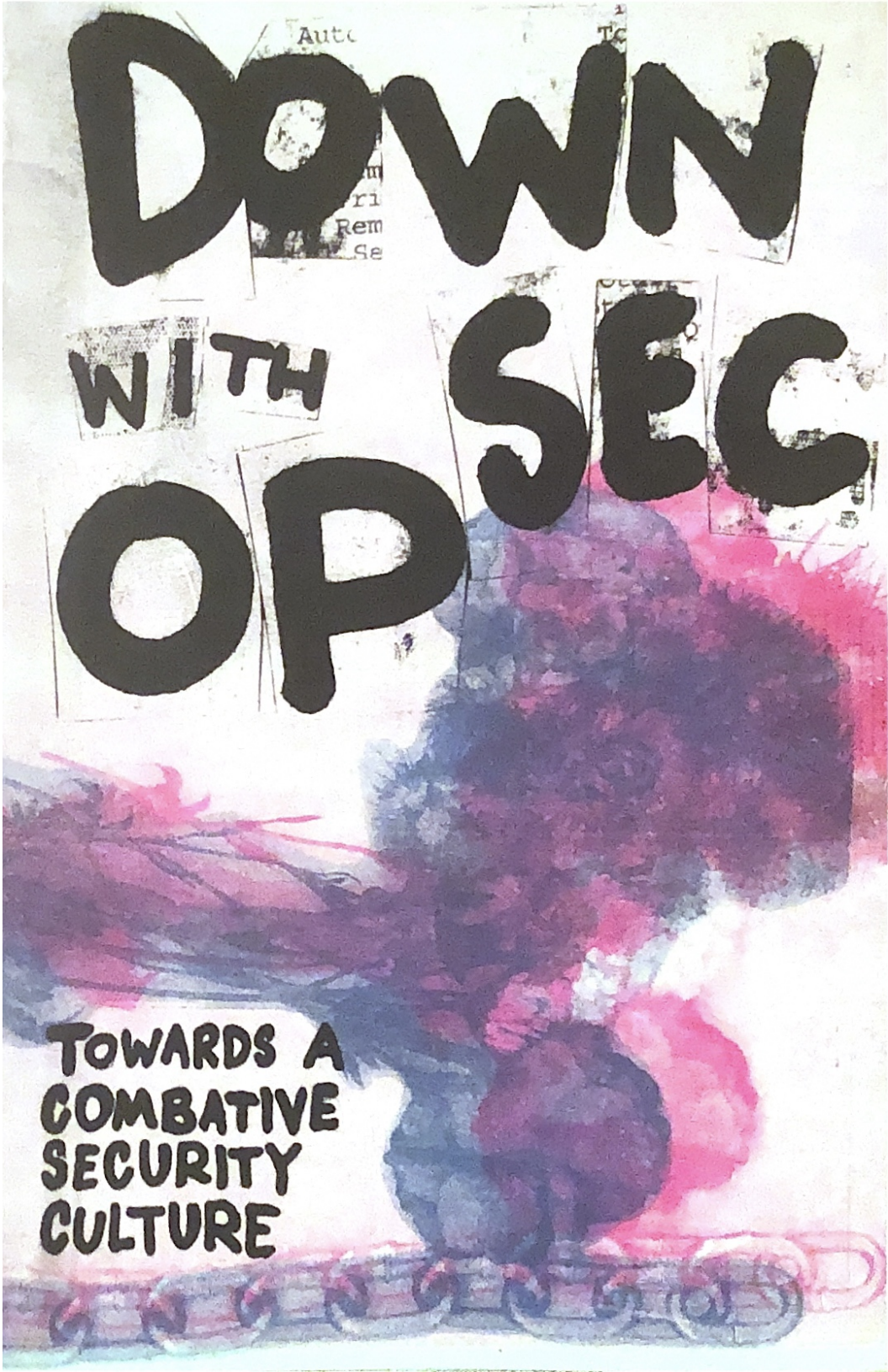
DOWN WITH OPSEC

TOWARDS A COMBATIVE SECURITY CULTURE



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Towards a Combative Security Culture

Introduction

This zine is a transcript of a group discussion on the differences between "security culture" and "opsec." The participants have been involved in various anarchist, anti-capitalist, and other radical struggles for close to 20 years. During the summer of 2020, the term "opsec" began to appear in online and in-person radical circles with a frequency that made this older term suddenly feel new. "Opsec" largely pertains to a list of actionable steps that can be taken to protect one's identity and to mask vulnerable identifying markers against government repression while undertaking militant direct action in its many forms. In this regard, "opsec" is nothing new, but rather a slight variation of an older, and as we argue more holistic, idea often referred to as "security culture." Security Culture aims to accomplish many of the same goals as "opsec" - protecting participants in direct action from government repression. However, just below the surface, we can see that these two methods of defense are vastly different.

The context in which the term "opsec" gained traction is important. The 2020 Uprising in the United States brought together a set of circumstances that needed a fast response through easily

accessible tools for protection against government repression. The Uprising for George Floyd took form in late May, after insurgents in Minneapolis burned down the police precinct to massive popular approval. Semi-dormant anti-police uprisings reemerged and spread across the country and sustained themselves for months on end, urged on by material support in the streets as well as intellectual engagement and debate online. "Opsec" became the term used by people advising participants on identity concealment, both physically and digitally, while committing criminal acts or being in the vicinity of others doing so. In order for "opsec" to become rapidly replicable and put into practice, it was largely delivered through easy to digest and reproduce social media 'infographics'. Through this medium - fast,one-way communication to an individual - "opsec" went from something possibly transformative to a watered down checklist of tasks that one can ostensibly perform and protect their individual self from government repression.

What security culture seeks to accomplish is both similar in its goals and markedly different from opsec in the means it uses.Security culture is a holistic practice of everyday approaches to protecting what is vulnerable about yourself and your circles of accomplices that is explicitly tied to creating communities of care, resilience, and fierce compassion rooted in anti-hierarchical ethics. Security culture cannot be boiled down to a handful of actionable items that protect only your identity, but rather it is like a ritual without beginning or end, determined by you and your closest accomplices in the degrees that are best appropriate for the relevant circumstances. This pamphlet will not tell you how to conduct security culture, but will hopefully serve as an intimate introduction to a critical engagement between "security culture" and "opsec." The format is intentionally informal, as a strong security culture seeks to be impossible to detect by an outsider, a potential government spy, so that those who commit illegal acts are impossible to discern from those who do not. What remains to be said on the matter is in fact best articulated by the participants in this conversation.

