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Notes on: radical aloneness

6-8 minutes

Last fall, I presented a paper on relationship anarchy. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term (or concept), it can loosely be understood as a style of interpersonal relationships that doesn't prioritize or hierarchialize relationships with others based on what takes place within them, at least *a priori*. In short, there's a uniqueness to each relationship which makes their translation between relationships difficult to gather—a kind of ineffability that gets lost or violated in the transition. So, for example, you may relate with someone in a way that tends to be more like friendship: perhaps you sometimes get together for coffee, talk about things that are going on with your life, go for walks, make dinner together sometimes, etc—but, sometimes you mess around, not too often, but sometimes. Then, you may have another relationship that is a bit more weighty—for one reason or another it's got a trajectory that shoots out into the future, a place where you may see yourself growing vegetables and living together, sharing projects, intertwining intricately. And then, just to have more than two examples, you may have a friend that is more traditionally just a friend: you watch hockey together, talk about books you've been reading, get a drink, whatever. There's a complex calculus taking place in all of these relationships, a shifting definition, murky waters, not only interrelationship but intrarelationship, as well—

just because you fucked around last time doesn't mean it'll definitely happen this time, just because you didn't hold one another last time doesn't mean you won't this time, etc.

The point being is that, out of the gate, you can't prioritize based on the activities that go on within the relationship—the only thing that can be said is that the relationships *differ*. Now, in lived experience, you may want to spend more time with the person who you see yourself growing vegetables with (this is one of the miserable aporias of existence: love seems infinite, but time isn't...) but this isn't because you have sex or because you don't have sex, it isn't because they're "more than a friend" or whatever coarse terminology is hoisted upon it—it's because that's the way that relationship goes, its particular mode—you require more time with them for one reason or another: they ignite you, they unravel you beautifully, they support you unflinchingly, they catalyze splendid complexity and nuance.

After I presented this paper, I spent some time with one of my former professors, a vibrant and shimmering man with a long philosophical history, but more importantly an insatiable thirst for life, gaiety, and joy—his continuing project being resolutely existential and affirmative. As we rode the bus late at night, he said to me something to the effect of: I absolutely loved your paper, why would we ever want people to be with us who don't want to be with us? Why would we ever want to exercise power and control over loved ones, for that negates or corrodes love, rots it constitutionally. And then, in passing, right before I got on the bus I was transferring to without him, he said something to the effect of: what you need to be able to do relationship anarchy well is an incredible amount of *radical aloneness*. At the time, this

comment slid right off me, it didn't stick for an instant longer than hearing it and offering a surface response without thinking, "Yeah, you're right, I think."

What does radical aloneness mean, anyway. To me, it's some sort of commitment to your shit, what you've got going on, a wellness and health that supports engagements with others, comes to the rescue when you want to lash out and heave at others, take people down because of your own insecurities. One who has cultivated an abundant radical aloneness can let the other be because they've got their own projects and projections, their own vital flow. If the one they love wants to be with others for whatever reason, they can be upset and bothered, even jealous of course, but on the whole everything is okay, for they are fecundity. You only know you haven't cultivated radical aloneness when it's too late, when you need it, unfortunately. Radical aloneness shouldn't be equated with the singular or the individual either—sometimes radical aloneness means that you have fostered relationships with others that support you and supplement you. Other times radical aloneness means being actually alone, but alone is of course always populated by others as well, even if you're alone in space at a given time.

Events of late have lead to reflect upon the ways that I create, sustain, and tend to my sense of radical aloneness. I think that, in other circles, this would be taken up as self-care, but this is unfortunate, I think. Radical aloneness can encompass what is broadly construed as self-care, sure, but sometimes radical aloneness means fleeing the self, evacuating the self's rigid postures and habits, and setting out on unforeseen trails—instead of watching over the self, dismantling the self, letting the light shine

in, opening up a window, cracking things up a bit. Maybe I'm being too fine with distinctions, but I think there's a difference. Beyond that, I think that radical aloneness is the wellspring of being with others confidently and creatively: it is from this shimmering becoming that we can glow with others, connect with others in productive and dazzling ways. Radical aloneness as generative and combinatorial, experimental and stochastic, seeking to build and proliferate. Sometimes self-care is necessary to do this: sometimes you just need someone to make you an avocado sandwich, but an avocado sandwich isn't going to propel you into radiance, just get you into the position where you can once again have the opportunity to luxuriate.

Maybe in subsequent posts I can explore the ways in which I cultivate this radical aloneness, or perhaps the times when it would have been immensely useful to have access to.