

COLLECTIVE CARE +
AUTONOMY 101!
A MINI-ZINE



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AUTONOMY IS THE PROMISE OF FINDING OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER OVER AND OVER AGAIN · IT IS A REALITY THAT WE HAVE LIVED IN PARTS · A VISION THAT WE COLLECTIVELY SHAPE · A DREAM THAT WE LONG TO FULFILL · AND EVEN WHEN THEY TRY TO TWIST US TO FIT THEIR CONTORTED DESIRES WE WILL ALWAYS FIND RUPTURES · EMERGING SPACES, A NEW BREATH, ANOTHER CHANCE TO BE WHOLE.

I. On Autonomy

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Part of how autonomy is defined is:

- **a collective means of living/a form of relationship that strives to be explicitly non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian in its decision-making processes**
- **anyone can and should be able to plug in based on their abilities and capacity**
- **a commitment to combat and challenge all forms of oppression, an integration of communal care practices and mutual aid + mutual investment, and creating spaces for people to be their full selves (in ways that aren't violent towards others) without fear, shame, or threat**

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Autonomy can really just mean the ability to be your full self, to fulfill your needs to the best of your understanding and ability (unfortunately, this is sometimes used to promote hyper-individualism).

Within the context of anarchism, autonomy extends towards communal and collective care via skill-sharing (self-defense training, propaganda creation), material aid, and mutual investment. Autonomy in anarchism is always reaching towards horizontalism and the dismantling of violent hierarchies, as well as liberation from the domination of the carceral state apparatus (which means the abolition of borders, states, and prisons).

For anarchists, defending autonomy means challenging the dynamics of domination wherever they show up.



*THIS IS
AUTONOMOUS
PRAXIS*

- mutual aid
- direct action
- community care
- leaderless, consensus-based, capacity-centered organizing

*THIS IS ALSO
AUTONOMOUS
PRAXIS*

- creating boundaries
- following your heart's desires
- choosing yourself first
- acknowledging the power already within you
- witchcraft

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II. Between Anxiety and Danger

Over time, especially under the daily impact of hierarchies of violence and oppression, our bodies may develop very similar responses to both the anticipation of catastrophe and also the immediate need to respond to threat or danger.

These responses can be deeply rooted in past trauma that we have experienced, whether or not we can clearly identify or articulate those experiences.



Offer: Breathing Exercise
(via @decolonizingtherapy, Dr. Jennifer Mullan)

Breathe in for a count of 7.
Hold for a count of 3.
Breathe out for a count of 9.
Repeat as needed.

When we exhale for a longer period of time than we inhale, it immediately signals to our vagal nerve to help ground and calm our body.

Offer:
Worst case, best case, middle-of-the-road

We are wired to remember negative experiences more intensely than positive experiences, and this can lead us to think catastrophically about future events, only planning for the worst-case scenario. If you have only thought of the worst-case, can you allow yourself to envision also the best-case?

Can you imagine a middle-of-the-road between the two? This often matches the most likely outcome.

Here are some additional questions we can use to check-in with ourselves when we are starting to feel a sense of anxiety around a situation:

- Where are my body and lived experience telling me to create boundaries around this situation?
- How is my body trying to protect me?
- Do I need to respond with immediacy, or am I sensing a longer-term risk that I can find ways to be more ready for?



MEET YOURSELF WHERE
YOU ARE

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III. Building Collective Care

**To me, care looks like:
(feel free to doodle, sketch, diagram, write!)**

Ways in which I like to express care for myself:

Ways in which I like to express care for others:

I feel grounded when:

**You can use nicknames or initials for security
:)**

**These are the people who I can be honest with,
who I feel seen by, and who hold space for my
complexities:**

I am my fullest self when:

**These are the people who have shown up for
me consistently:**

**I trust these people enough to be my fullest self
around them:**

**These are the people I would like to build
affinity with:**

Check-In:

- **What is most intimate to my experience?**
- **Where do my values align with others?**
- **What is my positionality in relationship to each person I connect with?**
- **Where do our experiences resonate - where do we share joy?**
- **How does our shared and collective knowledge allow us to build together?**

Double-Check:

- **Does the work I want to do already exist? Who is organizing it?**
- **Where do I stand in relationship to this type of work (positionality)?**
- **If the work is not intimate to my own experience, what does my participation look like - if any at all? Otherwise, how can I help to amplify those voices, perspectives, and efforts?**

Material Aid Ideas

There may already be groups doing this work near you

This list is not comprehensive by any means (higher risk actions & projects are not included here for obvious reasons) just places to begin