As we were planning this conversatin, we brainstormed the following questions to guide us.

We begin by addressing the first question and then find our way to the rest through the conversation.

–What's the difference between opsec and security culture and why does that matter?

–What do we not like about the current discourse around opsec? How is it detrimental to our movements?

–What are some hard won lessons learned by folks in this group that feel important to communicate to people who are newer to organizing?

–How do we create a security culture that also makes movements inviting, open spaces, that are genuinely desirable to be a part of?

–How is building relationships across generations essential to creating a strong culture of security?

What is the difference between opsec and security culture and why does that matter?

Silvina: Well I think I can start. I think on a very basic level, opsec and security culture are two different modes for understanding how we keep ourselves and the people we love safe in movements that are resisting the state and white supremacy and capitalism. However, opsec and security culture approach this task in different ways. In general opsec comes at it very technically, looking at the ways that we use technology, and the ways that things like computers and cell phones make us vulnerable to state repression. I also think the lineage of this phrase and this approach is important too - opsec comes out of a US Special Forces background. It is language that is coming from the military and the kind of framework of it also reflects this military perspective. It is technical, it is precise, and it is relies on individual responsibility.

Security culture, on the other hand, is a more wholistic approach to safety, that is born out of movements against domination - in doing some research on this topic, a friend told me that the earliest use of the term security culture that they were able to find was in the

spring 1997 issue of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) publication *No Compromise*. The article, titled "Creating a Security Culture: What it is, Why We Need it, and How to Implement It" may not be the first ever use of the term, but it definitely reflects the begining of it's promincence in movement spaces in a moment where there was a burgeoning militant underground around the earth and animal liberation movements. This article make direct reference to movements of the 70's and 80's and learning from the state represssion of earleir movements through cointelpro. In my reading, it is an intentional effort to incorporate the lessons learned inside of movements in order to help movements thrive and be more resiliant to the state's efforts at pacification and repression. I think one of the really core things to me in security culture that is different from opsec is the idea of *culture* - that it's not just about the technical aspects. This doesn't mean that those technical aspects aren't important, but that when building and sustaining a security culture, we are foregrounding the ways that relationships keep us safe,and we see the ways that our safety and security is fundamentally a process of building strong relationships with each other.

Aron: I'm in agreement on that front. Another piece that comes up for me, when thinking about security culture in relationship to what is "operational security", which has its own realm in tech - not just physical surveillance, but also in the digital world, and all of these larger companies that do tech security services profit on. The idea of opsec from the militaristic approach is similar to what these private corporations are doing and pushing, obviously, and also is in of itself very closed off from the relationship aspect of security culture. Many of the tech workers that are in relation to the networks that we all hold, they have also always expressed that when discussing security culture and opsec, we should never not both underestimate and overestimate the power of all technology that is around us especially in this day and age for surveillance. It's a different field than even what we were seeing in the 2010s, and that tech leap is going to continue to be a thing for the state. But, we are also going to see larger swathes of more "innocuous"

technology being pushed out there that can do the raw surveillance, and can be grabbed by the state. Which is why there is concerns about new model vehicles, there are concerns about laptops, there are many concerns about the ways that Ring cameras and other kinds of security aids for houses can be automatically linked into what police departments are putting together, and that same technology being done in private businesses as well, whether that be a grocery store, a little shop, a corner somewhere as well - and its always important to be aware of what's coming up as well as making sure that we can address the underlying issue that comes with really focusing on those things without really recognizing how we stand with each other on this front, and how we actually protect each other on the more analogue side as well.

Charles: I would like to a little bit, not necessarily - not counter, but add on to what people are saying. I think there is a structural element that makes this question make the most sense after you've already defined state repression. What Silvina said about keeping movements safer I don't think is incorrect, but I think it misses one of the larger points of security culture, which is - when you think about it, the safest thing for a movement, a way for a movement to stay safe, if that's the goal, is to not engage in conflict. That's the safest movement, right?

So when I think about security culture specifically, I think about ways in which communities in resistance are creating cultures that keep them in resistance. And sometimes when I think of the uprising in 2020, I think of my goal during the 2020 Uprising while doing anti-repression organizing was to keep the uprising going. That was the goal. When I think about security culture vs. opsec - operational security - I think that they really just have different goals. So, security culture comes out of a mid-1990s - I don't necessarily think it was anarchist, I think that's important. Thinking about the earth liberation movement as a whole being kind of like, not necessarily based in an anarchist ethic, means that security culture is much bigger than we even think of it as. The thing that

people were concerned about in the mid-90s was this kind of holdeover from cointelpro - and the major aspects of cointelpro that people were concerned about wasn't necessarily this kind of technological, people weren't necessarily that concerned with being listened to, they weren't really that concerned with their phone being bugged - I mean they were, but the big big big issue that security culture comes from was the ways in which cointelpro employed state tactics to disrupt movements through antagonisms built by informants, sewing discontent among people in groups, a lot of rumor milling.The government figured out that through cointelpro they didn't really need to spend a lot of money or do a lot of surveillance to disrupt movements, you just had to send one or two people in to cause havoc. Which is not to say that I think informants are the most strategic issue - in the 90s, we can look back and see that they [informants] really were.So many people went down because of people snitching and because of informants. But I think that this response to that kind of style of state organizing was to kind of create a broader culture of understanding between people that transcended the more political lines and was broader than just the anarchist movement. It was an idea of creating networks of relationships that had a specific ethic. Thinking about security culture as an ethic has always helped me think thorugh how to do it. And opsec in my mind is a thing inside of security culture - its a specific tool inside of security culture - and the contemporary heavy reliance on opsec isn't necessarily wrong-it just misses the point that the biggest threat to movements - not to people, but to movements - is a lack of ethical culture of taking each other seriously and trying to move forward into the future. So I think that those are the things that I see.

