

A Critique of Activist Security Culture

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Edited by Kyle Rearden





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http://audioanarchy.org/submission/10-Security_Culture.mp3

Editor's Forward

[Wolfi Landstreicher](#) is the *nome de plume* for a man whose writings embraced aspects of the [egoist](#) and [insurrectionist](#) schools of anarchism. In [My Perspectives](#), Landstreicher wrote:

“Since this aim of freeing every individual to be able to create her or his life as s/he sees fit requires that everyone have equal access to all that is necessary for this project of self-realization, it is necessary to destroy the institutions that prevent this free access. Thus, the destruction of the institutions of property and of commodity exchange, and consequently of work—that separation of the activity through which one gets the necessities of existence from life itself—is a necessary aim of revolutionary struggle. Only in this way can new social relations based on free association without hierarchy or privilege come to exist. This is communism as I understand it.”

While I think such sentiments are somewhat evocative of Bob Black's [The Abolition of Work](#), I believe that readers will better appreciate Landstreicher if they first understand where he is coming from, philosophically speaking. Although I am not personally a syndicalist, libertarian socialist, or any other anti-propertarian type by any means, I thought that the following piece of literature is invaluable for anyone who chooses to study the topic of activist security culture.

Only changes to grammar have been altered from the original. Also, please keep in mind that the Audio Anarchy version contains some errors, such as missing entire sentences, which I have scrupulously endeavored to avoid here.



Life today is far too small. Forced into roles and relationships that reproduce the current social order, it focuses on the petty, on that which can be measured, priced, bought, and sold. The meager existence of shopkeepers and security guards has been imposed everywhere, and real life, expansive life, life with no limits other than our own capacities exists only in revolt against this society. So those of us who want an expansive existence, life lived to the full, are moved to take action, to attack the institutions that compel us to live such petty lives.

Moved to take back our lives and make them wellsprings of the marvelous, we inevitable encounter repression. Everyday, hidden mechanisms of repression operate to prevent revolt, to guarantee the submission that maintains the social order. The necessities of survival, the underlying

awareness of always being watched, the barrage of prohibitions that meet the eyes on signs or in the person of a cop, the very structure of the social environments in which we move, these are enough to keep most people in line, eyes to the ground, minds empty of all except the petty worries of the day. But when one has had enough of this impoverished existence and decides that there must be more, that she cannot tolerate another day in which life is diminished even more, the repression ceases to be so subtle. The spark of revolt has to be suppressed; the maintenance of the social order requires it.

The expansion of life cannot occur in hiding – that would simply be a change of cells within the social prison. But because this expansion, this tension toward freedom, moves us to attack this social order, to take action that is outside and frequently against its written and implied laws, we are forced to deal with the question of how to evade the uniformed guard dogs of the ruling class. So we cannot ignore the question of security.

I have always considered the question of security a simple one, a matter of practical intelligence that anyone should be capable of figuring out. By developing relations of affinity, one decides with whom one can act. There is no need to say a word about an action to anyone who is not involved in it. This is basic and should go without saying for anyone who decides to action against domination. But such practical intelligence has no need to enshroud itself in an atmosphere of suspicion and secretiveness where every word and every thought must be watched, in which even the *words* of

defiance are considered too great a risk. If our practice takes us there, we have already lost.

In the context of illegal activity, security is essential. But even in this context, it is not the top priority. Our top priority is always the creation of the lives and relationships we desire, the opening of the possibility for the fullness of existence that the system of domination and exploitation cannot allow. Those of us who truly desire such an expansive existence want to express it in all of our actions.

In this light, the call for the development of a “*security culture*” seems strange to me. When I first heard the term, my immediate thought was: “That is precisely the sort of culture we live in!” The cops and cameras on every corner and in every shop, the increasing numbers of identification cards and of interactions requiring their use, the various weapons systems put in place for national security, and on and on – the culture of security surrounds us, and it is the same as the culture of repression. Certainly, as anarchists, this is not what we want.

Many of the practical suggestions made by the proponents of security culture are basic good sense, for one who is taking action against the institutions of domination. It is obvious that one shouldn’t leave evidence, or speak to the police, that one should take the due precautions to avoid arrest – a situation that would certainly not enhance one’s struggle for a full free life. But it makes no sense to speak of a security *culture*. The caution necessary to avoid arrest

does not reflect the sort of life and relationships we want to build. At least, I hope not.

When anarchists begin to see security as their top priority – as a “culture” that they must develop – paranoia comes to dominate relationships. Anarchist conferences are set up with levels of bureaucracy and (let’s call things what they are) *policing* that too closely parallels what we are trying to destroy. Suspicion replaces comradeship and solidarity. If someone doesn’t look or dress right, he finds herself ostracized, excluded from involvement. Something vital has been lost here – the reason for our struggle. It has vanished behind the hard armor of militancy, and we have come to be the mirror image of our enemy.

The anarchist struggle slips into this joyless, paranoid rigidity when it is not carried out as an attempt to create life differently, joyfully, intensely, but is rather treated as a cause to which one is to sacrifice oneself. One’s struggle then becomes *moral*, not a question of desire, but of right and wrong, good and evil, conceived as absolute and knowable. Here is the source of much of the rigidity, much of the paranoia and much of the unwarranted sense of self-importance that one finds much too often in anarchist circles. We are the righteous warriors surrounded on all sides by the forces of evil. We must protect ourselves from any possibility of contamination. And the hardened character armor undermines the joyful spirit that provides the courage necessary for the destruction of world domination.

This destruction, this demolition of the social prison that surrounds us would bring us face-to-face with the unknown. If we confront it with fear and suspicion, we will build the new prisons ourselves. Some already are, in their minds and in their projects. This is why our projects of attack must originate in and be carried out with joy and an expansive generosity of spirit. The logic of paranoia and fear, the logic of suspicion with its measured words and deeds, is the logic of submission – if not the present order of domination, then to a morality that diminishes our lives and guarantees that we will not have the courage to face the unknown, to face the world in which we would find ourselves if the present order were destroyed. Instead, let's embrace the passionate reason of desire that defies all domination. This reason is absolutely serious in its desire to destroy all that diminishes life, confining it to that which can be measured. And because it is so serious, it laughs.

