

Review: Species Traitor #4

Aragorn!

Spring/Summer 2007

Species Traitor #4
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While this is the fourth issue of this zine, the format has changed considerably from the flimsy all-newsprint microscopic print of the last issue. Taking a cue from the now defunct *Do or Die*, *Species Traitor* #4 is almost 200 pages long and in a journal-style format — for the purposes of review crossing the threshold from magazine to book. This is a handsome edition with clean layout, a high quality cover, and good selection of images throughout.

There are a couple of obvious points to make about *ST*. While the cover may say insurrectionary (as in “Insurrectionary Anarcho-Primitivist Journal”), Kevin Tucker (the primary force behind and voice of *ST*) is more interested in applying an anthropological analysis to anarchism, even more than Zerzan. You will appreciate the articles, or not, based on whether you accept or reject the premise that the field of anthropology offers something useful to anarchist ideas — or whether you agree with Tucker on how much it offers. The longest article is the 40-page “The Forest Beyond the Field: the consequences of domestication.”

Anarcho-primitivists, like most social theorists, have typically focused on agriculture as that source of change and the real origin of domestication. But that doesn’t explain why the walls of Jericho were built by gatherer hunters or how societies like those along the Salish Coast and some Maori of New Zealand had complex kingdoms complete with slaves while lacking agriculture. Looking at domestication as a social phenomena [sic] as well as referring to plants does help to explain this while offering a glimpse of what would (in some cases) become the cornerstone of civilization. (22)

Many terms used in the journal have different definitions than one would expect and are used without any explanation of why, or of their genealogy. *Rewilding*, *domestication*, *wild*, *collapse*, *primal war*, *spirituality*, *veganism*, *balance*, *nature* (etc), are all used in highly subjective and judgmental ways that require a description for any audience outside of a circle of friends. Tucker uses a set of terms to describe concepts he either has a critique of or supports and assumes that readers will share his loaded uses of the terms without acknowledging that his use implies that agreement. This is language used as a cudgel rather than as dialog. Let’s take one example: primal war.

Just like the title of this periodical is a play (with a misanthropic twist) on a popular leftist anti-racist perspective, Tucker’s idea of primal war works best, and was first introduced, as a contrast to the idea of “no war but the class war,” which buttresses a red anarchist perspective. But these chuckles aren’t enough for Tucker, who attempts to develop the tongue-in-cheek term primal war into a full blown idea.

I've been interested in developing "primal war" as less of an alternative to revolution than as an embodiment of the fusion of rewilding and resisting civilization... A part of this primal war is a deeper understanding of its spiritual implications. (4)

There are essays by authors other than Kevin Tucker in the issue but they are brief and seem more like supporting documentation to Tucker's thesis rather than stand-alone statements themselves. Red Wolf Returns argues that "Now is the time for us 'working people' to learn to play again, to learn how to play with our fellow humans and all our Wild Relations" (123). Griffin argues that "Rewilding cannot be fully achieved in social isolation." There are a few articles about specific infrastructural soft targets and conceptual discussions about what disabling these targets would mean. The rest are articles about healing and spirituality that could only inspire someone who is excited by statements like "When the ebb and flow of the Land are mirrored in the life of a person, once the changing moons and tides become the movements of one's own life, the suffering of the Earth is obvious" (112).

There is a bigger problem in the *ST* project — beyond the need for a glossary, the vague spirituality, or the positing of assisted collapsism as the de facto strategy and that is how incomplete, or rather, particular, *ST*'s rejection of civilization is. Even though readers may disagree with some of the details regarding the framing of the problem (civilization being the problem), it is worthwhile to frame, to name, and even to take the optimistic view of how fragile it all is; it can be a useful exercise to think about how civilization is just waiting for a critical mass of the uncivilized to knock it over. But when the "roots of our own reality" (9) are described as human nature and evolutionary change, there appears to be a serious oversight.