Gwen: I really appreciate, Charles, your framing of it being an ethic. I'm not sure I totally like the framing of opsec as being within an umbrella of security culture. Like I agree with your framing that security culture is something larger than opsec, but I also think that the thing that opsec is trying to accomplish - even if you were like, both opsec and security culture would have things to say about me driving my car that has an onboard navigation system for certain

actions. I think that opsec would be a series of protocols, that is kind of a rigid series of protocols. Whereas security culture would say, let's have an ethic about how we look out for each other that says we can have a negotiation that is dynamic and organic, that says I'm gonna consider the informed consent of "hey, before we do this action, I want you to know that my car has an onboard navigation system. Can we have a group evaluation of that risk?" And that is part of, there is something more of a consent based ethic that is part of security culture as a form of approaching a problem. And I think similarly, in thinking about what makes it larger than just the technical precautions that we think of as being "opsec" - I think about the first security culture workshop I went to years ago, there was a lot of discussion of responsible communication, so like if you want someone's phone number to connect with about something, don't ask "Hey, Charles, can I have Silvina's phone number?" - you would instead say "Hey, Charles, could you ask Silvina if she's okay with me having her phone number?" Because there is an ethic in trying to be responsible in how we interact with each other that is informed by that history of infiltration and stuff, that is trying to cut down on gossip and triangulation that can be tools of repression.

These are probably good practices for all the other things in our relationships, beyond just state repression, but I think it also is a thing that keeps us more able to take maximum risk, to adopt your framing. I also think that sometimes in developing these organic practices that a group might do, while it's if we're thinking about opsec is this rigid thing, and security culture can be more dynamic, then we can have precautions that a cold rational evaluation would say "this doesn't really make sense here" - so like sometimes a precaution is just nice and we can just be like we have a ritual where when we talk about stuff, we just always leave our phones at home and go for a walk. And that's a ritual that can help make us feel safer and a way of saying hey this conversation is important or sensitive. That can also be a part of security culture - that it's not about maximizing a cold rational and potentially false sense of safety but more aimed at an ethic of looking out for eachother.

Seraphina: I really like this frame of security culture as an ethic of consent, Gwen- Let's see, I'm going to move slow - that security culture as an ethic of consent, is a communal aspiration. It's an aspiration to be in practice with each other relationally, that's so well-practiced, it's a norm. It's normative, it's something that's automatic. That feels deeply connected to the kinds of communal care often aspired to as well. Security culture is another way we can practice real, deep relational care. I care enough about you enough to not put you in a position where you are becoming more vulnerable to state repression due to my actions. And I care about myself enough in the same way, so that I can stay in this struggle for the long haul.

Silvina: I just wanna say there is so much in there - I really appreciate what you said Charles, about the goal being to allow our movements to stay disruptive rather than safe. *laughter and sounds of agreement in the background* I think I just wanna really be like - especially because safety is an illusion, right? If we're going to be in active conflict with the state, that we are actually aspiring against safety. And that doesn't mean that we can't be careful. But I think that thats the difference: how do we do care without aspiring towards safety. The other thing I was thinking about was in terms of the thing you were just saying Seraphina, coming off of Gwen. About the going for a walk thing. That practice - of saying "when we go for a walk we leave our phones at home" - is culture. We have a culture inside of our movements, that when we go for a walk we leave our phones at home, just in case! Maybe we want to have a conversation or maybe we don't, but that is part of the practice that allows us to have conversations with each other intentionally.

I think also thinking about the difference between security culture and opsec, I have a couple examples that I thought would be helpful. These are related to people using the community space that we have here. One example is people oftentimes being in the space that is public at a large event with lots of people in it, and

saying like “Hey! Maybe we should all put our phones away right now, so we can have this sketchy conversation.” And I think, in some ways, opsec leads us to believe that is something we could or should do. Because, in some ways, it leads us to believe that if we take the technical precautions, then we can protect ourselves. But, in reality, security culture tells us that we have to build trust with people before we have conversations that might be incurring risk, or that might be asking another person to take a risk with us. And so starting with that relationship part, and being like, the threats here are not even mostly that the state is listening to us. A lot of times, when we look at the history of repression, it’s not that the room was bugged - that’s not how people end up going down a lot of the time.

Another example I have is related to some people's behavior on signal. I will get a lot of texts from people that I don’t know because I’m coordinating the space, and people will be texting me to ask me about booking an event. Oftentimes, people will be reaching out to me because they got my number from another person, but will not tell me who they are or who they got my phone number from, or even what the event that they want to do is - I think because of the assumption that that is “good opsec.” That good opsec means we are keeping each other safe by never knowing who each other are, and that we are never communicating about who we are on our devices. When in reality, this makes me feel like our capacity to be disruptive together is jeopardized, because in that frame, I don’t know who you are, and I don’t know if I should trust you - and I’m also not building trust with you in this moment because I have no ability to tell in one moment to the next if we’ve had a relationship before. There’s ways in which this idea of opsec being a perfectible anonymity means that it actually really hampers our ability to be disruptive together and to build trust and the kinds of relationships that would build a strong security culture.

I think the last thing I want to say is - thinking about what Charles said about movement needing to respond to threats of informants. A lot of the ways that security culture adapted in order to be

responsive to those threats are not only helpful for responding to threats from the state. The zine "Misogynists Make Great Informants" I think is a really helpful explanation of the ways that security culture practices keep us saf— *catches herself* Not safe - keep us able to be disruptive together, with the people in our movements by helping us face threats that are not just coming from the state, but from other people who are disruptive to our movements and disruptive of our ability to trust each other. Oftentimes, the same kinds of behaviors that might be done by informants are also done by misogynists in our movements and on some level it doesn't matter if they are agents of the state or not because their actions have the same consequences of sewing distrust and demobilization. Opsec might tell us that we need to find out if this person is indeed an informant, whereas security culture would apply the same logic to both the misoginist and the informant which is to say "the culture of our movements is that we don't tolerate bragging, or bullying, or whatever it is that this person is doing and so we aren't going to afford trust to this person that would give them access to information that could harm us"

Gwen: "Good opsec is bad security culture." I think that might be the title of this zine *laughter*

Charles: I do think what Gwen is saying is what I wanted to respond to a little bit. I think one of the things that we're all getting at - I think Gwen, you described this as "the ritual." Ritual is done in community, right? You can do ritual on your own, obviously, but it's not as effective. There's a reason that people come together to do rituals. Gosh, there are so many friends I can think of right now who are laughing at me saying this *laughter* Fucking west coast. Cut all of that out, sorry.

