

Chapter Nine

Towards a World without Borders

Utopia is on the horizon: I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.

-- Eduardo Galeano

I wanted to see something about her -- I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do.

-- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

For some, it may seem like a strange move that I have made: from asking strangers intimate questions about their sexual desires and practices to advocating anarchist politics. Indeed, it sometimes seems strange to me. But, this move has followed on from the aims I defined in the introduction. They were: 1) to better understand this concept we call 'sexual orientation' by understanding how (some) people live in relation to it; and 2) to think about what these understandings can tell us about possibilities for political activism. Dissatisfied with my own experiences of participating in identity politics and unsure about this thing called queer theory, I decided to talk to people about their experiences of identity and desire. As I described in Chapter Four, I chose people living in mixed relationships because I was interested in issues of difference and I expected people living with differences of sexual orientation identity would have interesting experiences and theories of those experiences. In doing so, I came up with some answers to my questions about 'sexual orientation'.

In keeping with social constructionist and poststructuralist work, I argue that sexual orientation is not a characteristic of individuals. This perspective sees orientation as a noun -- to be oriented in a particular direction like a compass. I suggest, rather, that there is more

value in seeing orientation as a process by which individuals are encouraged to think of themselves as having sexual desires that are oriented in a particular direction. Orientation in this sense is more like one usage of the word in the United States which describes an event where people new to a system or institution learn how it works and how they are expected to participate in it (e.g. new student orientation). Used in this sense, people do not have sexual orientations, they are sexually oriented or, in other words, given sexual directions. As I described in Chapter Six, this occurs through practices of representation, that is telling people who they are or what they (should) want. Not only are people 'kept in line' through practices of representation, but it is through repetition of these practices that the 'line' is (continuously) produced. In Chapter Three, I suggested that this 'line' might be understood in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the state-form. Sexual orientation is consistent with the State; both depend on processes of containing diversity, processes of 'overcoding'. As Todd May (1994) explained, 'overcoding is not unique to State apparatuses but occur wherever social operations try to subsume large regions of practices under single principles or categories that are to act at once as modes of comprehension and standards of judgment of those practices' (p 106). In the example of sexual orientation, diverse sexual desires, practices and relationships as well as forms of gender expression (just to name the most obvious) are overcoded; that is they are understood and judged in terms of sexual orientation categories. In Chapter Six, I demonstrated how participants were expected to be consistent in terms of sexual orientation categories, and how they were judged for either being perceived to belong to a stigmatised category or failing to live up to expectations of a desirable one. I described this as 'compulsory sexual orientation'. Likewise, many of the participants described a parallel process of 'compulsory monogamy'. Failing to be appropriately contained within state-forms of sexual orientation and monogamy, resulted not only directly in (symbolic, physical, verbal and emotional) violence, but also indirectly in shame. The shame, if not openly acknowledged and accepted, can result in what Scheff (1990) refers to as pathological shame, that is feeling ashamed of one's shame. This results in excess of conformity to social standards, as can fear of punishment from others. Thus, like the State, sexual orientation is a system of organisation whose effects tend to reinforce its existence.

But resistance is possible. Despite these pressures, none of the participants were entirely complicit in the ongoing production of sexual orientation. They resisted being directed. They resisted orientation. In Chapters Five and Seven, I described how participants' identities, desires and relationships in many ways overflowed the containment of state-forms.

Compulsory sexual orientation was resisted through a variety of means, including simply rejecting sexual orientation identities, using labels tactically not to identify themselves as a particular type of being but to negotiate interactions with others, and also by deploying labels that were, for them in their context, open and flexible. Likewise, rather than categorising their sexual relationships as either monogamous or non-monogamous, I argued that each of the participants actively and respectfully negotiated with their partners to produce appropriate boundaries rather than to contain their relationships in a rigid category. Furthermore, participants' experiences challenged the components of the definition of sexual orientation: which (of two choices) gender are you and which (of two choices) gender do you find sexually desirable. Some had gender identities that could not be contained in either the gender state-forms. Others questioned how 'desire' could be so neatly categorised as sexual or non-sexual. For many, the relationship between gender and desire was very complex, including: desire for gender transgressions, desire for women but no preference for different lesbian genders, desires for different sexual practices with members of difference genders, and desires for people who fell outside of one's usual pattern of gendered desire. Finally, even the concept of what constituted a sexual practice was open to negotiation. These diverse forms of resisting orientation can be understood as nomadic, as that which escapes or evades capture by the overcoding of the state-form. They can also be understood as anarchist in another sense. In resisting orientation, they must actively produce alternative realities, which they do in conjunction with their partners and other people. In contrast to the representation of the State and sexual orientation, the participants in many ways experienced autonomy. Rather than being told how to live, they got together and worked it out for themselves. I described this process as involving the production of flexible and negotiated boundaries unlike the rigid borders of state-forms.

