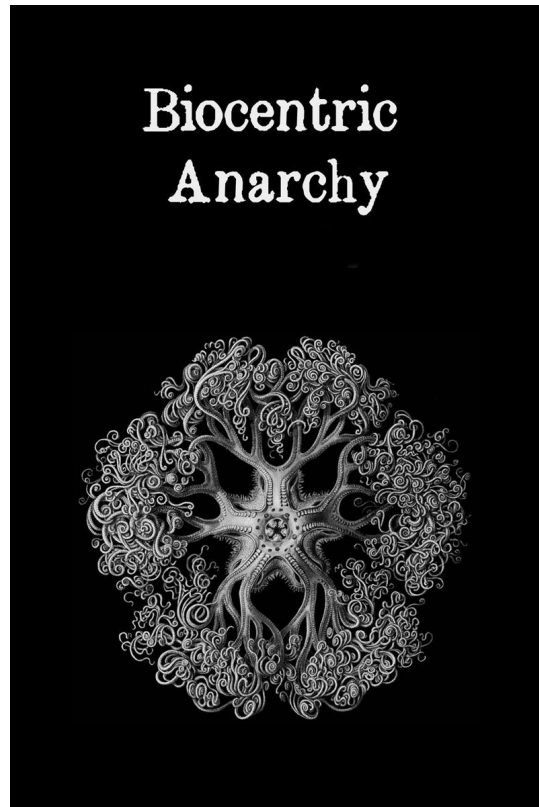


# Biocentric Anarchy



2017

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This zine was written in London in 2016 by a person who's considered herself an anarchist and vegan for around 12 years. It is not pretending to present some fully-fledged theory nor is it meant to be prescriptive, but is a personal text designed to spark thought and discussion.

# Sick Societies

This is a text emanating from love for life on this planet and despair at its continued degradation. By life I mean the totality of plants, animals, fungi and bacteria that populates the biosphere. This text is a call to broaden and deepen dominant, human-centered conceptions of anarchy, and to attack anthropocentrism both within anarchist circles and wider society.

**Anthropocentrism** is the arrogant belief or assumption that humans are at the centre of the universe, and that our desires take precedence over those of all other living beings combined. Combined, because we cannot harm some species (such as saltwater fish), without also harming the ecosystems which they form part of (such as sea birds, marine mammals, bacteria, humans, and so on). Actions deriving from an anthropocentric worldview are determined by what is perceived to provide the most benefit to us as people, including supposedly benign interventions made under the guise of 'conservation'. Anthropocentric conservationism is also often found among ecologists and some green anarchists, who fail to recognise that the dominant urge to control/steward what is wild (e.g. through 'woodland management', culling animals in the name of "indigenous" species who they deem more deserving of life) is at heart of the problem.

A logical conclusion of anthropocentrism is **speciesism** - relations of domination over other living beings based on the inferior value we give them. This translates to the treatment of all non-human lives as lesser than those of our own species, with some lives (eg. those of "pets") deemed more worthy of compassion than others. The differential treatment among non-human animals is likewise based on their perceived value to our own species, common factors being financial worth, cuteness, beauty and utility.

Speciesism justifies relations of ownership and domestication of other animals, which allows us to keep them in cages, control their reproduction, destroy kinship bonds, inject them with chemicals/hormones, microchip, mutilate, and experiment on them, and intensively breed them for our pleasure (food, fashion, sports, pets) on a gargantuan scale.

Speciesism enables Homo Sapiens to profess a wisdom unique among beasts, yet Homo Carceralis would be a more appropriate moniker, as our species is arguably the only one known to imprison itself within myriad institutions of domination. Most species cannot be domesticated, and every life form will struggle against anything that stands in its way. Yet we create ever more complex societies, imprisoned like Russian dolls within the borders of states, wage slavery, patriarchy, in metropolises of hostile

architecture and sterility, boxed up in our coffin-like apartments and resorting to the cold comfort of the internet for some sense of connection to our fellow humans. Of course there is resistance and attempts to forge an independent and free existence, but for the most part we are content to build our own prisons and work as each others' screws. Wildlife is a reminder of another part of us, a part that has been largely suppressed over the course of millenia, a part our rulers work every day to keep down, and which we frequently keep in check in ourselves and each other.

This domestication infects us to varying degrees by a sickness sometimes called **alienation**. This sickness affects us on the level of our relationships with ourselves, with other people, and with the rest of the planet. Many of us are lonely, unhappy and dissatisfied, which contributes to unhealthy attitudes to everything from foreigners, to sex, to celebrities, to other species.