There's a way in which opsec when taken on its own - "operational security" - when people's culture, when peoples idea of security comes from operational security, it doesn't go far enough. Because what it does is it kind of operationalizes this idea that there is a technical fix to every security issue. "Tech" in a very real sense.

What Silvina is speaking to is people not being willing to say their names over signal about booking a public event. And that's a mismatch of security practice with the event happening, right? And that's kind of what opsec does in a lot of ways. It gives people a false sense that they are staying very very very safe - so that they take certain kinds of risks when they actually haven't created a culture of security. They've got these technical ideas and so you know, as a person who does anti-repression organizing, I've seen the transcripts of people talking to each other through signal, that was taken off of phones that were taken in a raid that were unlocked. But these connversations over signal were amongst people who didn't really know each other. And people thought that they were safe because they were using the technical tools that they're told are the things that keep them safe. One of those people went to prison for a long time. So I think the thing about operational security is that it works, it's not that it doesn't work, it's just that if you follow it and everyone puts their phone in airplane mode at the community space and then has a really crazy conversation - everyone's followed operational security, they've followed this rule, this protocol. But what if one of the people in the room is a cop? What if one of the people 20 years from now decides to be like "actually I don't like that we did that and I'm gonna roll"? These are all real dynamics that we see play out.

Aron: I did want to respond to what Charles was saying. I also want to frame where this current era of "opsec over security culture" has been coming from, what the context has been, and why we've seen this kind of rise. I will say that I've noticed the rise of opsec over security culture conversations coming at the rise of the Covid-19 Pandemic, into more isolated spaces, into spaces where we are relying on technology even more, to not only communicate but also attempting to organizing, and everything after that point attempting to claw back from the isolation that people had been literally going through,and for many people, still going through to this day, so we rely on technology as the only source of not only movement building but also friendship and general connection building. That's where I have personal issues

with the things that you were mentioning, Silvina, where people are not willing to truly safety model based on what they are actively doing in the movement. If it's a public event, treat it like a public event. If you're in a public space, treat it like a public space. These should be truisms, but doesn't seem like they are anymore. I've definitely seen more of this opsec obsession from these newer and younger people coming in (by young I mean young to movement spaces, young to politics, not specifically age-related). We're seeing a rise of more of what I would consider "clout-based" security culture, "clout-sec." It often feels like many of these newer folks are gaining this knowledge about 'operational security' from these larger social media sources/infographics of what turns out to be clout-chasing,political entities that act like celebrities in movement spaces. We see that on tiktok, on instagram, we see this in how people interact with each other IRL. We see how on social media the "this is what I can do in this moment" things leads to an impermanence of relationship because, "oh, I can just keep scrolling and find more people," bigger numbers better. That weird logic ends up destroying the ability for us to actively connect to one another - whether online or in person. It's wild how that has been normalized. I feel like security culture is sick because so many people are alienating from each other out of fear. How do we in general move forward on that front?

Seraphina: I feel like Covid and internet isolation is really astute. I think about the way I learned security culture - yeah partly from zines, but mostly from folks when I was young being like "Girl, do not send me texts like that!" In that moment, I learned a relationship skill too. I learned how to take feedback and how to reflect. I learned discernment. And that this was someone who cared about me and loved me. It brought us closer together and deepened intimacy in the same way hearing and recieving a boundary can. That's so different than the To-Do's and Not-To-Do's Instagram carousels.

Silvina: I think that there's a way that approach to opsec or cloutsec that you're talking about can encourage people to engage

in an indirect bragging. A really important part of security culture is to not engage in that kind of indirect bragging. Sometimes people will talk about how good their opsec is, for example, a situation at the local community space someone comes in and says "Hey, can we put the curtains up? Because we want this event to be a secure meeting." And perhaps I would say "Well this isn't a secure space - you wouldn't want to have a conversation here that you wouldn't have around your phones." The person responded, "Well I have a burner phone, and I bring that with me everywhere usually, but I didn't bring it today." To me, as someone who has never met this person before, I don't need to know that you have a burner phone, I don't need to know that you are doing anything that would require you to have a burner phone. (Also, if you carry it everywhere that's no longer a burner phone!) And maybe they're affording me trust because I'm associated with this space and so I seem like I have some kind of de-facto cred or something, but I think it's really important to remember that sometimes people who have been in movements for a long time turn on movements (Brandon Darby from Common Ground, all of the ELF snitches, etc.) - that's not to say "you can never trust anyone" but rather to say that trust is something we build and that takes time and sometimes our attempts to appear legitimate or "down" to each other through indirect bragging end up comprimising our ablity to actually do the long term work of building trust with people.

Gwen: I see indirect bragging as, instead of saying "I'm really cool and into crime, here's an example of a crime I did..." - you just unnecessarily reference these hyper vigilant security culture precautions that you're taking that no one needs to know about like "oh i only use tails or PGP to communicate with anyone and I keep everything in a faraday bag and I'm just always ready for shit to go down", like that person is just saying that to make sure that everyone knows that they are into some really heavy shit. But its actually probably drawing a lot of attention to them.

Silvina: I think that sometimes the way that we talk about opsec is this thing that has a perfectionist frame that you're supposed to

know - you individually are supposed to have good opsec. And I think that can kind of encourage this indirect bragging because people want to display how good at opsec they are, right? As a way of gaining clout in movements, which really means as a way of finding acceptance - because so many of us don't trust we are actually worth anything and feel we have to prove our worth in order to be accepted. What would a culture look like that encourages us to believe (and not prove) we are worth a lot and to treat each other as if we all togeher are worth everything? Often I hear people talking about "MY opsec" and I would like us to move towards "OUR security culture" as something that we build together. It also might be helpful to talk about direct bragging.

