

# **Two Perspectives on Anti-Speciesism**

**From Return Fire and Pantarai**

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*Editorial: Since more than a decade, Return Fire have been providing wide-ranging anarchist perspectives on life and struggle within the troubling, chaotic, and brilliant world we live in. We voice our gratitude for a zine whose pages might be recommended for its sharp critiques of humanism, technology, and gender; no less so for strategic reflections on insurrectional attack, equally for everyday tips on herbalism, also for considered thoughts on spirituality and animism. We were delighted by Return Fire's suggestion of an interview for No Path #1, a dialogue which we ultimately decided to cut short, omitting the longest of answers to the seven questions we posed. That was partly because of lack of space, also because, as editors of a zine with the expressed intention of strengthening affinities between anti-speciesist and anti-civilisation anarchists, we had our reservations about dedicating however many pages – especially in our first issue – to a text which seemed to be pushing in exactly the opposite direction. That, however, was a mistake; for affinity can be deepened by disagreement, and also by conflict. Therefore, we include below the omitted section of our interview with Return Fire, itself a valuable intervention on the topic of anti-speciesism, along with a response from the writer who has contributed the most words to No Path so far. (On that note, and in the spirit of a name which we may, as yet, have assumed for ourselves too easily, we aim to open up more space in this zine for perspectives which are deliberately contradictory).*

## **PART I**

**A main reason for putting these pages together was the wish to strengthen affinities between anti-spe and anti-civ anarchists. We reject the characterisation of anti-speciesism as inherently civilised, along with the assumption that hunting other animals is a great way of rewilding ourselves. Do you disagree? How do you relate to anti-speciesism?**

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To start with the part that has already been theorised the most as part of the Return Fire experience and what influenced it,<sup>1</sup> anti-civilisation thought has been a very powerful, diverse, influential and in many ways positive interjection into anarchism; indeed, depending on how you define those terms and histories,<sup>2</sup> it could even be synonymous with it in certain cases. Of course it's only possible today to talk with real certainty about the legacy that thought identified in this way has within the anarchism of our lifetimes, in which cases anti-civ has often been a more recent (re-)arrival.

The instant problem that you have when trying to take anti-civilisation perspectives outside of an intellectual exercise or lazy way of describing 'the totality' of what we anarchists oppose, is that it becomes extremely slippery to define where civilisation begins and ends in our interactions, cultures, and aspirations. Possibly your above question, though its focus might be elsewhere, may be a good lens to see some of these problems through.

First let it be said that, while interest has been expressed towards this project by comrades within the anti-speciesist movement, it's not actually a tendency that is very well understood or researched by Return Fire, so please forgive any ignorance that comes across in this interview, and correspondence and critique are very welcome as always. (A glossary entry in back in vol.2 outlined what the term speciesism meant here at Return Fire from an editorial perspective, but it wasn't a term that was used editorially from 2014 onwards due to some uncertainties and

ambiguities that will be touched on soon.) As a result, this question would undoubtedly be more intelligently answered by others. Assuming that it is an outgrowth of animal liberation (and, in turn, animal rights) philosophy and practices, there are however at least some basic things to be said.

The lives, flourishing, meaning and personhood of other-than-humans – and the ability to re-think, question and assert what that means for the way we choose to live – is of great relevance to anti-civilisational anarchism (if not its very hallmark!) and, to be honest, to any anarchism of interest to Return Fire. Animal rights – and, more so, animal liberation – movements have powerfully shown within Westernised societies the way that certain of those other-than-humans are industrialised, tortured, trivialised, exploited and disposed of, as one symptom among many of a profoundly sick society. Animal liberation actions<sup>3</sup> have in many cases shown a bravery and commitment that highlights some essential traits for revolutionary struggle: the open-hearted, non-quantifiable need for attacking what is ugly in this world, rejection of the human-supremacist philosophies that are pervasive in Western civilisation, and determination to act in the face of overwhelming odds and social disapproval.

