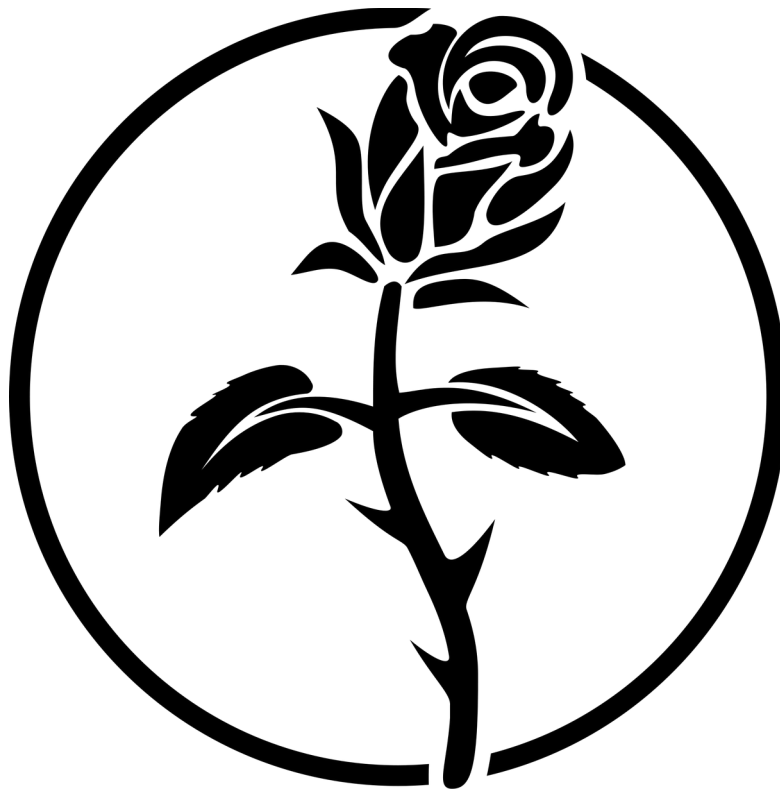


Flower in the Meadow: Affinity Groups (and Why You Should Form One)

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Scraping by to survive under capitalism is hard. Dismantling it is harder. Doing either alone is impossible.

Isolation in an utterly broken system is unbearable. It drives us to desperation and hopelessness. Lacking an emotional and material support system is suicide.

The affinity group structure is not an instrumental solution to these problems; it is rather an intentional yet organic social form which evolved out of the contradiction between the human spirit and the hostile, cruel machine of capitalist modernity it found itself lost in. With roots in the Spanish anarchists of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, who dubbed it the grupo de afinidad, and deeper roots in the natural inclinations of Life itself, the affinity group is at once a found family unit, a survival team and a revolutionary cell catalyzing radical changes in their environment, arousing turbulence in the status quo power structure where they reside.

An overly precise definition would compromise its inherent flexibility, but in broad strokes, the affinity group is a collective of a relatively small number of radical individuals (ideally, under a dozen) who come to develop affinity and trust in each other, and band together forming a tight-knit unit of comrades who together nourish two primary intentions: ensuring internal resiliency in the face of economic and social hardship, and organizing and engaging in revolutionary action together. But, no less crucially, affinity groups cultivate and grow each other's revolutionary spirit through the interchange of ideas and interplay of affection, and enrich both group and individual autonomy through the sharing of skills and knowledge. They are the principle of free association embodied fully and practically in social form.

In Murray Bookchin's pamphlet *A Note on Affinity Groups*, he describes them astutely:

“Autonomous, communal and directly democratic, the group combines revolutionary theory with revolutionary lifestyle in its everyday behavior. It creates a free space in which revolutionaries can remake themselves individually, and also as social beings.”

Their small size is conducive towards mutual trust, cohesion and intimacy, and serves as a near absolute barrier against infiltration. Their true strength emerges when collaborating with other like-minded groups to organize larger scale actions and projects: they are not an alternative to comparatively larger revolutionary organizations any more than the flower is an alternative to the meadow.

Affinity groups may print zines to distribute around town to raise revolutionary consciousness and share tactics; read and study together; engage in propaganda of the deed; set up guerrilla gardens to grow and feed their communities; engage in all manner of subversive mischief; start squats together – but crucially, they do *the things which they commonly believe in*.

Affinity groups may support each other in times of emotional and financial crisis; share much property in common; start a rainy day fund; cook and eat and live communally, finding ways to reduce living expenses shackling us to capitalism – and always, always, *ride or die together*.

They benefit highly from a diversity not only in skillsets, but in life background, ethnicity, gender, neurology, ability and social identity. Having a broad, complementary scope of perspectives inoculates the group with simmering creative force as well as tempering each other's lack of social awareness in certain areas. Better to be an ecosystem than a monoculture. To be a space where people of marginalized identities are able to let their guard down, trust each other and heal together, though, each member should be enthusiastically open to criticism, with a mind and intention towards solidarity and self-development. Conflicts may arise, as they do in all forms of social relation, especially in a society which traumatizes us all so deeply. Regularly engaging in *teknil* (a process of good faith communal criticism developed in Rojava), deciding together a flexible structure for resolving internal issues, and becoming educated on radical conflict resolution are all important ways of addressing inevitable disputes.

Consensus should be sought in all major decisions, such as the introduction of new group members, tactics to engage in, and areas to

focus on – keeping in mind the autonomy of each individual to pursue what they believe is right with whomever they choose to freely associate.

Chances are, you already know people who you could discuss forming an affinity group with. If you feel alone locally, there is nothing stopping you from starting a virtual affinity group with people you trust and aspire with abroad. We're all beaten down by this callous system and in need of relief, and of the exhilarating joy of subverting it. Perhaps you could share this zine with them. Perhaps a new seed will sprout.

To take our flower metaphor further, considering our existential predicament and the overall state of the Left, we could observe that the world we find ourselves in is more like a desert wasteland than a lovely meadow. Maybe we can see the ultimate ambition of each affinity group, or every revolutionary, for that matter, as an effort to remediate the desolate barrens of our world, to make it once again beautiful, teeming with Life and color and joy. If the affinity group is the flower, its natural inclination is to beget Life through its living, to sow more seeds of rebellion carried by the winds far and wide.

Like many flowers, affinity groups have mechanisms to defend themselves from those who might attempt to disturb them or tear them up – anyone who would grab it by the stem would be greeted with a handful of lacerating thorns.

Before the fake potted plant, a tacky simulacrum manufactured to offer false beauty, lies the Black Rose, forged through billions of years of natural evolution, imbued as is all Life with intention; a spontaneous striving towards meaning and true beauty.

Beyond the nuclear family, tied through contrivance by nothing but common genetics and vestigial patriarchy, lies an evolved radical form of relating – the affinity group, tied through volition by aspiration, by conviction, by spirit, by desire, by action – by hope.

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