Charles: Silvina what you're talking about and has come up for me is the realization that - and this has been said already - opsec intentionally draws us apart. The intention of operational security is to be anonymous. But not anonymous to the state or state power, but anonymous to each other. And that anonymity is supposed to give us a veil of security so that we can't harm each other by using the state as a weapon. Security culture brings us together and shows us that we would never want to harm each other by using the state as a weapon. That's the distinction - security culture is supposed to make us closer. It's supposed to - I remember when I went to security culture workshops years ago - do y'all remember the "Donny Don't?" It was an old security culture puppet show. It was a workshop that was mostly followed through the anarchist Earth First! - it was around the same time as the I-69 campaign [a campaign against the construction of a highway in Indiana in the early 2000's], much older campaigns. It was also when summits were a consistent attraction for organizing. People were interacting with these large groups of people that they didn't know very well, so they had to figure out ways to create culture around doing things in really big groups of people you didn't know - one of the things that you learned in these security culture workshops was that you don't take risks with people you don't know. The inverse of that has become that the safest people to take risks with are people you know nothing about. *laughter*

And I think that's been the situation since 2020, and I think that that partially comes from people's complete misunderstanding of why people went to prison. People didn't actually follow the cases that were happening, and they don't actually know why people went to prison. They don't know why the state repression came down, and I think that's one of the big things that we as - older in the movement - needed to do a better job of. Talking about things as they happen so that we can give a better idea of what the reality is. As someone who does anti-repression work, we consistently see that peoples' idea of state repression is very different than how it plays out. We get reguarly asked to do grand jury workshops, anti-terrorism talks, and those things are real- but generally if a grand jury's gonna happen, a grand jury's gonna happen. And it's actually security culture that helps keep people safe in those scenarios. Not knowing each other and a grand jury happens, is the thing that makes it so people cooperate and snitch to a grand jury. Or how we don't know when they happen at all.

The kinds of things that are more common threats from the state are these smaller, more every day kinds of repressions. People get ground down by these small-scale state and city charges that people don't think about in terms of their general anti-repression frameworks because everyone is very concerned about the big stuff but they haven't figured out how to deal with the small stuff yet. I think that that's a big part of why people go toward opsec, because it deals with the big stuff. It says "encrypt everything in case you get raided." There's a small chance of that happening, but you getting picked up for pedestrian interference in a roadway at a dumb demo with your phone is actually way more possible. Getting into a fight with someone at the bus stop, and then getting picked up for it - there's all these things can happen much more regularly than the kind of things that opsec is really thinking about.

Gwen: I think like your saying that if there are those more serious, spectacular types of repression, it's still the community that keeps you safe - not the secret-agent-opsec encryption-whatever. Are there ways that encryption can help you? Probably, and are there times

when anonymity is helpful? Yes, but anonymity's shouldn't be an apriori goal of movement.

You can see this play out when you look at cases where people have caught charges. We could analize the like technical "opsec mistakes" that were made like not using disapearing messages but theres something more about lack of a culture of trust building and looking out for eachother that is missed when we focus on the opsec frame.

I want to talk about the police reports and screenshots from signal that came out of some repression that happened in a specific case that was in a press release by the cops when they charged some people. Basically, the exchange that these people had on signal (which eventually landed in a screenshot in the hands of the cops) was - these two people did not know each other, and they were talking about doing an extremely risky action. In order to build trust, one person says "Oh hey, do you know this arson that happened? That was me, I did that arson. That's how you can trust me." This is very direct bragging - but the logic that brought people to direct brag like that is really a failure to understand how trust building works - and I don't bring this up to shame the people involved in this, but it's a failure of our movement education that we let people believe that that is an appropriate way to build trust. And that is a fucking tragedy and it ended in tragedy.

Charles: Maybe it would make sense to transition into talking about repression that we have seen pretty contemporarily - and think about ways that security culture has failed in a moment. This is the thing that's difficult about security culture also, is that we actually have no idea how well it works, because when it's working there's no footprint. There's no receipt of security culture working because you're looking at something not happening. It's very difficult to measure but it's very easy to see the times when security culture could have saved people from a certain style of repression. Silvina - earlier you mentioned this infiltration dynamic - and I think that my only hesitation with infiltration dynamics is that I

think they are actually a contemporarily small phenomenon. People get very concerned about infiltration and we quickly get into this world of snitch-jacketing. Informants happen, I'm not going to say they don't happen, but they aren't the most efficient use of state resources - so they aren't going to be the go-to thing for a local or even fed jurisdiction. You're more likely to get snitched on by someone you know then be sent to prison by a state informant. One of the things that we see through opsec is the ways that clout chasers you talked about Aron - they end up positioning themselves in these power-positions to police other peoples' actions. They are the Kings of Opsec, and they decide who is and isn't following opsec. This is where a lot of this snitch-jacketing/informant issue comes from. It comes from people saying "So-and-so's opsec is bad, we're concerned that they might be an informant." That's this mish-mash of people saying they know that informants are bad, but what they don't understand is that the way you move past and around informants is to build strong communities of people that trust each other in the long-term. That doesn't keep an informant from getting into that mix, but you don't keep an informant out by snitch-jacketing each other, by fed-jacketing each other. You don't keep an informant out by securing your phone and then making sure no one on signal knows who you are. That doesn't actually stop informants.

Snitch-jacketing and fed-jacketing is when you semi-publicly or publicly out someone as definitely being a cop - or you position your suspicions as verifiable that someone is either a cop who has infiltrated, or someone who is giving information to the feds or the state, or is working for a police department or the state in some way. The reality of outing an informant - I've been part of a collective that has successfully outed informants, and it takes so much work to verify your sources and your sources need to be verified through multiple means. You never actually have a truly verifiable piece of evidence. You never have a police report that says "This is the informant." You have to stitch together a lot of information over a stretch of time, and when you do out an informant, you do it with an understanding that it's going to cause

a lot of harm inside of a community. It rips people apart. You do it because it's very important and that it's something that needs to be done. It's not something done lightly, it's not something done inside of a conflict, and it's not something done inside of a social dynamic. It's part of our broader security culture.

Silvina: I think the other thing too is that you're right - these informant dynamics don't happen that frequently, though there definitely are cases, and there are cases in our region in the last fifteen years at least where that's happened. But the goal is to have a strong security culture where we hold each other accountable and have practices of feedback, like where Seraphina was saying earlier. I think that, instead of saying "I think that person's a cop." We might talk to that person and say "Hey, the way that you're doing this thing makes me feel uncomfortable being in this space or in this collective with you,etc." Having those kind of interactions and having that kind of investment in each other is much more likely to create the kinds of movements that can continue to be disruptive and continue to move toward the things we want to move toward. It also helps us to build trust with each other - if someone responds to that well, that conflict is actually trust building - if they respond to it in a way that is defensive or dismissive, then you can use that information to determine how you move forward with that person.

