

Relationship Anarchism

Relationship Anarchy, to be a Relationship Anarchist, is the incorporation of anarchist ideas into the practice of romantic-sexual and platonic relationships. It involves internalizing values of horizontalité, free association, autonomy, and mutual aid as a guide for how we structure and engage with our relationships. Effectively, this means that Relationship Anarchism is not a retrospective philosophical explanation but an active practice. We cannot be relationship anarchists in name only, we have to practice RA because we have been raised in a hierarchical, monogamous, domineering society. A society that says not only do we play favorites, but that it's good we do. Our society stokes twin fires of fears of abandonment and jealousy. America whispers to us that if we don't dominate our partners, make them ours, they will leave us. The premise itself is fake, people don't leave because they're enjoying time with another, with themselves or in community. We have to disabuse ourselves of any notion of control or ownership over humans, whether we fuck them or not. This links naturally to jealousy, which is a social emotion that communicates to us when we feel that an important relationship is threatened or in danger. We have to both realize and trust that if our partners do care for us, we don't have to coerce them into maintaining the relationship. We can remember to communicate directly and honestly when we feel we need something, disregarding puritanical notions of desire as sin to more completely connect as humans. Even if this egalitarian horizontal relationship style does result in someone drifting from you or you from them, it is an expression of their own autonomy and at the end of the day that means taking a deep breath and letting those we love be themselves most genuinely, even in separation. Living in Anarchy.

What are the ideas of Anarchy? Anarchism is a broad movement with many ideas. Uniting many Anarchists are common positions being against the state and capitalism, for the abolition of all hierarchy, with common ideas of mutual aid, free association, horizontal organizing, autonomy, self-liberation, and direct action. As Peter Gelderloos explains in *Anarchy Works*:

“Autonomy and Horizontality: All people deserve the freedom to define and organize themselves on their own terms. Decision-making structures should be horizontal rather than vertical, so no one dominates anyone else; they should foster *power to* act freely rather than *power over* others

Mutual Aid: People should help one another voluntarily; bonds of solidarity and generosity form a stronger social glue than the fear inspired by laws, borders, prisons, and armies. Mutual aid is neither a form of charity nor of zero-sum exchange; both giver and receiver are equal and interchangeable. Since neither holds power over the other, they increase their collective power by creating opportunities to work together.

Free Association: People should be free to cooperate with whomever they want, however they see fit; likewise, they should be free to refuse any relationship or arrangement they do not judge to be in their interest. Everyone should be able to move freely, both physically and socially. Anarchists oppose borders of all kinds and involuntary categorization by citizenship, gender, or race.

Direct Action: It is more empowering and effective to accomplish goals directly than to rely on authorities or representatives. Free people do not request the changes they want to see in the world; they make those changes.

Self-Liberation: People must be at the forefront of their own liberation. Freedom cannot be given; it must be taken.”

In building romantic-sexual relationships with anarchy we seek to structure them horizontally, without a hierarchy. Where no one person is of a higher rank or status than another, where each individual relationship is able to exist independently without having to be compared to others. As The Buddha said, not to compare one to another as good, the same or worse. To let each relationship be enjoyed in what it is itself without one having to be better or more important. No compartmentalization. Including that no relationship has to reach a socially determined point before deep love and affection are allowed to exist. That those feelings of love and affection don't require specific benchmarks of sex or action; that we can

love our friends whether we go down on them or not and express love quickly with expectation of being tied down.

The value of free association is what enables a genuine expression of autonomy. Allows oneself and those we are close to, to exercise their own decision making on who they associate with, without dictates of class, race or religion. In practice this is a kind of non-monogamy. In allowing ourselves and others to associate with new and different people at all times, our love isn't constrained to a closed loop and in doing so we are able to form complex and broad-based relationship networks. We don't place hard limits on how, who or when we engage with others.

In structuring our relationships around autonomy we allow our partners to both be engaging with us genuinely and to never become owned or subservient to our partners implicitly or explicitly. We allow ourselves to pursue our own dreams and values and allow our partners to lead their lives without compromise. We refuse to let social notions that love is more valid or real through the sacrifice of autonomy exist within our relationship paradigm. We exercise autonomy over our own bodies/minds and respect the bodies/minds of others by seeking and maintaining clear consent. Whether that's kissing or off loading trauma. We let our partners decide where they want to live and we decide for ourselves what choices are most desirable to us without fear of being a bad partner or destroying the relationship.

