Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power
Edited by Jamie Heckert, Richard Cleminson
(2011) Routledge, 238pp

Jamie Heckert is a founding member of the Anarchist Studies Network and the editor of two collections of perspectives on anarchism and sexuality – a special issue of Socialities (2016) and Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power (2011) co-edited with Richard Cleminson.

Anarchism & Sexuality is described by the co-editors as “a set of serious, sustained engagements with the complex terrain between anarchism and the politics and practice of sexuality...a collection of passionate, provocative papers that incite the reader to recognize the relevance of anarchist ideas to queer and feminist sexual politics.”

Heckert and Cleminson further clarify their intentions as: “first, to make fresh anarchist perspectives available; second, to make a queer and feminist intervention within the most recent waves of anarchism scholarship; and, third, to make a quietly anarchist contribution to social justice literature, policy and practice” (p1).

Anarchism & Sexuality consists of a collection of works, many of which have origins in a 2006 conference and workshop convened on the same theme, which are interwoven with four “poetic interludes” and an interview with Judith Butler – whose book Gender Trouble (1990) fundamentally challenged the way we conceptualise gender – relating her work to dialogues around anarchism.

We would like to thank Jamie for this opportunity for exchange and for the speed and generosity with which he responded to our questions – themselves the result of divergent exchanges following engagement with this collection of works and discussions around the issues they raise.

Tracey McLennan/ Gordon Asher: One of the aims of both the ‘Anarchism & Sexuality’ conference and the book, is that they were intended to provide a space for academics and activists to be together and to learn from each other.

This aim is picked up by Gavin Brown in his contribution ‘Amnestia and Anarchism in the Creation of Autonomous Queer Spaces’ where he discusses his concerns about how his presentation would be received by the more “activist” elements of the audience” (p201).

Throughout the book, is “activist” used to convey ‘experience-based writings’, perhaps not formalised as Participatory Action Research, or more infrastructure-based action, which includes activist organisations, regular workshops and conferences, publications and social gatherings?

Do you that there is a clear distinction between activists and academics, specifically with regard to the complex relationships between anarchism and the politics and practices of sexuality?

If so, how do you interpret what is meant across the book by “activists” in terms of engagement outwith academia?

As one of the editors, alongside Richard Cleminson, how do you perceive the book to approach any such division?

When does academic exploration/ criticality – in the form of ‘queer theory’, anarchist studies – connect with contemporary sexual activism, politics and practices aiming at the realisation of sexual equality and justice?

Jamie Heckert: Thank you for starting off with such key questions? I’ve long been interested in these different identities: activist and academic. And they do fit together interestingly with queer theory which likes to shake up questions like “are you one of these or one of those?” So no, I don’t feel there is a clear distinction between activists and academics. These labels are not truths of selves anymore than ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’. Each of us has complex thoughts and feelings, desires and behaviours. We all have effects on the world around us, of which we are a part. So, I suspect when Gavin was writing about his concern, he was aware of the normativity that goes with these identities. Just as societies of control function, in part, by getting us to worry about whether we are ‘real men’ or ‘real women’, with a clear line in between, the same can go for academic and activist. Obviously, right, if you are a real activist, you can’t be an academic and vice versa. Or so they say. Sometimes...

When we are attached to either identity, or both, we might look to others for reassurance that we are contributing to our communities. And of course, that feedback can be invaluable. However, not being attached to either identity can lead to a more relaxed and selfless form of service. Not worry about being either a ‘good activist’ or ‘proper academic’ (or trying to do both at once) frees up a lot of energy to simply contribute to the wellbeing of others. And what we need for wellbeing may not be what we think. Contributions can be surprising, strange, queer – neither good nor proper, expanding our understanding of what both scholarship and other forms of organising and creating can involve. Working with the contributions to this book have certainly done that for me, and I am deeply grateful.