Gwen: I think that in naming behavior, whether it's behavior that you're labeling as "collaboration with the state" or misogynistic, it's so helpful for community communication to name the specifics of the behavior rather than the label. Saying "This person is an abuser, a misogynist, a snitch" is so much less helpful than saying "This person touched someone non-consensually in this way" or "This person is on a police report talking to the cops and saying A B & C" or "This person testified at a hearing against another person." When you say "this label", sometimes we can lose track of what we mean by that label.

Silvina: Part of that is creating a culture where what we do is

specifically to name the harms and try to be in a culture of accountability with people, rather than creating a culture of finding the bad person. Often times, I think that's what the culture of snitch-jacketing does, to say "Who's the evil inside of the social body?" But in reality, we are all people who do harm, all of us. Harm is always something that happens inside of communities, and that doesn't mean that we should celebrate it or tolerate it, but it does mean that in order for our movements to thrive we have to find a different way to relate to it because it will always be there. The questions is not how to eradicate it, but how to create a culture of accountability and solidarity with each other.

Inevitably that "looking for the evil in the social body" approach leads us to fear that perhaps we are the evil in the social body, which because we live in a toxic world that thrives on our self-hatred is always the fear that lurks unspoken around the corner and makes us aspire to goodness rather than liberation. I think this relates to the point I made earleir about valuing ourselves and believing we are worth something on a fundamental level.

And then, in reality, sometimes there are people who have to be expelled, whether because they are cops, or they are people who cause consistent harm over a period of time, or they have snitched - but that should not the norm or our go to strategy. As Charles was saying earlier - that's something that takes a lot of responsibility and care.

Gwen: I think that some of the discernment that Seraphina is talking about as being part of that practice of security culture.

Charles: Question 4 is how do we create a security culture that is inviting, open spaces that are genuinely desirable to be a part of. I think that we've begun to hit on this in talking about the ways creating closed communities is detrimental because it leaves people out of specific skill building that you need. We're social beings, we learn how to be social through building skills together. Through making mistakes. There's no one in this room that hasn't made a

security mistake at a certain point - and sometimes those mistakes have really big consequences. I think part of what we're all talking about is the moving away from the purity paradigm where there is a pure anarchist subject that we can be. When actually what we are is a collection of our interactions with each other. That's really what's going to be tested.

Gwen: I think there is an inevitable tension between some precautions and openness and invitingness. Holding that tension is always going to be a balance that is struck wrong in one direction or another, and everyone for themself is going to have a different risk tolerance in one direction as far as like, is connection more important or is safety or secrecy more important. Some of that depends on the types of actions you're doing. I remember some security culture discussions I have been exposed to have been very like, what's important is that everything is on a need-to-know basis. There are actions where really thinking who needs to know this piece of information is really worth knowing - building a culture where it's normal to be like, "Oh hey, you're my partner, you're curious where I've been - I'm actually not going to tell you and we have the trust to know that that's not some weird shady thing, it's just that like you're not a part of this thing that I'm doing and I'm not going to tell you the details about it because you're not a part of it and others have trusted me to keep it private that's okay." Not everyone needs to be privy to everything that we do.

On the other hand I remember when I was younger, I talked to someone who was an older radical from the 1960s who said "This whole security culture thing, I'm against it. Stop doing that, it's alienating." Because he interpreted security culture as being an elitist, cool-kids club that was so focused on risk-aversion to a detriment of being an open movement that brings in more new people. And I think there can, at its worst, be truth to that, but perhaps his perspective was because he was more of a socialist type guy who really emphasized numbers and growth. Some people are going to have politics that lend themself to one end or the other of that dynamic - such as "more people is always better,

we just need more masses." There's also people who really like emphasize the small group of trusted people. We can contain both of those things for different actions, different times in life. But were probably stronger if we are able to adjust our openness and secrecy to the needs of the particular action and the moment.

Seraphina: I was thinking about - maybe this story is useful - the moment from a Stop Cop City report back event where the presenter was talking about the atmosphere of the Weelaunee forest encampment- it being incredibly inviting with food, parties, people meeting each other and building new connections, stories, music- a feeling of togetherness. It was really moving, partly the context was that the presenter became friends with Tortuguita during their time in the forest and was grieving the loss of the connection that they found with them, the loss of Tortuguita and loss of the encampment after the police raids and murder of Tortuguita. Someone asked, "I so rarely experience organizing spaces with this kind of joy and welcoming atmosphere that you're describing. How do you square that with the need to practice security culture?" Their response was simply "Well, it turns out, being an asshole doesn't make us safer." Or, maybe we would strike "safer" and instead say "Being an asshole to each other doesn't make us less vulnerable to the impacts of state repression."

We want to create spaces that are a party, that are an incredibly inviting, joyous, and ones where we don't talk about illegal shit! The act of creating an inviting atmosphere and one that's exciting to be a part of in many ways is synonymous, or can be synonymous, with security culture. We want to create alive spaces of meaningful encounter, where we can connect with people who we might find affinity with, might want to connect with more, build relationship and build trust. And some of those relationships can build trust towards taking greater risks together. Security culture can invite us to move at scale or move slowly in relationship with each other. Relationships that move the speed of trust. Or maybe to reframe that a little bit, moving at the speed of actively building trust through engaging in intentional actions - assessing risk level of

actions through evidence of previous actions.

Silvina: There's a part in the book Joyful Militancy where they talk about the power of a baseline orientation of trust. For me, reading that felt really important, "Oh right, what if you approach people with a baseline orientation of trust?" That doesn't mean you walk up to someone and ask "Hey you want to go do this sketchy thing with me? I trust you immediately!" But rather I think having a strong sense of security culture allows us to have a baseline orientation of trust with people because we know what kind of trust we're extending to a person. It's very easy to have a baseline orientation of trust that I can say "hi" to you - or that we can tell each other our names over signal. It's a bad idea to have a baseline orientation of trust for things that are more risky to do together - like going to a sketchy demo together, or going out and trying to do an action together. That idea of trying to approach people with a baseline openness and a baseline feeling of - trying to get away from that feeling of "everyone's a cop." For so long when I first came into anarchist spaces, it was so hard to make connections with anyone because it felt like there was also a kind of clout in being like "Nobody knows my name - I'm so sketchy." which actually makes you look sketchier.