However, with the philosophies of Western civilisation as pervasive as mentioned above, it's possible that some ideas of how to attack some only strengthen other ones. Without knowing exactly which ways in which anti-speciesist thought has been attacked as “inherently civilised” as you mention, there have been plenty of intelligent, well-founded critiques of animal liberation and animal rights movements. They've been perhaps most important when made by those who actually conduct an active and respectful relationship with other-than-humans, that is often linked to their non-marketised subsistence activities: animal liberation/animal rights movements do not hold the monopoly on concern for the many cousins we get to share this incredible world with, and the degree to which many (often Global North, often urban) participants in those movements speak with authority about the liberation of those they have little-to-no connection with deserves acknowledging. Those critiques won't be rehearsed at length here when they're so widely available (though frequently smeared), but this curious definition of 'liberation' will be returned to. In terms of why – despite these commonalities and respect for many of their actions – there is a hesitation from Return Fire towards anti-speciesism, let's talk about the focus that anti-speciesists seem to have and their framing. The term smacks of yet another tag-on to the check-box of liberal political correctness buzz-words (i.e. anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-speciesist) well integrated into market choices and lifestyle options within capitalism at this point; buzz-words that of course all gesture towards something vital from any truly radical perspective, but which in the dominant culture we live within are dealt with as discrete issues to be resolved with the equality of enlightened citizens. While this is of course a framing that no doubt some anti-speciesists totally reject – not least yourselves, assuredly! – let's explain why this connection has been made here.

Liberalism posits subjects who exist in thin air, with their rights raised triumphantly in their hands (though always under the gaze of the State which supposedly guarantees them), not subjects messily entwined with each other and their world.<sup>4</sup> Animal liberation and animal rights, surely the spaces anti-speciesism emerges from, have overwhelmingly tended to fetishise and separate certain expressions of life (that get categorized as animals) from the rest. (Actually, this brings us back around to what our notions of a self or relationality are: animal rights in the West has a strong – although not exclusive – root in utilitarian philosophy, such choice characters as Jeremy Bentham with his famous Panopticon; and its calculation of what it considers the great-

est good for the greatest number, each of that number shorn from their context and ecology and dropped into the prison cells viewed from the benevolent liberal's control tower.) If we can't look at ecologies rather than lone species with their rights (or lack of them), anti-speciesism would seem little more than liberalism writ large upon the whole world. While this may simply be a quibble based on a linguistic association – certainly, intelligent anti-speciesists do exist who reject the framework of rights at least in theory<sup>5</sup> – it does seem related to the rejection in the question above of hunting.

To include a range of cultural practices so vast under the simple heading of hunting (from the bloodsports of the rich and their subservients we know so well here in the UK to the annual deer harvest by Haudenosaunee archers for subsistence) seems to be a coded way of implying one thing; veganism. Without mischaracterising the wide range of practices that are subsumed under that label, nor rejecting the wishes of those with certain bodily constitutions or personal idiosyncratic strategies for considering themselves to have moral integrity in the consumerist world we currently inhabit, in terms of a totalising prescription veganism is riddled with Western philosophical biases,<sup>6</sup> from the Christian fear of death, to the liberal right-to-life, to the scientific parsing of the living world into discrete categories; itself greatly indebted to the Aristotelian 'great chain of being', with animals afforded a higher status than 'mere' plants, waters or soils (clearly harking back to the conversation above about animism). In a world where species extinctions are happening at a break-neck pace, and soils and waters so despoiled (not least for the needs of industrial agriculture, whichever diet it feeds), it does not seem a satisfactory response to simply bring certain animals one peg further up on the rights list, if we still see them (and ourselves) as isolated fragments and not totally embedded into matrices of interdependence that cannot be encapsulated in such simplistic and legalistic frameworks as "thou shalt not kill... except for non-animals".

It seems currently fashionable to refer to other-than-human animals as "comrades" in some circles (often spoken by people with a questionable amount of direct relation to such "comrades"), but surely solidarity must include the ability to actually learn from the person you are in solidarity with, if not actually (to be pedantic) a common project to 'stay solid' with. There is a great deal we can learn from observant participation in actual ecologies in meaningful ways,<sup>7</sup> trying to make those places we actually live from and eat from and die into, our habitats, not scenery: veganism does not seem to be one of those lessons however in any contexts personally experienced at the time of writing, and there is a tendency for people who are actually beginning to enter that dance (while rejecting industrialisation, monocropping, chemical abuse of the land and other practices that tangibly harm the entire web rather than periodically taking lives of specific individuals within it) to abandon veganism once they get going. This harks back to the earlier point about animal rights/animal liberation sometimes being (to put it mildly) tone-deaf to other movements for respectful co-existence with the living world, such as indigenous re-vitalisation movements: there have been indigenous people interested in or involved with animal liberation movements (one thinks of Rod Coronado,<sup>8</sup> of tawinikay<sup>9</sup>), including challenging aspects of modern-day 'traditionalism' in their own cultures – but they generally haven't subscribed to veganism. Attempts to synthesise the two<sup>10</sup> have seemed uneasy at best.