At the same time, labels and identities have some use, as long as we don’t take them too seriously. And so sometimes in this book, activist is used to refer to people involved in social movements who don’t necessarily spend a lot of time engaging with the kind of political theory you find in university library books. Oh, activists read, of course! I was just at the Anarchist Bookfair in London with it’s thousands of participants and many more thousands of books and, magazines and zines. But apart from those of us who are also involved in academia, they don’t tend to write articles for peer reviewed journals. So the word ‘activist’ is used in the book in various ways to recognize those differences. And when some of us get into a university in one way or open the doors, it can be amazing to share that space with people who have diverse ways of engaging with social change, different ways of writing and speaking, and to listen to and learn from each other.

This book is very much a product of those queer, liminal spaces. It’s not either an academic book or an activist book. It’s both/and, and, and, and! The writing comes from, and contributes to, thoughtful activism and engaged scholarship. It’s less about categories and more about connections. In the book, queer theory and anarchist studies, interwoven with ethnographic, biographic and literary storytelling, work to nurture a sense of imagination, to see not only what might be possible, sexually and socially, but also what already is. Too often, politics is focused on the future, and what is missing in the present. Perhaps awakening to the beauty and vitality of life, even with what we call the state and capitalism around, is even more radical. This book does that in many ways: bringing attention to the potential playfulness of power (Lewis Call), the revolutionary nature of love (Laurence Davis), the diverse ecology of contemporary queer autonomous spaces (Gavin Brown, Marta Kolárová & Kristina Weaver), the erotic nature of nature (Helen Moore) and the wealth of historical and theoretical inspirations available to us (Jenny Alexander, Judith Butler, Lena Eckert, Judy Greenaway & Stephen Shinakitsu). Even the very painful and/or angry autobiographical pieces (Fergus Evans, Jamie Heckert & Tom Leonard) have their beauty.

TMGA: Among the aims of the conference that gave rise to the book were “to bring the rich and diverse traditions of anarchist thought and practice into contact with contemporary questions about the politics and lived experience of sexuality.” Both in style and in content, the book is conceived as aiming to question, subvert and overthrow authoritarian divisions. From these points, can we ask you about the choice of fiction in Laurence Davis’s contribution ‘Love and Revolution in Le Guin’s Four Ways to Forgiveness’, and Lewis Call’s ‘Structures of Desire: Postanarchist Kink in the Speculative Fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany’.

Do you have any thoughts on whether more contemporary fiction may have made the book more involving for non-academics? For example, questions of imbalance of (male) power, sexuality and ethics are explored in much contemporary popular vampire fiction – with (predominately female) humans occupying what is often an uncomfortably physically weaker and submissive/submissive/submissive/submissive/submissive/submissive/submissive/submissive/submissive position. As Caitlin Brown writes: “The power dynamic of male vamp/ female human is in fact uniquely set up for the possibilities of subversion and exploration of the nature of power in any male/female relationship. It is a preconfigured metaphor for the dominance of men within society and the value capitalist to this power imbalance available open to women.”

Contemporary vampire fiction has also covered subjects such as alternative approaches to sex and relationships. The fourth series of True Blood makes an attempt at covering the subject of polyamory – consensual, responsible non-monogamy – between the vampires themselves and in a relationship between a human woman and her male vampire boyfriends.

To what extent do you feel that the book, both in style and content, achieves its aims...
to “question, subvert and overform authoritarian divisions... between seemingly mutually exclusive activism and scholarship; between forms of expression such as poetry and prose”? How do the contributions begin to address these issues of academia and the limitations of academic publishing (beyond the recognised limitations of its current hardback format)?

JH: You know, Jesse Cohn, the anarchist literary theorist, and I half talked about writing something together about the race, class, gender and sexual politics of *True Blood*. But I must admit, I lost interest early in the second series. It seemed to me to lose some of its emotional and political subtlety and rely more on the shock factor of gore and violence. So I’ve not caught up on the whole polyamorous plot. But I am curious. Maybe I’ll give it a look.