Charles: I think a big part of what we're talking about also is the ways in which security culture orients us to interaction - which is really important given that security culture fails sometimes. Regardless of security culture, people go to prison. The overarching sentiment here is that we want movements that are in conflict with the state and capital and to continue to move forward. Sometimes the inevitability is that people are going to go to prison inside of that movement - that's just going to happen. Security culture is a thing that lessens the capacity for the state to put people in prison - it makes us more dangerous because we're able - in a hypothetical sense - to do more. Security culture allows for the higher capacity and the higher possibility of more action and more serious action. But it doesn't mean people won't get in trouble. I think that that's one of the things that we desperately need, is to understand that

creating cultures allows for the people who go to prison to remain a part of our movements while they're in prison and when they get back out. That's a big key that's missing that I think older generations of anarchists did better. I think of support campaigns, the intergenerational dynamics, of the past like "The Friends and Family of Daniel McGowan" is one of the groups I think of when I think of a really successful solidarity support campaign for a long-term political prisoner who comes from an anarchist milieu. Daniel McGowan went to prison through the Green Scare, specifically for actions taken in the late 1990s on the West Coast as part of the Earth & Animal Liberation Front movements. Those arrests in the Green Scare happened because 15 years after the fact, one of the participants in the actions decided to snitch. Daniel's support crew kept Daniel as a part of these movements even as he sat in the most physically repressive prisons that the United States has, in the Control Management Units (CMUs). He maintained a presence inside of our long standing anarchist and prisoner support traditions. That's a really big part of what we should be talking about in this dynamic, how security culture isn't perfect, some of us are going to go to jail - that's a reality and so we need to start thinking about how do we create movements that can both support people throughout - and then there's a movement for people to get released back into.

Post-release stuff is so difficult for people primarily because - when people ask "What do you need when you get released from prison?" people often say "I need a movement to come back to." That often doesn't exist. I think that's a big part of what I learn from these inter-generational movements. Perpetually looking back to the 1960s - 1970s is not the best idea, but I think that there's a way in which the looking at the anti-Globalization era and onward [late 1990's] gives us a really good snapshot of the things we should be thinking about.

Aron: One of the things that comes to my mind when we're thinking about the necessity of actively continuing to care for anybody who ends up in prison, whether for shorter stints or long-

term stays, that we also think about the community-care aspect of things. Creating a culture of care that relates to not just caring for those serving and coming out to hopefully a movement, but how do we also care for the movement alongside so there is something for people to come back to. One thing I think about especially with intergenerational stuff, I always worry about anarchists who fall off because they're getting old, or they're fading away, and there's not a lot of care put towards where they are and their life stage. I've had a lot of really amazing conversations with anarchists in their 70s and 80s who sometimes feel completely out of the loop on a lot of things happening today within the milieu. I know that's the case for folks as well who are much younger than that, feeling that there is not a community of care that's able to support them through situations in their life that makes the milieu feel like something caring about long term, that makes them feel like "I am okay with defending this movement, this milieu with my life, forever." I always think about that as being a really easy thin-link. Keeping people safer on the long-term is creating a community that cares about one another on the basic shit. That is what mutual aid is supposed to be about, in regards to taking care of each other and meeting the needs of each other, as we can and how we can. I think about the way that disability liberation movements consider the rate of long-term caring for one another until the point of death, and including through that moment of death, and how people take care of each other in those times. When we are at our weakest physically, mentally, spiritually, is when we are the most vulnerable to who knows what. We've seen that this is an easy way of getting people to flip. How do we continue to take care of each other and our basic day-to-day being with each other? Whether that means making sure that people are safe: do they have shelter, do they have food, do they have water, do they have clothes to keep them warm, that they're able to have relationships with each other to the point that we can stand with each other when we are not doing well? I know that there has been failures on that front, and I've also seen successes on that front. It's a continual practice that we have to do, keeping people engaged and in it on the longer-term front is, in my opinion, how we also make sure that we stay safer on the

long-front too.

Silvina: I think also - if we're thinking about why intergenerational relationships are important for our movements - culture is something that is built through practice. It's something that is passed down, it evolves and changes over time. And if we don't have intergenerational relationships, there's no way for that culture to continue. The movements before us have developed cultures, and if we don't have intergenerational relationships, if we're not able to be interacting with people who have come 10, 20, 30 years before us, we are really missing out on an opportunity to build culture. Because then we're trying to start a new culture every single cycle of struggle, which ends up being about 3 years. We don't end up actually being able to pass things on, or to develop complex practices of culture together that have developed and changed and been created through practice over a long period of time. Those intergenerational relationships are something that make our movements places where people actually want to be. That kind of care you were referencing, the kinds of ways that we show up for each other and have mutual aid for each other - those produce intergenerational relationships because they allow people to stay in the shit for longer, and they allow these places that sustain us. If people come in, and they see all these people that have been involved for say 20 years, it becomes a much more appealing space - as long as the people who have been there for 20 years aren't assholes I guess. *laughter* You can cut that part out.

Gwen: No, no, keep that in!

I am thinking about this community care thing, that there's something powerful and beutiful about seeing people be cared for, and being cared for yourself, that I feel like I have felt in myself and I have seen other people make them feel braver and more capable of taking risks because you know people will have your back. When I think about my own experience with spending time in jail, and considering it if I feel anxious and worried about something bad happening where I could go back to jail, my fear is

not "Oh what if I end up in jail?" it's "What if I end up in a cell for months without support or community?" My fear is not solitary, my fear is solitary without letters. Those are so dramatically different. A letter writing night is helpful for the people receiving the letters, but I think that it's also helpful for the attendees to see, "Oh, I know that when I'm in jail, you'll write to me too."

Charles: My last little thought on this intergenerational dynamic is that there's also a way that the state changes it's pace, style, and tactic in terms of state repression, quickly and slowly at different times. But it can be really difficult if not impossible to understand what a normal amount of repression is. Or, to understand the dynamic that you're in in the exact moment if you don't have other things to look to. This is where this intergenerational piece came in for me - I remember during 2020, during the uprising, there were consistently large group arrests of people in Black Bloc. Every single night people were getting arrested, and then re-arrested. In talking to people, I made an offhand comment to someone who was new to the movement about how in the last 10 years, there had consistently been large black bloc demonstrations in our city, and only 5-7 arrests over those 10 years. There were so few arrests happening at demonstrations prior to 2020, and the person I was talking to was shocked. They just thought that the number of arrests that were happening was normal. They were like "This is the endemic level of repression that one should experience." And I said, "No, actually, this is a very different kind of repression that's happening." And what's happening in that scenario was a consistency of people ending up in scenarios where they were coming into contact with the police and the jail system, which is always going to be a security issue, right? Every time you go to jail, that's a security issue that we wish we didn't have to deal with - it happens though. In talking with this person, I realized that without that intergenerational information and knowledge of how demonstrations had gone in this city before, everyone was just moving forward thinking this was a great strategy, because they thought this was how it had always been. So when we don't have these conversations with each other across time, we lose the "What

should we expect as normal? What should we be fighting against? How should we change our strategies?"