Probably as often, animal rights has pitted itself against indigenous lifeways, as with the famous anti-whaling and seal-hunting poster-children of previous generations (which by sleight of hand equated Inuit or Nunavut practices with the very same obscene commercial slaughters by big industry – dating back to the start of the Industrial Revolution which over-harvested

whale products lubricated as the first global commodity, whose derivatives could once be found in every room in the house – which Rod Coronado and so many others were radicalised by and risked life and limb decisively sabotaging). Powerful movements against imperialism and domestic racism existed at the same time, and have not ceased since the European colonial powers began their project to export the capitalist social relations which have been poisoning the earth and industrialising its inhabitants ever since at a steadily more global scale. This was at a time when emerging Western movements for ecological awareness and animal rights had to choose between deepening and radicalising their understandings of the problem while finding solidarity with anti-colonial struggles, while recognising certain European peasant or herding practices as what has been called ‘the environmentalism of the poor’; or, doubling down on some of Western culture’s pre-existing cultural biases in a fatally-partial revolt against others. The rest, as they say, is history. At the risk of over-focusing, the example used above is revealing: despite not even harvesting the white seal pups whose images were mobilised by animal rights and environmentalist groups in the 1970s, but only adult seals, Inuit hunters have been the targets of such groups ever since, further devastating colonised populations with the highest suicide rates in the world and severing cultural subsistence practices that have bound them together with their habitat since time immemorial (whereas the activities of industrial society – including its devout vegans – has been turning that habitat into a melting shipping lane in scarcely a handful of generations). In 2014 one of those groups, Greenpeace, stood down their thirty-plus-year campaign and apologised (and seeing how such large organisations are inarguably run as corporations<sup>11</sup> and with the same sensitivity to PR, this was probably cynically timed due to the higher social capital resulting from being ‘pro-indigenous’ now than in other moments); others continue their work. In 2017, environmentalist group Sea Legacy even attempted to smear Nunavut hunters of polar bears for their meat by claiming (with no foundation but their own racism, it turned out) that they denied global warming; from their air-conditioned offices, punching down on those inhabiting the most rapidly heating places on Earth. The same year, the Haudenosaunee archers mentioned above – just four years after their supposedly-protected-by-treaty rights to hunt and fish in what Europeans named ‘southwestern Ontario’ were finally recognised by its colonial government, under which indigenous people living on-reserve have three times the national rate of diabetes, linked to industrial diets – were confronted by animal rights demonstrators as they entered the area who screamed racist slurs and disrupted their traditional practice, as they have every year so far.

Lest it be said that the criticisms made here only apply to the notorious sell-outs of the environmental and vegan movements, let’s take this month’s article<sup>12</sup> by the anarchists of the Total Liberation Club, hosted by Freedom News. While taking more care to insist that theirs is not “an argument to say all cultures must adopt a singular worldview or way of being”, this supposedly more sophisticated stance is immediately undermined by their equation in the very first paragraph of a child eating rabbit – in what they approvingly describe as a “famous vegan thought experiment” – with not just “violence” (a meaninglessly broad, self-serving and incoherent category<sup>13</sup>) but “psychopathic tendencies”. It’s hard not to notice the symmetry between this stigmatisation and the experience of Tanya Tagaq, an Inuit musician (who has spoken out against factory farming while delineating it from her cultural legacy of hunting, and advocated action against the industrial meat and fast food industries) who in recent years shared a photo of her baby daughter with a seal her family had just killed, leading to her receiving death threats and witnessing petitioning to have her child taken away from her.

The lumping together under “violence” of subsistence practices with war-making or even serial killing – with Hannibal Lecter, to cite Total Liberation Club’s assertion, who was not known to fill his victims mouths with snow with respect after taking their lives so their spirits would not have thirst on their onward journey, as Inuit hunters do with seals – finds resonance in another purportedly-enlightened (but actually deeply colonialist) reaction to such practices. The more recent revitalisation of whaling by Makah and Nuuchah-nulth groups, who intended to hunt a whale, provoked a campaign against them. From ‘Animal Rights, Imperialism and Indigenous Hunting’<sup>14</sup>:

Many animal rights activists suggested to the Makah that instead of killing the whale they should ‘count coup’ – a Plains Indians practice which involved touching an enemy warrior as a demonstration of bravery. Makah artist Greg Colfax responded to this by saying: “I know nothing of counting coup [...] But, from the folks I have talked to about it, it was an act committed between one warrior and another. We are not at war with the whales.”