Clearly there is value in a popular cultural pedagogy that engages with material that people are already reading or watching and I’d be delighted to see folk developing that in relation to anarchism and sexuality. Would that have attracted more non-academics to the book? I don’t know. I do know that Lewis Call and Laurence Davis have written beautifully engaging essays inviting readers to engage with literature they may not already know. Of course, Ursula Le Guin is pretty famous (and contemporary as far as I’m concerned!), especially for her anarchist classic *The Dispossessed* and her genderqueer feminist one, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. These examples of political science fiction are only the tip of the iceberg of the tremendous body of work she has produced a lifetime. Davis brings to our attention one of her lesser-known works linking it with a contemporary questions around love, violence and radical social and personal transformations. I had already *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (Particularly around how power might be used for good ends rather than necessarily something positive) picked up in both Jenny Alexander’s *Alexander Berkman: Sexual Dissidence in the First Wave Anarchist Movement & Its Subsequent Narratives*, and a question is raised as to why should “emotionally significant deep attachments where those concerned choose not to share bodily fluids be deemed less socially significant than the ‘bounded states’” (p39) If intimacy rather than sex is important, and attachments that don’t include sex between non-blood relatives are of equal importance, how then might attachments between humans and non-humans be seen? (Particularly around how power might be used in an ethical way when there is no power is so much in favour of the human side of the connection.)

JH: Wonderful question! For most of our evolution as a species, attachment to non-humans has been incredibly important. It takes a lot of effort to create mass confusion that exists placing humans outside of nature. We, too, are animals. So, yes, let us consider that relationships with particular non-humans, whether companion animals or trees, and with the non-human world more broadly. Gavin writes about this a bit in his chapter when he talks about Queer Pagan Camp and the relationships there with land and spirit. The developing field of ecopsychology has a lot to offer here, too, in making space for the non-human world and its interseccions of anarchist, feminist and indigenous politics. The second part of your question intrigues me. I admit I immediately and intuitively think about the way in which climate change highlights that humans aren’t quite so powerful as we like to imagine. We cannot control the nonhuman world because we are only a small part of it. Sure, we’re influential, but we’re not in charge. Where is the balance of power here?

I’ll also let Bakunin answer this. “[Human beings suffer from] a nostalgia for which there is no remedy upon earth except as it is to be found in the enlightenment of the spirit – some ability to have a perceptive rather than an exploitative relationship with his [sic] fellow creatures.”

TM/GA: Could you comment, particularly with regard to the balance of power here, on significant and deep relationships between human- and non-human animals? Further, is the claim that by treating animals badly we build up habits that will lead to us treating humans badly. And vice versa. So, yes, I certainly agree that treating non-human beings as beings without rights and without the desire to control or the belief that one knows better what’s best for them is the key to treating humans badly relevant? It will lead to us treating humans badly relevant? By treating animals badly we build up habits that will lead to us treating humans badly? And vice versa.

JH: Relationships are relationships. Nurturing a capacity for sensitivity in any relationship will affect others. And vice versa. So yes, I certainly agree that treating non-human beings as beings without rights and without the desire to control or the belief that one knows better what’s best for them is the key to treating humans badly relevant? It will lead to us treating humans badly relevant? By treating animals badly we build up habits that will lead to us treating humans badly? And vice versa.

With regard to the first question, I’m not
Simon Fairlie has made some pretty compelling arguments about the potential of sailing ships? When we look at things like nut trees so that those of us who prefer to eat the nuts we don't intentionally have any in our homes. They live all around us and have evolved with us. We cannot escape this intimacy, but we can cherish it.

Jenny Alexander relates to how their use can be associated with activism and anarchy. She highlights the role of playfulness in queer movements. Like Emma Goldman, she discusses the importance of labels for positive reasons – identifying as an outsider can bring the benefit of support from other outsiders and provide a way of dealing with spending time in what might otherwise be a hostile environment. However, an effect of this can also be that those same labels may “inhibit transformations of consciousness or social relations” (p160) – labels limiting and constraining how people think and act.

