imagine non-dyadic possibilities by demonstrating them in public spaces.

- Be embedded in community and through that embed liberatory values in your community.

- Use intimacy as the powerful tool/message it is. Cuddle and fuck in front of pipeline construction, occupy old growth and have an orgy in the canopy. Do not compartmentalize the modes of resistance to hegemony and divisive capitalist violence.

### **Redistribute resources to make monogamy obsolete**

- Support people recovering from monogamy! Speak about monogamy frankly as a damaging behavioral pattern that humans are trapped in by their attempts to satisfy their needs in a situation of artificial scarcity and incredible social pressure.

- Write/run 12 step-style programs for those trying to quit monogamy. Throw retreats, rehab functions, support groups.

- Provide social (and maybe eventually financial) marriage insurance, to support people leaving marriages with food, clothes, housing, health care, money, safety measures, addiction resources, employment (example of Rebel Nell in Detroit – jewelry workshop focused on employing women with barriers to employment.)
- Show up at divorce court with a pennant and streamers and cheers (and a hot meal, and info on resources, and a ride home, and a shoulder to cry on, and a joke to laugh about).
- Fucking support people. Strengthen your non-dyadic social networks so that monogamy becomes less attractive/necessary. Provide housing + survival resources. Provide reparations.
- Replace isolationist couple-dependent practices with community-supporting-individual focused practices. Example: Power of attorney + Healthcare advocacy + advanced directives for non-coupled people. There could be RA projects to educate and help people prepare these, to network people with friends or strangers who could be trustworthy advocates/POAs, to run events to allow the non-coupled to find advocates in their community, build care and trust.
- Work takes time and bodies. Don't underestimate this. Find reliable volunteers. Be reliable volunteers.
- Normalize provision of resources OUTSIDE of consumer capitalism – squat, dumpster, liberate food / clothes / shelter and share the bounty.
- Build spaces to find intimacy that operate outside of dating/escalator life. Example of Rainbros in Atlanta, gay-focused organization with mentorship and group activities (joy, exercise, learning) as alternative to normative gay spaces.
- Share love with incarcerated people! Build community that includes people behind bars and people newly freed. Send love letters and naked pictures to prisons. Bail people out. Offer (vegan) pizza and coffee to folks just being released. Give love and support to the loved ones of incarcerated folks.

Re-direct  
your  
attention to  
**ABUNDANCE**

# Making Candles

We poured the wax -

your breath slips into me  
and mixes with theirs.

I smell everyone's body at once.

In turns we kissed  
more or less as passionately -

we poured the wax and waited

for solid pieces to form out of liquid.  
Eight hands, if you're counting.

(No one's counting.)

Her breath tastes  
like a burning forest,

his like a made bed.

Someone said I smell like waiting  
and rain. Their hands

led mine, flowed as one, molten -

everybody take one. They're small  
but will give enough light

to find our way.

*(first published in Open Palm Print)*



Relationship Anarchy is...

CREATING LONG-TERM  
COMMUNITIES OF PEOPLE  
LOVING + RELATING FREELY.  
THAT I'M FREE TO LOVE WHO I  
WANT. WHEN I WANT. HOW I WANT  
WITHOUT BEING CONTROLLED BY  
OTHERS. • ASSERTING + FOLLOWING  
MY HEARTS DESIRES WITHOUT  
JUDGEMENT / SHAME / GUILT.  
CHALLENGING SYSTEMS OF POWER +  
OPPRESSION IN MY RELATIONSHIPS  
AND IN THE WORLD. • BREAKING  
DOWN TABOOS TO ALLOW PEOPLE  
TO LOVE. TOUCH + FUCK FREELY  
AS THEY WANT TO (OR DON'T).  
CELEBRATING INTERDEPENDENCE  
WHILE BUILDING AUTONOMY.  
OPEN POSSIBILITIES FOR NEW  
WAYS OF RELATING. • NOURISHING  
SELF + OTHERS. • GETTING TO  
IMAGINE + CREATE +  
EXPERIMENT WITH MY OWN  
UNIQUE IDEAL WAYS • FOR  
(DE)STRUCTURING MY RELATIONSHIPS