The gist of Total Liberation Club’s text is discussing a recent academic study (yawn) that supposedly ‘proves’ – and although you’d have thought our movements had already established this knowledge through our own experience and struggles, now they have the Positive Evidence! – that “[w]hat treatment is deemed morally appropriate for an animal can depend on whether the animal is characterized as “food.”” Like all covertly Eurocentric claims, neither the parts quoted from the study nor Total Liberation Club themselves mark the assertions they make as pertaining to a particular culture, while still (in Total Liberation Club’s case) using the opportunity to poke fun at what they call “corpse-eaters” in general; but in Makah and many other societies, this finding would probably be something of a non-event. Other cultures do not universally characterise certain other species merely as food, as that category clearly and derisively exists in alienated cultures like our own. They characterise them<sup>15</sup> as relatives.<sup>16</sup> Relatives in a great and unending cycle of dependency and responsibility, where nothing gives that is not given to and nothing eats that is not eaten. (And, for what it’s worth given how far a cry this is from what is being discussed, it is certain that nothing consumed at Return Fire after shelling from bean-pods in our own gardens, picked up and plucked from the site of a road-kill, gathered from nut-trees or picked from coastline mollusk clusters, or shared by friends who host herds in their orchards, has felt like mere “food” in the same way as whatever products (vegan or not) that are collected from shop shelves. Perhaps it is ignorance to these experiences and their deep meaning that leads Total Liberation Club to identify, along with their report, any capacity to both love and eat animals as “moral acrobatics”, rather than as one possible result of philosophical maturity.)

When the Makah hunt proceeded, members of Sea Defense Alliance made sure to spray chemical fire extinguishers into the faces of the whaling crew, shoot flares over their canoe, and threaten their lives. The same article on that hunt, harking back to the notorious ‘70s campaigns of Greenpeace, the Sea Shepherd Society and their like, cites a passage from another text with which to close this meditation on your question: “The protest movement, while it cast aside speciesist attitudes, was unable to categorize Inuit seal hunting other than through its own ethnocentrically derived universalist perceptions of animal rights and values.”

If we are interested in liberation – the real kind, the kind that actually is self-directed and not imposed from outside – co-creating living landscapes where we are working with how everybody can find a niche for their people to live well and then die well, it seems more likely that the lessons other beings have to teach us will be more complex and subtle than us never hunting them. But of course practice could prove otherwise, as it would be distinct in each place; the burden of proof

does, however, seem in veganism's corner at this point, especially in terms of what it is actually doing on its own doorstep rather than dictating as a totalising morality masquerading as strategy. News from anti-speciesist projects on what they are currently doing would be appreciated!

The framing of your question does lend itself to projecting possible pathways in the abstract, without the context that makes such decisions meaningful. So apologies that this answer may also have strayed into general principles – as this topic too often does! – that may or may not prove the best in any particular situation created through our struggles, and seem like a kind of 'best-case scenario' take rather than reflecting the actual realities as we try to move towards food autonomy (for want of a better short-hand descriptor<sup>17</sup>) in our own landbases, with whatever seems appropriate there. (It's a tangent that will not be taken further here, but one controversy of animal rights/animal liberation movements has been their tendency to compare – or, in the worst cases, equate – the oppression they are concerned by with the historic struggle for the emancipation of African slaves of the Triangular Trade; little comparison has been made however between these activists and the white abolitionists who often had little interest in the enslaved Africans' actual aspirations or self-determination, but instead wanted to further 'civilise' them into Christian morality. Obviously objectionable practices of such activists like de-clawing cats they live with, dictating veganism for other-than-humans whose diets they control, etc., have elsewhere come under scrutiny, but this 'saviour' kind of so-called solidarity – a solidarity without learning as the base-line of respect – seems relevant to the wish to impose blueprints onto a being or area without any openness to their partnership in that process.) Doubtless there will be places where hunting by whatever definition is not an appropriate interaction for the time being; doubtless in other places, it is.

Conversely, this is not a unique failing – other strains such as primitivism (only one of many subsets of anti-civilisation thought within anarchism, and whose adherents we do not reject out of hand) have also at times done the same with their prescriptions for "hunter-gatherer life" regardless of the location, and even when it has tried not to<sup>18</sup> has tended to the blueprint-imposed-from-above model in its discourse when it comes to human lifeways.