Gavin Brown – ‘Amateurism and Anarchism in the Creation of Autonomous Queer Spaces’ – writes of his worries about being labeled overly intellectual by the activist members of the 2006 conference audience. He also says, “...and wondered how the more ‘activist’ elements of the audience might react to my attempt to uncover impulses toward autonomy in a range of spaces beyond activist circuits.” (p201)

Sexual identity is a personal, public and social construct. Labels pathologise, prejudice and discriminate against... and labels are adopted, adjusted, and reconfigured in the social imaginary. Sexual practices have impacts on those who participate in them and on the societies in which they are done. Why does the conference book seek to specifically focus on anarchism in terms of its relation to sexuality, when most notions of sexualities apparently sit productively within neo-liberalism? In what (anarchist) political way can lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual perspectives, queer perspectives and approaches, be said to be distinctive? JH: For starters, the relationship between a diversity of sexualities and neo-liberalism isn’t so clear cut. Yeah, there are many ways in which the impulse toward LGBTQ liberation has been diverted by the attractions of privilege and profit. That’s understandable when we are seduced by the confusion of individualism. And it kind of works for some people. We suggest anarchism is a rich tradition of resources that can help everyone have the kind of freedom and well-being that capitalism promises that can never deliver, not even to the so-called 1%.

While the labels of LGBTQ have been taken up by hierarchical institutions, the impulse for liberation has been left behind. Emma Goldman spoke of this many years ago: “Individuality is not to be confused with the various ideas and concepts of individualism, much less with that ‘rigged individualism’ which is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his [sic] individuality. So-called individualism is the social and economic laissez faire, the exploitation of the masses by the classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit, which process is known as education.” That corrupt and perverse ‘individualism’ is the straight-jacket of individuality. It has converted life into a degrading race for exteriors, for possession, for social prestige and supremacy.

If someone believes that externals are what makes for a good life, they may well throw themselves in with 100% liberalism. Anarchism potentially offers something deeper. (I say potentially because interpretations of anarchism sometimes get caught up in that great distraction of resentment.) Anarchism emphasises freedom and equality, individuality and community. Nathan Jun has summarised this as vitality, which certainly describes the life of Emma Goldman. And while Sheila Rowbotham is correct to say that we can’t all be Emma Goldman, we can each be vital, vibrant, full of life in our own ways. And we can help each other to do this.

Is there something distinctive about LGBTQ contributions to anarchic politics? Probably yes, but not necessarily. Ben Shepard, for example, highlights the role of playfulness in queer anarchism politics. And while you don’t have to think of yourself as queer to be playful, there is something nowhere outside the normative about adults playing in streets or on the picketline. Like Emma Goldman, we want dancing in our revolutions. And like Ursula Le Guin, we want loving in our revolutions. Queer approaches to anarchism also include playing with gender, sexuality and intimacy. They may also involve a seriousness around painful experiences of gender/sexual/racial violence. Anarchism, like any ism, has the potential to become rigid, dogmatic. To keep it vital, we can each bring our own experiences, our own truth, our own individuality. The labels might fall away.

Laurence Davis’s ‘Love and Revolution in Le Guin’s Four Ways to Forgiveness’, describes a slave character within Le Guin’s work. The character is shunned by her own people and sexually abused by her captors. Over time, she starts to identify strongly with these masters. She has no agency to avoid spending so much time in their company and so being intimate with...
them, that in order to cope, she starts to identify with them – seemingly to redress the power imbalance, to access the power accorded to the male protagonists. (p117) Later in the books, her circumstances change again and she becomes a writer and speaker, campaigning for freedom for the oppressed. (p118)