Share food • Support with house work • Child care • Organize fundraisers for material needs (housing/rent, food, medical costs, transportation, etc.) • Support friends with navigating medical industrial complex • Skill-share (house or car repairs, technical design knowledge, job application and resume support, self-defense training etc.) • Car-sharing and driving • Cook for someone or bring food • Create and distribute art for events/agitprop;) • Connect asks to offers • Signal boost direct-to-person fundraisers • Court support • Collect and distribute supplies to housing encampments and for disaster preparation and relief

IV: Navigating Despair: Notes for the Journey

via @subversive.thread

1) It's okay to let the distant future be unknown if we know we are building what we can now. There are no one-size-fits-all "solutions" for the future which do not foreclose on the possibility of liberation by shackling it to hierarchy. We have to challenge ourselves to think about the future as a way of aspiring toward possibilities rather than feeling attached to the "successes" or failures of systems and institutions that we didn't create and that don't seek our liberation. For us, we began to ask "What if pockets of the future already exist alongside the present? What if people have been organizing autonomously already? Could we connect with them? Is there a history of autonomous organizing? What if our future depends less on something distant and more on how well we are cultivating what exists in the margins where we live?"

2) It's okay to say no to the types of organizing that drain our capacity to organize around what brings us joy. All capitalist institutions are inherently ableist. By extension, organizing spaces that haven't divested from a capitalist work ethic make sustainable organizing impossible. They set expectations that produce burnout and replicate the same exploitation they say they want to destroy. If we begin to see ourselves not as disposable objects to be used up in the struggle for liberation but as people worthy of liberation too, then it becomes rational to say no to the types of organizing that constantly ask us to martyr ourselves.

All liberatory struggles are struggles for life, joy, and connection — not despair and not death.

3) It's okay to listen to our bodies, to make space to be sad, to grieve, and to heal. Our bodies hold the collective wisdom of our ancestors. We can begin disrupting the ableism of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy by listening to them. When we are feeling alienated, our bodies are telling us that building community is vital to our individual and collective survival. When we are burned out, our bodies are telling us that there is more work to do than can we possibly do alone. And when we want to give up, our bodies are communicating a need to rest that doubles as a reminder that we need communities in struggle that can step up when we need to step back and heal.

4) It's okay to make boundaries that respect our limited capacity as individuals. No matter what we do, there will usually be more than one right choice to make — and as individuals we cannot make them all. One person didn't create the oppression we are fighting, so we shouldn't expect an individual to end it either. When we expect too much from ourselves or our small communities of resistance, we replicate the oppressor's world for them by replicating the ableism that fuels it. If we feel small or alone, it is not a testament to our inability to make a difference as individuals — it is a testament to the need for community and connection, to build the places where we can realize our full potential as communities in struggle together.

5) It's okay to prioritize building with the people you've built affinity with and who understand your needs. We've been told that it's our task as radicals to "radicalize the people" too — without much regard for our own mental health and capacity. But there are no truly safe spaces in a world of hierarchy and domination. The large majority of our time is navigating, interacting with, and finding small ways to push back against people with harmful perspectives. Family, co-workers, people on the street — most of these people have perspectives that are opposed to ours, that are hurting us. But we're forced to engage with many of these people because the alternative is to be punished, to lose our livelihood, to be outed and targeted. We're always already doing the work because we have no choice.

How does creating boundaries not make sense for our safety and sanity? What's wrong with being very intentional and deliberate with the people we actually want to build with — who want to build with us, who honor our time and our full selves? What's wrong with building between people who actually bring meaning to our lives and who spending time with is generative rather than depleting?

These are the people who have shown us that mutual compassion is the most sustainable form of resistance, and that we do not need to "convince the masses" or sacrifice ourselves to create substantive change.

In what we build with each other we are demonstrating that a better world is not only possible, it's happening.

Check-in:

- What does it mean to create boundaries that respect our existence?**
- How do we balance our work of resistance in a way that also leaves room for a liveable life?**

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE, AND YOU ARE ALWAYS DOING THE WORK AS LONG AS YOU ARE TRYING.

EACH OF OUR SPECIFIC SKILLS AND CONTRIBUTIONS WILL BE NECESSARY TOWARDS UNDOING A VIOLENT WORLD AND BUILDING ONE THAT IS LIVABLE FOR ALL OF US - AND WE CAN PRACTICE THEM ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, ORGANICALLY AND AUTONOMOUSLY.