Modern urban life allows us to compartmentalise our experiences, which aggravates our alienated condition. So, we can fly to Canada for a holiday and 'be in nature', admire the spectacular landscape and take lots of photos, then go back to our jobs, eat animals that have been specially bred for our dinner plates, buy loads of plastic crap, never need to think about how we live, where our food comes from, where our waste goes and so on. For all we criticise capitalism, we need to recognise that it has given many of us (especially city-dwellers in "developed" countries) the luxury of not having to think about essentials like how our food is produced, how to treat illnesses from the plants around us, or how to respect the land that sustains us. Another common example of this compartmentalisation is the phenomenon of pets, whereby we select an individual animal who we decide to care about. We may even fetishize particular species (eg. cats), and yet for many people the idea of extending their concern to other animals - particularly those designated the status of livestock - never even enters their consciousness.

# Because we're all beasts of burden

As an anarchist, I try to live my life in ways that undermine systems of domination and work towards the liberation of all. These systems include capitalism, states, racism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism, like all systems of domination, does not exist in isolation from other relations of oppression, rather these systems tend to reinforce one another.

With specific reference to patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and racism, I'll now look at a select few examples of how anthropocentrism reinforces and is bolstered by different systems of oppression, and how their existence is maintained by the same fundamental mechanisms.

## Female bodies as machines of reproduction

Like women under patriarchy, the bodies and reproductive systems of non-human females are considered the dominion of the powerful. For example:

- Female cows are repeatedly raped (forcibly made pregnant by artificial insemination), made to give birth each year, and have their newborn calves taken from them so as to ensure a constant supply of milk to satisfy human desires. The bodies of female cows are used as machines of mass production, udders swollen with injected hormones and intensive breeding, strapped to devices so that the milk normally destined for their young can be appropriated by humans.
- Farmed female prawns around the world have their eyestalks severed as a matter of routine in order to speed up the maturation of their ovaries (which, due to their stressful and unnatural conditions, do not otherwise mature in domestic environments).
- Pregnant sows (female pigs) are confined to farrowing crates - cages the size of their bodies which render them immobile. They remain there for weeks while they feed their piglets through the metal bars, beyond which they are denied any contact with them.
- Modern hens are intensively bred so that their bodies can lay an average of 314 eggs per year, in contrast with their wild hens who only lay around 20.

- Finally, sexist and speciesist language ("bitch", "dog", "cow", "bird") is often invoked to keep women down, degrading both these animals and female humans in the process.

## Capitalist accumulation

Anthropocentrism and capitalism historically forced the mass dispossession of people from British land, through a process of enclosure aimed primarily at increasing the expanse of pastures for animals bred to meet the demands of the the 17th & 18th century meat and wool industries. The process involved the devastation of the country's woodland and the draining of many of its marshes, resulting in a massive loss of habitat and biodiversity for non-domesticated beings. Landless migrant humans headed towards a life of factory slavery in the sprawling cities, the only viable alternative beyond a life of banditry, while their ungulate cousins were to remain prisoners of the pastures. This laid the basis for today's unsustainably large urban populations and total dependency on the bosses for survival, initially in the form of closely-supervised factory labour. The factory model was refined and exported across the globe. This process of enclosure had been going on for centuries, but rapidly took up pace during this period, resulting in whole swathes of the country being depopled, deforested, and replaced by specially-bred grazing animals. In time, changes in agricultural methods would mean that these creatures too would be moved into factories, and lives spent in cages would become the norm for animals bred to be eaten by humans.

## Anthropocentrism in colonialism

In a similar manner, anthropocentrism was integral to the rise of mercantile capitalism and colonialism; large tracts of what remained of Britain's forests were sacrificed to build vessels of imperial expansion, which in turn were used to appropriate land and 'resources' overseas. The history of colonialism is of course, also a story of ecological devastation, a well-known example being the decimation of the American bison at the hands of European pioneers with the intention of precipitating a genocide of the indigenous people who depended on these creatures. A wholesale assault on Animistic belief systems in the Americas, sought among other things to sever indigenous peoples' relations with their lands, and break them down into pliable and dependent servants of Christ and capital.

Anthropocentrism remains fundamental to the capitalist accumulation of all the so-called commodities needed to keep the global economy afloat (oil & gas extraction, mining, deforestation, fisheries, agriculture, etc. etc.), which in turn continues to displace black and brown subsistence farmers in the majority world.

## Of beasts and barbarians

Western imperialism was frequently justified through the rhetoric of the savage Other. A whole host of bestial expressions, racist animal cartoons or human zoos were employed in an attempt to demean and control non-European peoples, or subjugated European populations such as Jews and the Irish, as well as subversive elements and the poor.