If, as queer theorists suggest, the hetero/homo division is central to the organisation of social life and the production of social knowledge in the overdeveloped world, then resistance to that division must be very difficult. Indeed, the stories from Chapters Five and Six describe brutal punishments for resistance. What enabled the participants to resist in such overt ways was the development of alternative ways of thinking and a sense of emotional entitlement, as I described in Chapter Eight. These intellectual and emotional changes were supported through access to alternative discourses, movement into more supportive time/space, and through relationships that were both supportive and challenging. The examples across participants within each of these rough categories were wildly different. Alternative discourses ranged

from *Sex and the City* to Buddhist texts, from queer/feminist magazines and women's music to science-fiction novels. Likewise, what constituted a more supportive space ranged from the obviously alternative (bisexual conferences, women only spaces and anarchic sex parties) to the more established (Quaker¹⁷ meetings and urban areas). Supportive and challenging relationships, though diverse in their forms, incorporated common characteristics. Relationships were challenging because the people involved challenged each other to think differently about their perceptions of reality. At the same time, an ethic of care and communication within relationships supported participants to grow and change within the context of committed partnerships. Each of the elements that supported and enabled participants to resist orientation are also crucial to anarchist practice. The anarchist commitment to the inseparability of ends and means results in forms of practice that are consistent with the desired aim of social organisation without domination, where individuals are highly capable of co-operating to fulfill shared desires and also flexible enough to allow for individual freedom. Thus, it is unsurprising that the skills people develop in protest camps and other forms of collective organising should be the same skills developed in intimate relationships. Whether in terms of obedience to State authority or to rigid truths of sexual relationships and desires, capacities for resisting orientation must necessarily be the same.

In Chapters Two and Three, I suggested that queer theory and activism provide a stronger basis for a radical politics of sexuality than any form of identity politics or sexual citizenship. However, queer politics has been criticised for a number of factors that would limit its capacity to address sexuality. Queer has been charged with promoting individualistic sexual transgressions rather than collective struggle against oppression (including capitalism), failing to acknowledge feminist theory and the importance of gender, maintaining gay and lesbian identities as the centre of its politics and focusing on textual deconstructions to the neglect of institutional and material political interventions. I suggested that these criticisms could largely be addressed by a return to the anarchist roots of queer theory and activism found in direct action, nonhierarchical organisation, and poststructuralist theory. After analysing mixed identity relationships in relation to anarchist theory and practice, I could advocate a *queer anarchism*. Such a tactic has been taken up by activist networks not only to challenge LGBT organisations that fail to address a diversity of oppressive relations, but also to queer 'straight' anarchist politics (e.g. Queeruption). While such an approach certainly has a great deal value, such politics have had a tendency to have 'queer' identities at their centre.

17 For connections between anarchism and the Quakers, see e.g., Purkis, 2004.

As I suggested Chapter Three, the word queer brings with it associations of (gendered and sexualised) transgression and, more specifically, homosexuality. Thus, at the same time as it provides a radical critique of identity politics, queer anarchism may maintain some of identity politics' limitations. Saying that, many people have found participation in such politics radically empowering. Meanwhile the possibilities of (more) explicitly anarchist queer theory seems to hold interesting possibilities. Such efforts might explore the relationship between the hetero/homo division and the hierarchical construction of State over society, for example.