Although spoken in a different context, some words from Peter Gelderloos' latest book<sup>19</sup> feel relevant to this:

Reflecting the class interests and the worldview of the technocrats themselves, all of these proposals enact power as a lever that operates on inert Others. To them, the territory is a map, and theirs is the hand that holds the pencil that will redraw it. Deep down, they can never trust the intelligence of the territory (nor locate themselves within it). They cannot surrender themselves to the dialogue, the dance, with a specific territory, nor meld into the reciprocal relationship that is the earth healing itself. Modern day missionaries, they fail to accept that they are not needed to save anyone. And that is why they remain a part of the problem. Your question of how to re-wild ourselves rests on a further question of what is wildness; another conversation that requires considerable de-contamination of Western dualisms, and one that unfortunately time has run out for here.

R.F., May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

## PART II

Away from the city, there were some hills. These green hills – which on one side rolled into the mountains – had on their surface a patchwork of fields and villages and woodlands. And outside one of those villages, a gathering of humans was taking place. A number of rebels – many of them calling themselves “anti-civ anarchists” – had found each other there to camp and cook and plot the downfall of everything they hated. There were bonds and there were tensions forming, in the discussions which arose. And one of those tensions – which inevitably erupted into an argument – concerned some of the nonhuman guests of the gathering, guests who (unlike the humans) didn’t get to decide whether or not to be there. These nonhumans were goats, and they were being kept in a cage; the human hosts of the gathering were keeping them there to feed themselves, to make themselves less dependant on the megamachine. Yet some of the humans weren’t satisfied with that, for them every cage existed to be opened, and so – once the time for talking had expired – they went over to the goats, and they set them free.

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I can’t help but think that humans need words like fish need water. There are many words which are very important to me; and one of those words is “speciesism” – with which I refer to domination based on species membership. Another of those words is “civilisation” – the combined process by which urbanisation, domestication, technology, and ideology are expanded. Some anti-civ anarchists, despite taking seriously the importance of fighting animal incarceration, exclude or at least de-emphasise anti-speciesism from their struggles against domination (I read you, Return Fire, as one of them). I think you raise some very good arguments for doing so! And yet, I remain an anti-speciesist.

I made the case elsewhere that anti-speciesism is hopeless when it seeks to protect civilisation, because the development of cities, their infrastructure, their methods of production and of mind control, are and always have been at the forefront of animal exploitation.<sup>20</sup> However, and what I wanted to highlight in my introductory story, is that even a resolute opposition to Leviathan does not entail a commitment to animal liberation. (Determining oneself to abandon mass society might even motivate speciesist practices. Refusing to use supermarkets could encourage humans to keep other animals locked up for food production; refusing to use automobiles might incline you to exploit horses or donkeys for transport). I need a term to express this wish I have to see all the cages with animals inside get opened, without delay. To signify that the gestures which follow are as much at the forefront in the struggle against domination as anything. It’s obvious to me that the term “anti-civ” isn’t enough, not nearly – hence the term “anti-speciesist” is one I find useful.

Your response highlights some of the problems with the philosophical roots of anti-speciesism. To these concerns I could add, that the term itself was coined and popularised by liberal academics with every interest in preserving the world-eating monster we call industrial society. However, I’m not sure how much I care where something like this originally comes from. I wonder if dropping a term on such a basis would imply a commitment to purity? Of refusing to use tools developed by the enemy. For me the only important thing, is the potential a word or practice opens up in the here and now. I’m thinking here (like you also mention, both in your interview and throughout your volumes) of the brilliant attacks against the cage-society which

the anarchist animal liberation movement continues to provide. I'm grateful to share a world with humans sufficiently brave and undomesticated to make them happen – and I don't want to distance myself from them. (Nor from those comrades performing less dramatic but just as vital contributions, such as providing everyday, minimally-coercive carework for other animals, both inside and outside official sanctuaries).

Perhaps the important thing in your association of liberalism with anti-speciesism, however, and which you seem to think was lurking behind the question that we (who ostensibly reject statist mentalities) posed you, was the implication of rights. I respond by saying, that your critique only applies to those whose rejection of speciesism involves a conceptual process – absolutely central to the composition of civilisation generally – which Stirner-nerds call “reification”. Our perceptions of other animals get reified when we treat their species (a mental fiction with no basis in biological reality, which scientists have had no luck in defining successfully) as more important and more real than the unique and ultimately ineffable creatures these intellectual schemes are based upon. In other words, we put animals in boxes called “species” – mental boxes which, despite being abstractions, function exactly like cages – in order to rationalise giving privileges to some whilst treating others like shit. (It is a similar process, I think, when domination against humans is based on essentialist daydreams such as gender or race). Your critique, Return Fire, helps me understand that species-essentialism is not merely an insult to the living, breathing, breathtaking creatures we get to share this planet with: it is also a necessary tool for human supremacism to function. If anti-speciesism is – as Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer would have conceived it – the larger-than-life project of establishing equality between different species of animals, then it can only involve the expansion of rights and the state (or at least of statism under another guise). But that isn't my concern, not at all: the kind of anti-speciesism I care about concerns the destruction of species-being altogether, a.k.a. the collapse of civilisation, of every attempt to separate ourselves from other animals – and from one's own animality, too.