Throughout ‘Anarchism & Sexuality’ there was an affirmation of how difficult it is for individuals and groups to change how they act and respond with regard to ethical thinking and feeling about the role of sexuality. A plurality of oppressions resonates through institutional and state forms. How is the impact of the social environment has on people, institutional and state forms. How is the impact with regard to ethical thinking and feeling about groups to change how they act and respond for the oppressed. (p118)

He goes on to describe a relationship between two characters from Octavia Butler’s Patternist series. The relationship starts with Doro forcing another character, Anyanwu, to submit to him. She does so in order to avoid being killed. Over time “she learns to eroticise the power relations which exist between her and Doro”. (p141) The relationship between Doro and Anyanwu is described as an ethical relationship desired by both parties. However, there is little in the paper that explains how this can be so. Anyanwu’s change in viewpoint could be seen as the psychological fallout from having to repeatedly submit to the will of another in order to remain alive. In this extreme imbalance of power, Anyanwu appears incapable of sustaining any individuality. Her own opposing wishes and agency is completely overtaken by the control which Doro exerts over them; a control of all of her actions and restriction of her choices.

Could you say more about this “exploration of the nature of power in any male/female relationship” as a political practice? That some people have and others do not. And that this response to this power imbalance available open to women?”

JH: Have you read Wild Seed? It’s incredible! And I think Lewis is spot on in his reading of what appears to be a paradox. How could Anyanwu love someone who could kill her? I’m not sure the story is about a power imbalance between women and men as that would suggest power is an object that some people have and others do not. And that reading is understandable. Doro can kill at will. Nothing can stop that. At least, perhaps, love. Lewis suggests a poststructuralist reading of power, not as a noun but as a verb. It’s not something you have, it’s something you do. And there are different ways to do it. Doro’s practice of power is state power – power over life. And he is a beautifully tragic character, unable to find love because he desires control. Anyanwu is a shape-changer who learns she does not have to be afraid. She practices power from below. Yin, rather than yang. And in doing so, disarms Doro. What an anarchist!

TM/GA: ‘Anarchism and Polyamory’ – a collection of writings on the theory and practice of open relationships from an anarchist perspective – sees anarchism as “a political practice that challenges mainstream economic, social and political power relationships, and polyamory as a similar challenge to the mainstream view of romantic relationships. In ‘Anarchism & Sexuality’, polyamory is discussed by Marta Kolárová in her contribution ‘Sexuality issues in the Czech anarchist movement’. Both works raise a question regarding pressure to conform to social norms from within anarchist movements. Kolárová describes how polyamory is frowned upon amongst Czech anarchist movements: ‘Anarchists practising polyamory have been criticised by others. This form of social control in the movement has pushed multiple relationships to dissolve and shamed individuals into returning to monogamy.’ (p118)

Social pressures around conforming to polyamory in UK anarchist groups are described in ‘Anarchism & Polyamory’ in Sour Mango Powder’s contribution ‘Let them eat cake: Anarchist polyamory theory and reality’, where the author describes pressure put on women to engage in sexual relationships with what he describes as “in-group dominant males.” (p27)

Discussion of the pressure to conform is continued in ‘The rise of polyamory: leftist men’s self-serving cure all for sexism’ where the author “Lost Clown” describes her break away from being a polyamorist because the power imbalance existing between men and women in anarchist movements in the 1960s meant that for women polyamory resulted in them not being “seen as human, but as sexual chattel.” (p144)

Given these explanations of different potential tensions between anarchism and polyamory, could you comment on whether you are aware of such issues existing in UK anarchist groups? – and if so, how they have been, or could be, addressed?

JH: I helped organise a session called ‘Love, Sex & Anarchy’ at the Anarchist Bookfair in London last year. Three of us gave short talks on different aspects of the theme – including sexual violence, the meaning of queer, and polyamory – to introduce the session. Nearly all of the questions that followed focused on the latter. How do you cope with jealousy? How do you manage time? Why does it seem so hard to love? So yeah, clearly a monogamy and polyamory are key issues for folk in anarchist networks here in the UK.