Given these limitations as well as participants' diverse relationships with the term queer, I suggest an alternative: anarchism as an ethics of relationships. A definition of anarchism that places relationships and ethics at its centre is both a useful way of understanding the analysis that I have developed from this research project as well as providing a framework for political action, theoretical and otherwise, to address the issues it has raised. Participants' experiences of policing -- of shame, violence, representation and overcoding -- can be understood as stemming from unethical relationships. Resistance and empowerment, on the other hand, provide the basis for nomadic and autonomous relationships; that is, relationships that do not necessarily conform to representations of 'types' of relationships, but where the participants collectively and individually decide how to live their lives. As I described in Chapter Seven, this notion of autonomy is not that of an individual masculine liberalism, but one more consistent with the anarchist tradition of freedom in community (Notes from Nowhere, 2003), more recent feminist theorising (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000) and places where they have overlapped (Roseneil, 2000). Arguing for a definition of anarchism centred on relationships and ethics is not the promotion of a new form of anarchism, such as a queer anarchism may be, but one which is consistent with anarchist history. Anarchism is critical of capitalism because the latter is based on relationships of domination and exploitation. It is critical of the State because government creates and depends on hierarchical relationships. Ecological devastation is the result of instrumental relationships with the environment and each other. Racialisation and nationalism depend on exclusive and hierarchical relationships with Others. While not creating a new anarchism, this refocus does, in effect, *queer* anarchism. Much of anarchist politics does focus very much on the 'public' sphere, targeting capitalism and the State. Emphasising an ethics of relationships as the core of anarchist criticisms and ideals encourages a more explicit turn to queer and feminist politics and to issues of the 'private' sphere, including 'personal' relationships, sexuality and emotions. A relational understanding of anarchism, then, must

break down the divisions of public/private, individual/collective, autonomous/relational, hetero/homo, justice/care and other binaries that sustain the State apparatus and state-forms. It may also help address concerns within the anarchist movement of the development of a specialised 'activist role' which may separate 'activists' from 'ordinary people' (Anonymous, 2000a and 2000b). Rather than seeing anarchism as a practice of 'activists', we could see it as a widespread practice in relationships that should be supported to develop and expand into all aspects of life.

Finally, anarchism as an ethics of relationships fits into a long tradition, originating in feminist thought, that connects notions of 'sexual orientation' to wider political systems. Lesbian feminist criticism argued that heterosexuality and lesbianism could not be understood as individual characteristics, but as a compulsory system and resistance to it, respectively. Debates surrounding difference, both within and across identity categories, challenged the singularity of this approach. In Todd May's terms, lesbian feminism was strategic in that it represented domination entirely in terms of patriarchy, which could be resisted by the strategy of lesbianism (or, a range of similar strategies from a lesbian continuum), regardless of context or situation. Criticisms of strategic feminism by working class women, women of colour and sex radicals pointed to the diverse ways in which women were oppressed to which no singular feminism could respond. Indeed, in response to cultural feminist attempts to circumscribe appropriate anti-patriarchal sexuality, sex-positive feminism suggested that perhaps sexuality should be understood as its own axis of oppression, not subject primarily to feminist theorising. Poststructuralist feminism took these arguments one step further, arguing that there could be no singular category of 'women' upon which to base political movement. Thus, more nuanced efforts to understand the relationship between sexuality and political order must incorporate a recognition of difference. The politics of sexual or intimate citizenship attempts to do precisely that, within the terms of liberal democracy. Such theorising draws on the work of Anthony Giddens, who has suggested that a radical democratisation of intimacy may lead to greater democracy in the 'public' sphere. However, the elitism of Giddens' conception of 'democracy' is made clear when he compares democratic order to parent-child relationships.

Can a relationship between a parent and young child be democratic? It can, and should be, in exactly the same sense as is true of a democratic political order. It is a right of the child, in other words, to be treated as a putative equal of the adult. Actions which cannot be negotiated directly

with the child, because he or she is too young to grasp one is entailed, should be capable of counterfactual justification. The presumption is that agreement could be reached, and trust sustained, if the child were sufficiently autonomous to be able to deploy arguments on equal basis to the adult (1992:191-192).

This is precisely the anarchist critique of the 'democratic' State. Government takes a parental role with regard to the rest of the population which presumes some incapacity on the part of 'ordinary' people. Anarchism, on the other hand, I suggest, provides a more consistent basis for a politics of relationships (including sexuality) that values equality and diversity than that which results in most adults being treated as young children. Hierarchies not only inhibit people's capacity to develop the skills and capacities necessary for autonomous relationships, but, as I argued in Chapter Three, they also result in pathological shame and excessive conformity. Any social order that seriously values relationships must reject hierarchy for networks of egalitarian relationships, representation for autonomy, and the overcoding of state-forms and borders for the openness and fluidity of nomadism and negotiable boundaries. It must reject sexual orientation for the freedom to acknowledge and explore diverse forms of (sexual) relationships, desires and practices without fear of violence or shame. 'For a social world in which emotional fulfilment replaced the maximising of economic growth would be very different from that which we know at present' (1992:3). Indeed. It would be anarchy.