In considering Mutual Aid as an important facet of a relationship we have to consider that human evolution itself has gifted us our present dominance through mutual aid. We must understand our relationships as existing in a state of reciprocation and that a relationship without reciprocation is an inherently hierarchical relationship. Often, relationships without reciprocation are ones of patriarchal slavery or abuse. Relationship Anarchy means understanding that a relationship survives off of a back and forth, of emotional, social and material exchange. It doesn't (necessarily) mean a one for one count of all things given and taken, more an intentional awareness of not creating a defacto hierarchy through means of status, class or ability, as far as is possible given the unfortunate realities of life under capitalism.

These values of horizontalité, free association, autonomy and mutual aid can be a struggle to realize in our lives and relationships. We grow up indoctrinated into a capitalist patriarchal society that pushes puritanical anti-pleasure ethics and compulsive monogamy and heterosexuality. We give birth to cops that live in our head and bring the nightstick down when we step out of line: the blood rushing to our cheeks and urge to hide when shame we've been taught to feel sets in. It's a shame and guilt that doesn't come from who we care about or from our own values. It's a shame and guilt 'gifted' to us by a hierarchical society. In order to exercise real autonomy over ourselves and others we have to kill the cop in our head. We have to intentionally act opposite to urges to avoid communication and instead be willing to share our experiences of shame and through that sharing come to put them aside. Realizing anarchy in our heads now.

Relationship Anarchism is an approach to relationships. It's not a style of relationship. It's a means of how we engage as humans. Approaching our interpersonal relationships with an eye towards autonomy, towards realizing free association and mutual aid in our lives. Relationship Anarchism is renouncing ideas of control or management of others, refusing domination and seeing everyone as they are.



Autonomy and Hierarchy: Sucking dick for Freedom

If you do it right it's better than heroin

As I've moved through relationships and developed as a person, I've come to reflect on the most tangible and important aspects of relationship anarchism as it's relevant to life:

Autonomy and Hierarchy

In relationship anarchism I want my relationships to be as horizontal, egalitarian, and non-coercive as possible. I want them to lack hierarchy as much as is feasible. In polyamory it's not weird to grow closer to one person or another, in the context of multiple partners this is often categorized into an implicit or explicit hierarchy. Traditionally that might be distinctions between married/unmarried, casual, committed, steady relationships.

While natural inclinations towards and away from people is not harmful if we allow our desires to exist without awareness and mindfulness we can let them give form to harmful hierarchies. Hierarchies that create layers of exclusion and isolation within polyamorous communities/families. These hierarchies can exacerbate attitudes of greater or lesser importance of individuals, rather than evaluating them in the present we can pre-assign their value to us in a way that becomes rigid in our cultural context. By dismantling the hierarchical labels used in relationships and resorting to more generalized labels with specified context we give sharper focus to the realities of our connections. No Compartmentalization. Might it take more words? Yes, there's great value in explanation. This is meant as a change that is reflected both in language and in the formulas in our head. Relationship anarchism starts in your own head, dispelling the delusions of control, coercion and assignment to embrace reality in it's own context.

We can direct attention to our desires and approach them with awareness. Knowing we might rather spend time with such and such or so and so, I also remain aware that desires shift inevitably and that I don't need to craft a present desire into an eternal relief. I can approach my relationships with greater autonomy by dissolving a solidified hierarchy and

approaching my desires in relation to an acceptance of the present and future. As in I can engage fully in the present moment with a given partner, accept and be aware of my desires as they change, and shift fluidly within multiple relationships.

Buoyed by direct communication, we create a culture of no-categorization that tries to simplify relationships in the abstract to allow them to grow in complexity in the specific. In practice this might mean abandoning labels that obscure and embracing, at times weird, labels. For example, instead of "Greyson my boyfriend" I've had the experience of finding that label misleading or confusing. I eventually found that the most accurate way to articulate my connection to Greyson was "my relationship with Greyson" rather than any specific single word title. Focusing instead on the actual complexity of material reality and allowing that reality to exist without compartmentalization.

While the dissolution of hierarchy is a boon to autonomy, autonomy must also become a cultivated perception. In viewing our partners as entirely autonomous and seeking to give them the most autonomy. We try to hold in mind, even if we don't like it, that our partners deserve to exist in as much of themselves as possible without coercion towards being or acting in a certain way.

I remember years ago someone I knew trying to marry someone so that they could benefit materially. It would've been a long-term commitment of energy and cohabitation. I objected and gave an ultimatum. I infringed on their autonomy to the, at the time, detriment of the person needing the material support. Reflecting now I would seek to not try to shape the person to be someone and do something different than was their desire. A desire which would cause no material harm to me or others. In trying to control our partners we cheat ourselves out of our own individuality and expression, as well as repressing theirs.