My concerns is when polyamory becomes normative in anarchist circles. As if having multiple romantic, loving and/or sexual relationships is a way to establish one’s anarchist identity or credentials. ‘Hey, look at me, I’m liberated.’ This is the flipside to that 1960s (and ongoing) feminist critique you highlighted, where so-called sexual liberation becomes sexual harassment. ‘Hey, baby, what’s the matter? I thought you were liberated.’

Now, Laura Stacey-Fortwood, writing about the US anarchist movement, has argued that sexual anarchonormativity can be ‘wielded strategically’: ‘There is power in identity.... Where the disciplinary power of anarchonormativity is used to promote a queer critique of hegemonic sexuality, and thus makes life more livable for those whose desires are repressed by dominant institutions and discourses, it has positive political potential. Where such power is used to generate new forms of repression or to foreclose relationships of solidarity or to distract from efforts to combat material oppressions, it is less strategically sound.‘

She and I are in disagreement here. I’m not convinced that a new normativity, a new conformity, is necessary to displace old ones. My personal preference is generally to focus on common ground in a way that allows appreciation for difference without becoming either the truth of the self or the other. Monogamous or polyamorous, gay, bi or straight, or living across or outside these categories, we all experience challenges in our intimate relationships. Things push our buttons. We get excited, or scared. We love.

I see the question of how to undermine, subvert or overflow heteronormativity as intertwined with the same questions about capitalism. In a recent critical engagement with the book Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, Gabriel Kuhn comments on the narrow, and controversial, definition of anarchism given by the authors. Rather than suggesting there is one true path to dismantling capitalism, an anarchonormativity which can be wielded strategically, Gabriel argues, “the answer cannot be to only organize with anarchists we have no
disagreements with the challenge for anarchist organizing rather seems to develop forms of organization that permit the exercise of power from a destructive threat to a productive tool. This is tremendously difficult, but I think it is the only chance we have.

So for me, an anarchist politics promotes neither monogamy nor polyamory, but provides spaces and practices for us to notice how we might get along in our fears or desires leading us to pressure others. Anarchism, ultimately, is the faith that we can all get along with each other without anyone having to be in control. This requires a great capacity for sensitivity, empathy and communication regardless of whether or how we might label our relationships. These are capacities we can nurture in ourselves and each other.

**TM/GA:** Christian Klesse in ‘Notions Of Love In Polyamory - Elements In A Discourse On Multiple Love Relationships’ writes “Survey data collected on USA polyamory communities affirms the educated nature and advanced class-position and ethnically/racially exclusive nature of polyamory communities, an image which is reproduced in most publications on polyamory.”

Could you say something about the subjectivities and inequalities at work in different relationship practices – for instance, how socio-economic disparities impact the power dynamics of any possible relationship?

Do you think critical discourses of relationship, for instance, help us to address such power dynamics, as regards anarchist emphases on communication, respect and equalization of individual capacities? For instance, help us to address such power dynamics, including making integrity, reciprocity and equality?

**JH:** I’m sure there are many ways to answer these questions, and other more central anarchist myths might offer a different approach, but for me, in this moment, the most immediate response is the ways in which the class system depends upon and encourages the delusions of scarcity, superiority and inferiority. Capitalism is, in part, a belief that there isn’t enough to go around, so the only way to be okay in life is to compete and hoard. Critical theorists have pointed out, it is the systems of distribution and ownership we call capitalism that itself creates this apparent scarcity. However, knowing this intellectually isn’t the same as knowing it emotionally. And so many of us learn, in all levels of the class system, that love is something you should earn or deserve by being good enough, that it’s something you fight for and, once won, must defend against challengers. Now, it might well be easier for those who trust that the world will look after them, without needing to fight or struggle, to be openhearted. Class or racial privilege might be one source of this trust. And oppression can shut people down emotionally, as they learn to believe themselves inferior and not worth listening to, trusting or believing. They/we learn not to listen to ourselves.