Nonetheless, remaining anti-speciesist does – and despite the above clarification – risk being associated with those with whom I share very little in common. You already provided some good examples, among them those who dress up colonial attitudes in the name of animal liberation. But using a term which connects you to a broader movement always carries such a risk – same goes for “anarchist”, “queer”, “anti-tech”. I can use any of these labels whilst making explicit, for example, that I am no friend of anarchists who support lockdown, of queers who propose reformist agendas, of transphobic critics of technology. For me “anti-speciesist” is on the same level; were I to avoid describing myself as such, it would be because of a suspicion that identity categories generally risk binding oneself to the roles, expectations, and stereotypes of a particular abstraction: not because of a problem with that term specifically.<sup>21</sup>

Relatedly, and despite calling myself “anti-civ”, I've raised concerns with the hunting ethos of many Western critics of civilisation, which supposes that the relationship between ourselves and a hunted animal could ever be based on respect or even consent.<sup>22</sup> Both are impossible; for, by definition, a hunt must target a wild animal, someone who flees or fights back – whose most vital preferences must therefore be disrespected in order to kill them. We might show respect to an idea we associate with the hunted animal, or to their spirit (whatever we take that to mean), or to the habitat they derived from. But not – as far as I can tell – to the organism themselves, who is anyway already dead. I make this point, however, without trying to sneak in a moral prescription, of proposing anything be forbidden (which would indeed mean promoting rights). Any such inclinations – like you do well to point out – promote general principles and universal

blueprints: they prevent the land from speaking for itself, blocking us from participating in that ongoing and ultimately unpredicable conversation. My purposes have only ever been to insist that animals be included in that conversation, and on no lower level – something which cannot be done whilst confusing ourselves about what it means to hunt them. That isn't a red line; because I can imagine contexts in which hunting would seem to me the least shitty option – and in realising that your words help me understand something important.

Bear in mind that, when posing you the above question two years ago, it was “the assumption that hunting other animals is a great way of rewilding ourselves” [emphasis added] that we rejected. This was not – as you seem to have read us – an attempt to problematise indigenous hunting practices.<sup>23</sup> I think you do well to hint at the enormous differences between fox-hunting in Great Britain and the annual deer harvest of Haudenosaunee archers. Unlike the latter, the former is a potent symbol of class hierarchy, it isn't performed for the sake of subsistence, and it relies on the exploitation of animals (horses and hounds) other than those being hunted. (To these important differences, nonetheless, I add that for the hunted animal themselves, both practices might well be regarded as alike: I'm not sure if I would care much for being pierced by arrows rather than torn apart by hounds).

The focus of our question was on how we, as humans raised in the West (and I suppose this includes both Return Fire, No Path, and the vast majority of our readerships), might like to approach hunting in our everyday quests of living wilder. Its wording was unhelpfully vague – and I'm not sure there was something more definite behind it back then. But to try and provide it now, I would start by saying that hunting plays a very significant role in Western culture – it is something way beyond economics. Even if foxes are “pests” for farmers, they are creatures who could be eliminated far more efficiently without horses and hounds and elaborate outfits. This practice is, I think, an age-old blood ritual which purports to establish the coherence, identity, and superiority of civilisation – by chasing down and sacrificing a living symbol of the more-than-human domain. Something similar could be said about the ridiculous amount of effort put into building and maintaining those thousands of hunting towers which penetrate the landscapes of much of so-called Europe, deeming them literal warzones: I wonder if their secret purpose is to signify that the wild – irrational and uncontrollable – is being dominated, kept in check. This is why, for those of us who weren't raised in indigenous cultures, hunting is something which should be approached with plenty of caution. I emphasise: not ruled out – but treated with caution. Might it be that we could end up making war with the wild in the name of connecting with it? Practiced for reasons other than sheer subsistence (and I think it possible to deceive ourselves when wording our motivations), I suspect that hunting-as-rewilding does exactly that.