Silvina: I have one thing to say, we can close soon. I just want to say that intergenerational struggles are also important because of the younger people, and people who are new to our movements. I think for myself, as someone who has been involved in movements for - oh my god - 17 years - that's crazy *laughter* - my sense of what is possible is very constrained by my experience. There have been many times where I have been completely wrong about what is possible in the moment that we are in, and where people who are younger than me, or newer to movements than me have been willing to take risks, do things that I thought were stupid, and they totally worked out.

I think that this thing is also really important for intergenerational movements, that those of us who have been in the shit for a long time often times - it goes both ways - We move from trauma. That trauma prevents us from seeing opportunities clearly, and from seeing possibilities clearly. While sometimes it is really helpful to have those of us who have been in the shit for relatively longer give our experience of that time - at the same time it is really useful for us to be able to step back and acknowledge that as a limiting factor, and newer people coming in with less experience have a lot of valuable information and knowledge that we maybe do not have at the same time.

Charles: I feel like what we've done here, and what I'm excited about, is really thought through what security culture has meant in our lives, and how we've used security culture to both maintain our ability to stay in a movement - we're here, we're in this room, so we've stuck through with something that's been really hard and really intense and really and really difficult. But also really beautiful, really generative, there's no other way that most of us could see ourselves living, or else we would have just done that. The thing that I think we are doing here is trying to create a conversation around, how do we maintain these resistance cultures

and movements while not giving in to atomization and not giving in to there being a perpetual technical fix to cultural issues and social issues. That's going to mean that at times, the state wins. That's going to mean also that a lot of times the state is not going to win, and we're never going to know when the state's not winning because what it's going to look like is us just getting to live our lives with each other. But that's a really beautiful reward, I think, for taking these really specific kinds of risks.

Gwen: It's hard to make an opsec rule about some things, but there are things that I think movements and individuals learn by going through them, that I think we can share stories of. One of them being the intuition about being careful with your words that comes from seeing them written in a police report, or from having them read to you in court. There is a care in moving about the world that comes from knowing you could be answering for them to your enemies in this way. Another, I think, is some kind of slogan of saying this is "Solidarity is our strength." But I think there is a significant way that repression is isolating, and when we talk to each other about it, and when we share information about what the police are doing, we do get safer. I think that's one of the biggest things, when the feds come knocking or something similar happens - just talking about it - or if you have an ongoing court case, sharing with your friends what's going on with it is going to be comforting for you and give you support. But it will also help your friends think "Oh great, they're not snitching in their court case." There's a degree of communication and solidarity that is really significant there. I also think there's something that a lot of anarchists learned that they sometimes forget about conspiracy charges and RICO charges and accomplice charges that is - just because you're not doing something, doesn't mean you can't be charged with it. The law is really good at criminalizing entire groups, and coming up with ways to do that. Sometimes it fails, lots of times conspiracy charges have not stuck on anarchists for a range of reasons. But it's something that various governments have been incredibly effective at using to target other groups of people, like particularly men of color in the United States. So many people

are serving life without parole for being in a car and thus an accomplice, and not doing anything. I think those same principles can get us in trouble for being in a protest, or at a meeting. So That kind of care with our words i'm talking about, we should use with that mind toward "Oh, what if the thing said in this meeting could be used to incriminate me or misinterpreted to think theres a conspiracy."

Seraphina: There's this larger thing of - if security culture comes down to relationships, how are we building relationships that are less vulnerable to the impacts of state repression? Part of what we're doing is being in a practice of relationships, again coming back to this deep networks of care - but we're creating relationships that are increasing their capacity to be in discomfort with each other. Feedback can feel uncomfortable, conflict can feel uncomfortable, but actually we need the practice of this discomfort because we're trying to get really adept and skillful at relationships because the state repression is so intense, so strong. What was said earlier about fear of solitary without a letter - these practices of having small amounts of pressure, like discomfort in a conversation, but then feeling us move back to relationship with each other after conflict or discomfort or tension, how that can build a skill in us and build a feeling of connectivity that is really necessary when there isn't the intense repression and the intense level of pressure from the state to want us to flip on our friends.

Aron: For real. Having stronger relationships with each other does require conflict, does require care, does require that balance between conflict and care, and that's how we keep each other up no matter what has happened to us. To me, that is the strongest piece that is the backbone of how I end up looking at security culture.

Silvina: My final thought is this: start practicing security culture now. Not because it makes us safe, but because it creates the world we want to live in.

That is the core, to me, of the difference between security culture and opsec. Opsec is about keeping us safe, and security culture is about building the world that we want to live in.

When I say "start practicing security culture now," what I mean is start going to prisoner letter writing nights and write letters to people in prison. The times when I have been actively writing letters to people in prison are when I have felt bolder and braver and more connected to people around me. You could start taking walks with your friends where you leave your phones at home, buliding that ritual together. You could start trying to have a baseline orientation of trust to people and knowing and differentiating what that means, and how that is different from trusting people in a way that allows you to do actions with them.

Starting to practice security culture now means having open conflicts with people. I think at its base, trust means that you have had conflicts with someone and you have come out the other side. I think often there's a real misunderstanding of what trust means, we often take trust to mean "I like you," we take trust to mean "You have good vibes," or "you boast about your opsec and you seem that you really got your shit down." But trust, on the most basic level, means that we have had conflict, we have gotten into the shit, and we made it to the other side in a way where we were able to find reconnection again. That's it.

Death to America.
Long live anarchy.

Further Reading

What is Secuirty Culture: A Guide to Staying Safe

Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements

Confidence, Courage, Connection, Trust: A Proposal for Security Culture

Insecurity Culture from the essay Indigenous Rooted Direct Action in the book No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred by Klee Benally

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