Evolution is the scientific theory that life has transformed from its earliest origins (and common ancestors) into the diverse forms of life represented today. It is particularly surprising when an anarcho-primitivist accepts the law of natural selection (and even the friendly amendment of cooperation rather than competition as an important factor) as the way that humans, or the world that humans live in, came to be. This surprise is tempered by the understanding that anthropology and evolutionary biology are bedfellows in their theoretical interests — but *anarchist* they are not. If there were an anarchist epistemology it would begin with skepticism towards claims of Knowledge that come out of Positivist 19th century European natural sciences. Tucker's view of human nature results from his acceptance of evolution. "Our similar reactions are part of our heritage as social animals. And that is how millions of years of evolution and social living have made us"(9). Human nature is a vehicle where Tucker's critique of domestication can be demonstrated as having a real resistance, one with which we can side against domestication. This is the clash of two (new and improved) essentialist categories and we are asked to side with the more sympathetic one, as if the world were this simple.

Even the vague spirituality that claims knowledge of the earth, of the wishes of the earth, and of the role of humans on the earth based on an individual's subjective experience is more convincing than one that evokes the great god of Evolution or Human Nature. While anarchists should neither align themselves with priests or scientists, churches are easier to burn down.

One of the high points is the article detailing *ST*'s relationship with Ted Kaczynski and Tucker's resulting critiques of him. He describes how inspired he was by the actions of FC (the group that claimed responsibility for what the FBI called the Unabomber campaign, and that the anarchist periodical *Alphabet Threat* assumed stood for "Friends of Chomsky") and his consequent letter exchanges with Ted. When Tucker writes like a person (rather than an anthropologist with a mission) he is a pleasure to read. His analysis of FC's actions being about "quality rather than quantity" is charming and explains *ST*'s attitude towards the destruction of infrastructure. Ted is critiqued as being incapable of surpassing his own biases, upbringing, and ideological convictions about The Answer. This is a criticism against which any radical should continually assess themselves, but Ted demonstrates these problems especially eloquently in his article "Ship of Fools" where he cites the problem of the anti-civilization movement. "(W)e can't build such a movement unless we steer clear of the people (let's call them 'victimization activists') who are obsessed with victimization issues. (That is racism, sexism, homophobia, animal abuse, etc., etc.) These people are extremely numerous in our society, and they come swarming to any rebel movement that is halfway congenial to them" (106).

Another review written at another time wouldn't take *Species Traitor* half as seriously as this one does. People who understand Kevin Tucker only through his writing aren't necessarily seeing him at his best (which is face-to-face). With his peculiar use of language and highly speculative assertions about how a better world will come to be, much of *ST* is unintentionally knee-slappingly funny. If we accept where *ST* is coming from, these statements are merely strange rather than comedic, but it is worth mentioning a few of them. Probably the best examples are from the article "Prepare for the Best, Train for the Worst: getting ready for the collapse," where Tucker offers this advice for the budding green Rambo.

The primal war is about undomesticating our lives. It is about going feral and removing the barriers. There is no distinction between rewilding and resisting, because the two are intertwined with the fate of our world, the fate of our communities, and our own fate... (72)

Preparing for primal living means fitness... The more wild the terrain, the better suited your body will be, and the more likely you are to be building up the right muscles. (78)

Toning and fitness over bulk was a focus for Bruce Lee who remains a great source for more reading... (78)

The fate of human society is in our hands one way or the other, we are simply left to choose which side we will be on and take a stance. I'll risk guerrilla warfare over the slow, lifeless drudgery of a work-consume world. But this takes work. (81)

And on and on.

The bulk of our problems are social and the solutions are not going to come from a lab or from hardy individuals who are willing to make a personal sacrifice in our name. Additionally, if planned solutions were enough to solve the problems of ideological systems run amok over the globe, they would have done so long ago. There are not mass society solutions to the alienation or disconnection that we, as individuals, experience. Solutions are not generalizable. ST is a complicated example of a solution in search of an audience that can understand and appreciate it.

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