Our original question didn't group all hunting practices together; but a text I authored and referenced already – ‘Against Speciesism, Against Leviathan!’ – includes a case for why prehistoric hunting, besides potentially fomenting the rise of human civilisation, also likely wiped out a great many animal nations.<sup>24</sup> So it might be time to answer the accusation (made by others already) that I took a position against indigenous hunting practices. (And I make my point in a roundabout way).

I love what you said elsewhere in our interview, about how generations of domestication have not succeeded in totally eradicating an animistic sensibility among Westerners; for example, many of us still talk to our plants, to our cars, to deceased loved ones.<sup>25</sup> I read this as an indication that, despite severely dismembering our capacities for recognising and responding to “the aliveness, the sacredness, the personhood of the inhabitants of this living world”, generations

of domestication have not destroyed them: what was there before is, in some sense, still there now – and always will be. I want to go from here by saying that I think it goes both ways, that the ugliness which defines so much of life in Leviathan’s 21<sup>st</sup> century is not something which the monster invented. The seeds of civilisation must already have been there; for how can anything grow without a seed? Domination, colonisation, and ecocide have probably always been around in some form – I think this a basic implication of the refusal of linear time.<sup>26</sup> I have no loyalty to primitivism; hence also no reason to believe that (except perhaps as an archetype present in the cosmologies of a surprising number of different human cultures, including non-monotheistic ones) anything resembling Eden ever existed. I could try and back up my hunch with things I’ve read in books; but it’s been most visible for me whilst spending time in forests, noticing how mercilessly other organisms seem to rip apart and exploit each other. I see immense beauty in the woods, but plenty of horror also (horror which, in a subtle sense, might be inseparable from the beauty).

This is why it isn’t difficult for me to entertain the possibility that prehistoric humans wiped out a plethora of mammalian cultures thousands of years prior to the invention of agriculture. It is also why, in one case, I described the humans who supposedly did so as “colonisers” (although, to be clear, here I wasn’t talking about indigenous humans: because they had only just landed on these continents). If it is true that prehistoric humans, upon arriving in untouched bioregions, burned down swathes of forest and hunted many of its indigenous inhabitants to extinction, then I think the description roughly accurate. But I wouldn’t make such a case any more! Not, however, because I now hold the opposite historical narrative; instead because I’m not convinced there’s much to be gained from speculating on the truth-content of an unattainable past.

To return to your response to our original question, I don’t believe an endorsement of veganism – especially not as a totalising prescription – was implied by what we asked (I could, for example, refuse to eat anyone killed deliberately, but still say yes to a bowl of your roadkill stew). And yet, there is a strong association between anti-speciesism and the refusal of animal products (I remember that vegetarianism is even stated as a baseline requirement for participating in the Animal Liberation Front); hence it might be an impossible debate to avoid.

I involve myself somewhat by saying that veganism – insofar as it is actualised within the living nightmare of industrialised production – is inherently ecocidal, colonial, and also... speciesist. Yes, incredibly speciesist, given how industrial agriculture inevitably devours and despoils ever higher quantities of wild animals’ native habitats, whilst banishing or exterminating (with the use of traps, fences, and pesticides) those birds, mammals, and insects who threaten to undermine its maximum efficiency in any way. If veganism is the promise of amassing industrial quantities of food without animal cruelty, then I honestly think veganism a lie, one made convincing by our estrangement from the production process. I would love it if, rather than promoting consumptive choices which have little or nothing to do with the reduction of animal exploitation, it became more commonplace to emphasise that animal liberation consists in nothing less than tearing the infrastructure of domination apart. As a beautiful (and fiercely anti-speciesist) text published in *Tinderbox* #3 put it: “It is time to do away with a vegan diet being a prerequisite for anti-speciesism. The critique of how our world treats animals is most important. Let the arguments around diet rest.”<sup>27</sup>

That said, I have full respect for those comrades who designate veganism as an important aspect of their hostility towards domination. I myself prefer avoiding animal products, not on the basis that I think animals more intelligent or sensitive or worthy beings, simply because – being

mobile creatures – I suspect that the degree of domination necessary to make products of them is all the more severe. You don't need to use cages or chains or fences or tranquilisers (incidentally the very tools of human oppression) in order to convince plants or fungi to participate in the productive process; providing warmth and nourishment are normally sufficient incentives. Yes, I know that non-animals, when farmed industrially, are kept in foreign environments, prevented from reproducing as they otherwise would, and sometimes get their genomes modified (though genetically modified foods, like animal products, I also would not eat unless I had little choice). But I'm still not convinced that we can describe slavery, torture, or rape as aspects of the domestication of non-animals: at the risk of generalising, there seems to be a qualitative difference. I know this line of speculation is complex, ambiguous, even arbitrary – that is also how it seems to me. But I outline it here in order to rationalise why, despite the fact that nothing produced by industry feels much like food to me any more, the products of factory farming continue to disgust me the most.