This is not to say you might not voice your view at the right time as to your feelings. Maybe you know you need a circular-saw not a jig-saw for the project and would try to correct a potential purchasing error if someone were going for the jig-saw and not the circular-saw. Working together to problem solve or speaking up when there's something you disagree with is

good Refraining from moral objection when someone you're close with assaults someone unnecessarily isn't.

As I've traveled the entire US, I've felt these two considerations in my relationships become crucially important to maintaining personal existence, my own freedom, and not cheating myself out of my desires and dreams. By seeking to always be in connection with my genuine feelings and thoughts I can embrace vulnerability with my partners and we can use a foundation of mutual aid to ground our relationships, whether vulnerability leads to cum or commiseration.



Change and Acceptance Practices

In life and love, what's to keep and what's to lose?

Relationship Anarchism makes major pronouncements on the various types and threads of connections between people. These connections are the relationship between:

- self and self
- self and other
- other and other
- other and itself

In the reality of implementing Relationship Anarchism we frequently come up with preconditioned beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about how we should or shouldn't feel about the various relationships listed above. Under the cis hetero patriarchy styled monogamous relationships there are expected to be controls, or behavioral change on relationships of self and other as well as restrictions, interpretations, or judgments particularly on relationships of other to other.

There are two kinds of responses to the various interpersonal conflicts and joys. Namely, there is a response to practice non-attachment, empathetic joy and reinforcing the value of autonomy and there is a response of attempting to exercise change or control over an aspect. For example, exercising restraint or control over the relationship of the self to itself might be something we do volitionally in relationship to self improvement such as when we seek to exercise behavioral change when one of our behaviors generates suffering for ourselves and/or others.

Relationship Anarchism broadly advocates that when it comes to relationships of other to other, or other to itself we should endeavor to practice non-attachment, empathetic joy and allowing of the various permutations, expressions and engagements of relationships to flourish. Meaning we should seek to create the greatest amount of autonomy when it comes to the relationships we have with ourselves and how we perceive the relationship others have with themselves and to others. In the interest of giving everyone the greatest control over that which directly affects them

Relationship Anarchism advocates an open and directly communicative management of the relationship of self to other. Meaning that in practice we endeavor to allow others to most genuinely accept, engage, and change who they are, that we allow ourselves to be most genuinely who we are remaining honest with ourselves, refusing to change who we are for the total benefit of others unless it also aligns with our own goals, and we allow others to engage with others to their fullest and most desired extent.

Now I'm gonna address the cop that's sitting in your head yelling at you. Because we live in a patriarchal monogamous society, people are essentially taught values of ownership and under this value of ownership people are encouraged or taught that they should have the ability to change, control and remix that which is in their ownership. Therefore meaning that because none of us are immune to propaganda there must be an intentional and ongoing practice of non-attachment, cultivating autonomy for others as well as cultivating emotional honesty and clarity within ourselves to better actualize our own autonomy given to us by those in our lives and the autonomy we have taken for ourselves.

So when we find ourselves having reactions and thoughts to various strings of relationship in our life, we can ask the question directly. Is this about the relationship between me to myself, the relationship between myself and others, the relationship between others to their selves, or about the relationship between others? We might then derive from what type of relationship this is what our reaction ought to be in respect to the cultivation of our most deeply held values. Keeping in mind that frequently in close relationships actions can cross many threads of relationship. When it comes to the relationship of self to self we are to cultivate emotional and behavioral honesty. Being genuine with ourselves about what we care about, what we do, and who we are in the moment. That can mean noticing directly when we're seeking to change ourselves solely for the benefit of others, especially in ways that might violate, denigrate, or invalidate our deeply held personal values. Relationship Anarchy to ourselves means a seizing of autonomy, personal responsibility, and internalized honesty. It means not compromising on our values solely for social benefit.

When it comes to the relationship of self to other under Relationship Anarchism we are to endeavor to build a relationship on a principle of mutual aid and autonomy. Seeking to have direct, clear and honest communication with those we are involved in. Seeking to cultivate a relationship that both allows us and others their autonomy, while at the same time cultivating deep and caring relationships that bring us together as humans and living beings. It means refusing to see anyone other as greater, lesser or equal to another in our life. It means allowing people to stand genuinely on their own terms, in their own context, without compartmentalization or control. It can be hard to let people do things that might distance us from them or that we don't think are the most right thing to be doing now. Part of this practice is letting go of applying judgment to everything a person we're connected to does. It means letting go and appreciating in its own context what those we care about, care about.