Unfortunately, instead of recognising that this rhetoric was, and continues to be, used by oppressors to keep us down, we unthinkingly perpetuate the civilized vs. savage opposition in the language we use to criticise the actions of the powerful. Examples include "humane" (good), "dehumanising" (bad) , "treated like animals" (bad) , "pigs/bacon" for cops, "sheep/sheeple", "lemmings", "cattle", and in many cultures, "dog", "donkey" etc. as terms of offence.

Othering on the basis of appearance and our inability to communicate was a process as fundamental to imperial conquest, slavery and genocide, as it is to our ability to oppress other species. We eat, experiment on, and imprison non-human animals because they look different to us and because we can't understand them. If we fail to recognise the basic mechanisms behind these systems of oppression, we are left with an impoverished analysis of power and are destined to repeat these injustices.

Anthropocentrism and capitalism are then the foundations of our cancerous and suicidal relationship with the planet and ourselves, while the same dynamics of supremacy based on othering play out in every oppressive relationship, our relationships with non-human lifeforms being no exception.



# Biocentric Anarchy

As opposed to anthropocentrism, I would like to see more comrades living and fighting for an ethic of anarchy and liberation for all lifeforms, not just the smartphone-wielding bipedal variety. To frame the concept in more positive terms, it could be called biocentric anarchy, or bioanarchy. Unlike many primitivists, who advocate hunting, a key practice of bioanarchy might be **veganism**; a philosophy refusal to participate in animal exploitation by, among other things, not commodifying and consuming them. But while veganism is a vital element in the fight against speciesism, it is not enough in itself. For a start, anyone can claim to be vegan, including fascists. And while looking at our own habits is a fundamental starting point, it's not going to have a major impact on the ecocidal juggernaut unless we also attack the corporations and governments most responsible.

To go a little further then, biocentric anarchy is a way of challenging ourselves to deepen our understanding of ourselves as animals and reconnect with our non-human cousins. It propels us to reorient our ideas and practices as anarchists so as to place equal importance on the liberation non-human life from the clutches of anthropocentrism and capitalism, as we do people from the forces of domination.

This echoes a recent trend among anarchist projects of a more ecological and anti-speciesist bent who identify as '**Total Liberation**' groups, differentiating themselves from mainstream currents within animal rights, and challenging other anarchists to make the links between all systems of oppression rather than limiting our concerns to issues that immediately affect our own kind.

It may seem odd, perhaps unnecessary, to come up with another word for what anarchy should already encapsulate. But aside from animal liberationists, and some green or anticivilization anarchists, there are serious blind spots in the analyses and practices of many anarchists when it comes to the other creatures on this planet.

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So what might biocentric anarchy look like?

A necessary first step is a **deepening of one's relationship with the world beyond our own species**. It is taking the time to really observe other lifeforms and communities. It is looking, listening and reflecting. It might involve reading about other living beings and the earth's history and processes, or even watching nature documentaries - particularly if you live in the city where wildlife is less common.

Taking the time to do this is conducive to a greater understanding of the the vast complexity and beauty of the earth and its ecosystems. If one really looks, one can

start to **appreciate the great variety of forms of life and living, character, perception and desire**. Olms, for example, are salamanders that inhabit caves in South Eastern Europe. Living in darkness, they are nearly blind. However, they have the ability to detect light, make out chemicals, pick up vibrations, receive sounds in water, and sense magnetic fields. It is also thought that they can live for 10 years without eating, and can live for over 100 years in all. The variation found in nature is of course as much between individuals as it is between species.

Biocentric anarchy is honouring the wilderness and the individualities that inhabit it, and allowing what has been tamed to be **rewilded**. Whatever cruelty humans inflict on each other or other animals, I take some comfort from the fact that we are just one of millions of species on the planet. I am reminded that the lives of wild organisms are complex, fascinating, liberated, beautiful, mysterious, and free of the knowing and systemic cruelties of many of our own societies. Violence and struggle of course exists everywhere, in all living communities, yet systems of domination do not. A greater understanding should deepen our respect for and humility with regards to our relationships with the planet, **unlearning our tendency to destroy, control and interfere with the wilderness**, and fighting those who would.

By really taking the time to look, one can both appreciate the diversity of life, and at the same time recognise ourselves in other living beings. Some behaviours will be intelligible to us, a recognition that is essential to the process of de-othering non-human life.

Similarly, a key element of a biocentric outlook is its **de- massifying** tendency. This means not seeing 'nature', or particular species as a mass. For example, fish are invariably massified, so much so that the English language uses the singular word 'fish' to denote the plural. Like us of course, fish feel pain, have desires and form relationships. Demassifying means valuing individuals and their autonomy and desires, as much as the ecosystems they form part of.