Once you combine the refusal of speciesism and of civilisation, the resulting terrain – in regards to dietary choices – is a muddy place, with no clear paths to follow. If one were only concerned with fighting animal exploitation, then veganism would be the obvious choice; and if one were only concerned with independence from the megamachine, it obviously would not be. And what if we're committed to both? Then we begin to traverse a landscape for which there is no map. (I've said something about my own attempts to do so, but what I hope goes without saying, is that I'm not trying to say anything definitive).

Am I correct in reading your discussion of veganism, as claiming that other animals can't be our comrades? This feels significant to me; because I'm not sure we can make sense of animal liberation at all without referring to this idea, something you might call "comradery". When "right" and "wrong" are of no interest to us, and we don't (as is usually the case) personally know those animals being held captive, how should we motivate ourselves to liberate them, to help them liberate themselves, unless we share a common projectuality? Unless we know deep down that their fierce yearning for freedom is the very same fire burning within ourselves. The point of comradery for me, is that even if we don't know each other's names or faces, we might nonetheless have something very important in common, a shared energy which doesn't depend on being in the same place (or even in the same time). It's a beautiful feeling; I don't know why we should try to limit it to human interactions – and I'm uninspired by attempts to do so. To be clear, I wouldn't apply the term to all or even most nonhuman animals, given that plenty seem about as habituated to their cages as most humans. But there are many who are not, who manifest a consistent conflictuality towards domestication generally, and the best word I have to describe this symbiosis is comradery. We take risks for these creatures, precisely because we aren't separate; and in liberating animals, therefore, we also liberate ourselves.<sup>28</sup>

This connects to a broader topic, that of animal resistance – the lived reality which makes animal liberation possible in the first place. Strictly speaking, I think it impossible to liberate someone else: the most we can do, is to disable some of the barriers which prevent those inside the cages from liberating themselves. What many anarchists fail to realise is that captive animals revolt every day against their incarceration, that they are not voiceless or passive victims, that they do not need humans to show them the way (hence their emancipation has nothing to do with democracy or the state). I see these humanistic delusions figuring, for example, in Daniel Colson's critical take on anti-speciesism in *A Little Philosophical Lexicon of Anarchism*, an entry which I was surprised to see you include as the appendix to your publication of our interview.<sup>29</sup>

Colson here mistakenly assumes – and with no explanation – that other animals are not the active forces of their own liberation;<sup>30</sup> and he claims, “since the animals do not speak”, that human beings must inevitably make ourselves their representatives when attempting to solidarise with them. However, animals are not silent: they talk and they teach in a myriad of ways – to which civilised ears have merely made themselves deaf. And whilst these languages will never become intelligible for the ruling order, this is only a problem for Colson because here he thinks like a statist, supposing that emancipation requires making oneself recognisable to power. Making demands of the enemy is exactly what curtails our possibilities for liberation: hence the “silence” of animals might well be to their advantage. Perhaps that is what makes animal resistance so terrifying, the fact that it has nothing to do with institutional dialogue, everything to do with wild and uncompromising direct action.

A sad and perhaps unwitting consequence of many anarchist critiques of anti-speciesism, is that they (in some sense working in tandem both with the seductions of vegan capitalism and ruthless state repression of the implacable) have had the effect of de-radicalising animal liberation movements, partitioning them from an emphasis on anarchic attack. I’ve seen this at work in numerous contexts in Europe, that much of the terrain is being deserted to liberals and the fucking fascists. I’m extremely glad to see publications<sup>31</sup> and gatherings<sup>32</sup> and actions happening which counteract this trend. More strength to all who continue this fight!! I hope our zine contributes in some small way, helping clarify that anti-speciesism nullifies itself by failing to call into question the totality of statist, humanistic, and civilised relations which cannot survive an hour without devastating the lives of other animals. And, conversely, I hope that anti-civ anarchists recognise that Leviathan will not be stopped until every cage is empty: all the cages of industry, also of small-scale production, and especially those within which we imprison the wild animals lurking within ourselves.

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