I suspect there is also something about mobility and meeting people who support leaning into norms that don’t work for you. I’m sure I would have had very different experiences of love and intimacy if education hadn’t helped me find a way out of the small village of my youth. Finding people who listen to you, who believe in you can make it easier for me to believe in myself.

Gordon, I once heard you refer to class struggle as the “struggle against class.” I like that, though I would offer a different version: let go of the belief in class. I don’t mean ignore the way in which differential access to resources affects bodies and minds differently. I do mean learning to relate to each other as equals despite the collective delusion that some people are better than others.

**TM/GA:** A clear theme in the book is how hard it is for those engaged in fighting for social change to change themselves. In the preface of the book, Judy Greenway is quoted saying that: “It is easier to theorise and to talk about what we would like to be than to talk about what we are” (Greenway 1975/6).

There is an echo of this sentiment in ‘On Anarchism: An Interview with Judith Butler’ when Butler describes the State as “a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour, we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.” (p95)

In ‘Nobody Knows What an Insurgent Body Can Do: Questions for Affective Resistance’, Stephen Shukaitis explores the issue of how women engaged in childcare tend to be excluded from left activist groups. This is continued in ‘Love and Revolution in Le Guin’s Four Ways to Forgiveness’ when Laurence Davis discusses the Spanish Civil War, saying that “In order to win, we have to believe that the answer might be ‘yes’. Hearing and repeating feminist critiques of macho behaviour in anarchist spaces, I know I’m not the only one facing these challenges.” (p10) You also talk about attending non-violent communication courses and deliberately taking care over who you interacted with during the stressful period of writing up your PhD.

**JH:** In ‘Fantasies of an Anarchist Sex Educator’, you give an honest, mindful account of your own struggles describing how, in spite of distrusting – with good reason – the drawing of lines between the good guys and the bad guys, you still find yourself doing it. (p10) And again when you talk about how “ask for help is one of the aspects of anarch I find most difficult to practise. For mutual aid to be truly mutual is to acknowledge vulnerability. Dammit, that’s just not how I was raised! And to ask, rather than demand, is to accept that the answer might be ‘no’. Hearing and repeating feminist critiques of macho behaviour in anarchist spaces, I know I’m not the only one facing these challenges.” (p10/1)

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The first axiom of queer theory is “People are different from each other.”

Let’s honour that and be gentle with ourselves and each other.

For me, I’ve learned so much about freedom from non-violent communication, permaculture, yoga and meditation. This could be dismissed as ‘mere lifestyle’ when clearly what we need is organisation. My question about that is, what enables organisation to work and what makes it fall apart so many anarchist groups and other efforts at creating alternative systems fall apart because people have trouble working together.

That’s okay. It’s not easy. It’s very easy to get attached to the idea of being right, to decide in advance how things should be or which ideas are better than others. It can be challenging to let go of that, to notice that belief and ideas can be helpful but don’t need to be given too much attention, to listen to something deeper, subtler. Listening to the body and mind, to the land and to others are at the root of anarchism (and sexuality), for me. Everything else follows from that.

**Notes**

2 http://www.temprelines.com/troubled-goose-poly.html
7 http://www.insef.uk.gov/isef/
8 See, e.g., http://encyclopedia.journal.edu/
13 http://www.sageoforestry.co.uk/trusted.html
14 http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/1/ gay-club-scen
15 http://shuandmac.pitzer.edu/ANARCHIST_ARCHIVES/goldmanindiv.html
17 Mingues, p.20
18 http://www.insef.uk.gov/isef/
21 http://www.radicalbooks.co.uk/product/dysophia-4-lapril-2010-anarchist-polyamory
22 Can also be read here: http://dysophia.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/polyamory4_l_web.pdf
23 http://www.radio4all.net/index.php/program/49503
25 http://www.anarchist-studies.org/node/529
26 Laboratory 2011. Vol. 3, no. 2:4-25