Further, bionarchy involves **de-centering humans and questioning all anthropocentric worldviews**.

From these foundations, our actions in defence of the wilderness may be fed as much by reverence and love for its beauty and freedom, as for our hatred for the institutions of control, confinement and commodification. In this way **it is a nourishing force** that complements what can often feel like a personally corrosive rage and despair.

Continuing on a path of warfare against nature locks us within a morbid logic and increases our sicknesses exponentially. To take a mundane example, our toilets use fresh water to take sewage to enormous chemical processing plants, before it is pumped back into freshwater systems such as rivers. This process requires a large amount of energy and water, and contaminates ecosystems with chemical pollutants on a vast scale. Meanwhile, chemical fertilisers are employed on crops worldwide, to the detriment to wildlife and the health of farmers and consumers. In contrast, humanure is a term used to refer to the composting of human shit for use as fertiliser. In this way, our human waste is life-giving. It nourishes the microbes and worms that feed off

it, gives us more healthy food, and doesn't require scarce resources, enabling groups of people to do this autonomously. It is a circular, health-giving process, unlike the toxic dead-end dependency on industrial waste management.

How might we then approach action in the spirit of biocentric anarchy? For me personally, I think a good starting point is to ask myself "how do I want to live my life?" How much can I free myself and others from relationships of slavery, confinement, monetary value, misery, passivity and ugliness? How much can I help create moments and spaces of freedom, love, beauty, and the destruction of the commodification and control? We all compromise on various aspects of these at different times in our lives - getting a job, signing on, paying rent, and buying cheap supermarket food when these things feel like the most viable option for survival, but I think this question is a pretty good starting point for the destruction of the miserable conditions we live under. Recognising that catastrophe has befallen the planet countless times before humans ever disgraced the earth with our presence, and given the difficulty of measuring the impact of our actions in societies as complex as ours, this question is probably a good way to navigate the colliding meteors that come our way.

This starting point is also helpful because it should leave nothing uninterrogated, compelling us to consider everything from how we relate to our friends, lovers, children and the elderly; to more abstract questions, such as what we consider food and how we obtain it, how we go about education, how we relate to other species, migrants, our bosses, politicians, technology, gender and so on.

This question can inform our actions from the most banal to the more unusual. A person's choice to live a vegan life doesn't therefore have to be based on whether there is or isn't a direct causal link between them paying Tesco's £5 for the burgers and the slaughter of the cows. Rather, it may come from a desire to act out of honour and respect for these creatures, and to have as little as possible to do with their domestication, slavery and torture. The simplistic retort that veganism isn't going to "overthrow capitalism" is surprisingly common among people who call themselves anarchists, but capitalism is a culture, an assemblage of social relationships, attitudes, behaviours and relationships sustained by an uncountable number of individual actions and choices. And anyway, since when did they last do something they felt truly counted towards "overthrowing capitalism"?

For many, the answer to this question is also not likely to be satisfied by purely making changes to their lifestyles. When there is a terrible destruction of the things one loves, conflict with those who create and protect the current order, and the risk that comes with this conflict are equally necessary. Getting out of our comfort zones, unbinding ourselves from the constraints of passivity and overcoming some of our fears to attack the architects of our prison society and live lives with even moments of freedom is a vital part of **rewilding ourselves**.

I'll end here with a quote from Black Seed (Issue 1) on the topic of rewilding and reconnection:

For most green/anti-civilization/primitivist anarchists, rewilding and re-connecting with the earth is a life project. It is not limited to intellectual comprehension or the practice of primitive skills, but instead, it is a deep understanding of the pervasive ways in which we are domesticated, fractured, and dislocated from our selves, each other, and the world, and the enormous and daily undertaking to be whole again. Rewilding has a physical component which involves reclaiming skills and developing methods for a sustainable co-existence, including how to feed, shelter, and heal ourselves with the plants, animals, and materials occurring naturally in our bioregion. It also includes the dismantling of the physical manifestations, apparatus, and infrastructure of civilization. Rewilding has an emotional component, which involves healing ourselves and each other from the 10,000 year-old wounds which run deep, learning how to live together in non-hierarchical and non-oppressive communities, and deconstructing the domesticating mindset in our social patterns. Rewilding involves prioritizing direct experience and passion over mediation and alienation, re-thinking every dynamic and aspect of our reality, connecting with our feral fury to defend our lives and to fight for a liberated existence, developing more trust in our intuition and being more connected to our instincts, and regaining the balance that has been virtually destroyed after thousands of years of patriarchal control and domestication. Rewilding is the process of becoming uncivilized.

For the Destruction of Civilization!

For the Reconnection to Life!

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# Back Cover

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