When it comes to the relationships of other to other, or other to itself, we are to endeavor to practice non-attachment and empathetic joy. With the direct aim of cultivating autonomy in terms of our own behavior being independent and rooted within ourselves, and not seeking to control or manage the behaviors and relationships of others. It means explicitly renouncing that we have a right over who others engage with or what they do. Relationship Anarchism means renouncing domination over those we care about, it means the people we care about should be allowed to genuinely be themselves and not who we want them to be, or who we think they should be. In reality, sometimes that means loss, or not getting what you want in the moment, and if we endeavor to realize autonomy in our practical lives, it means recognizing and validating those emotional experiences, and then deciding that those feelings don't actually have to control what you say and do and think in the long term.

It's important to think about emotions often as patterns we've learned as reactions to various stimuli. Emotions serve to inform us as to our perceptions, our interpretations and motivate behavior. It's perhaps even more important to remember that our emotional responses are deeply influenced by, if not directly dictated by, the societies under which we live. What we find brings us joy, fear, or arousal are all deeply rooted in both evolutionary biology and the sociological culture under which we live. Then,

it is understood that the actualization of autonomy is to look genuinely and honestly within ourselves (cultivating autonomy in our self to self relationship) and then judge the various societies and cultures in which we are enmeshed by the measuring stick of our own values. Implementing that autonomy is recognizing and calling out the values that have been instilled in us through society that are actually bullshit while fortifying the values we believe in.

The actualization of Relationship Anarchism is an ongoing process that involves the centering of the value of autonomy, for ourselves and for those connected to us.



Networked and Unique Relationships

Many a traditional marriage lobbies for a relationship that is singular and all encompassing. Marriage partner as friend, partner, lover and hiking buddy. This is both difficult to create and difficult to sustain. Only through capitalism's atomization and progressive isolation in the ability to offload various tasks on to other workers (whom we are implicitly alienated from) are such relationship styles able to function. Hired nannies, mechanics, restaurants.

Under Relationship Anarchism rather than concentrate many functions within one or very few individuals, we can create larger networked relationships that draw on a broader function of community. Under the model of Relationship Anarchism, we are able to have multifaceted relationships, some of which serve a highly specific form. In this we see the danger of social labels, in how falling back on girlfriend/husband/fuck buddy creates a box that restricts the true shape of the relationship. Although we can acknowledge our usage of marriage or boyfriend as not being as rigid as society says, it's all too easy to fall into the socially reinforced traps of labels as blueprint. Under relationship anarchism we can renounce feeling the need for those relationships to follow a blueprint, to become all encompassing or broad. For example, having a partner you only have sex with, or a friend you only go hiking with; a buddy down the street who you talk cars with, someone you go on weekly dates with and part with every time at the bus stop. None of these relationships are taking precedent or power over one another, rather being able to exist in their own autonomous and unique form.

This is not always as accessible as we can imagine under current circumstances. Rural areas, right wing culture and isolation under individualist capitalism promote estrangement from others. More and more functions become consolidated under a limited number of people, increasing strain, reducing ease. Yet through conscious awareness we can cultivate many relationships which serve specific functions, allowing them to change and grow with time without pressure to expand or take on burden.

Within this framework of networked specific relationships, we can further specificity into complex emotional relations. As in, we can differentiate feelings of love, respect and kinship. Loving someone doesn't mean I must believe or concede every point about community organizing. Respecting someone's organizing abilities doesn't mean I love them. Wanting to vigorously have sex on the floor of someone's kitchen doesn't necessitate love or all-encompassing respect (setting aside the basic respect we ought to have for all human beings tout court).

Unfortunately, relationships which are confined to narrow parts of our lives are often devalued by society at large, not to mention cultural attitudes towards polyamory in general. There's often a belief, even in polyamorous people, that purely sexual relationships and short term encounters are less valuable or impactful than relationship forms that imitate traditional monogamous dating/marriage. That highly sexual people are unwilling or unable to develop and maintain deep emotional connections. It's a puritanical devaluation of difference and buying into a false narrative peddled by conservative culture/media. Vulnerability is necessary for deep connection, with time and proximity allowing the relationship to bear fruit. The idea that sex is not vulnerability is a lie, sex being divorced from vulnerability is a fake form of empowerment that only leads to unpleasant or lukewarm experiences.

To have deeper more genuine connections we have to embrace vulnerability, allow relationships to take on unique and new forms and see that a multitude of engagements create valuable relationships. Those relationships often don't follow the blueprints of a Saturday morning cartoon and through intentional and mindful destruction of traditional relationship forms we can give birth to newer, more genuine and whole relationships.

