



Multispecies Anarchism in the Postnuclear World

written by Anibal Garcia Arregui
April, 2022



Connect the dots between “state”, “imperialism”, and “war”. Add “leaders”, “testosterone” and “nukes”. Look at the picture and tell me anarchism was a bad idea. In effect, as a band of Russian dudes and their Western elite-peers spoil the world, it seems the right time to summon those other Russians who could help us to imagine future reparations. One of them is “prince” Pyotr Kropotkin, the Moscow-born anarchist and naturalist who posited mutual aid, not competition, as the major force driving evolution (1902). Mutual aid is both a biological strategy



of organisms to endure through cooperation, and the core ethical and practical orientation of many libertarian ideologies. Mutual aid traces a different history of the environment, one which recoils from naturalized Darwinian schemes of inter-species struggle for existence. Unfortunately, it was Darwin's ideas that were picked up (and greatly distorted) by Victorian social engineers, eugenicists, and racists, whose arguments contributed to the naturalisation of violent imperialism, social inequality, and war. Now, imagine that modern political ideologies would have bought mutual aid instead of competition as the "natural" driver of social organisation. What would happen if we were to imagine both biological and social relations with Kropotkin not (only) with Darwin?

Unfortunately, it was Darwin's ideas that were picked up (and greatly distorted).

Besides Kropotkin, there is a deeper Russian genealogy of naturalists who have shed light on forces of evolution which depart from the zero-sum premises of Darwinian ecologies. One example is the phenomenon of symbiosis, or symbiogenesis, as per the generation of new biological forms through combination of different organisms. The study and revelation of symbiotic processes can be traced back to nineteenth-century botanists as Konstantin Merezhkousky, Andrey Faminstyn and [Boris Mijailovich Kozo-Polyansky](#). Since the late sixties, symbiogenesis was made famous to the West by evolutionary theorist Lynn Margulis (1981), who in turn inspired the later work of social science scholars such as Donna Haraway (2016), Stefan Helmreich (2009) or Anna Tsing (2015) among others. Vital interdependence and symbiosis are natural facts as well as powerful socioecological forces. And yet, planetary leaders remain oblivious to the possibility of reimagining a global politics through *this* kind of science.

In a time when testosterone, nuclear puissance and mutual phallocratic destruction seize the fate of the entire planet, it seems ok to recall other forms of imagining interactions both within and beyond the human sphere. The important



here is probably not the human but the humane. In this regard, Kropotkin's notion of mutual aid seems way more humane than social-Darwinist notions of the natural "survival of the fittest" (Spencer 1864: 444). Of course, mutual aid is not exempt of violence. In the same way that human collectives' self-organisation can be an effective strategy against killer states (Channell-Justice 2022), mutual aid can be a smart defensive gesture in nonhuman animals, too. Kropotkin famously wrote that "it is not love, and not even sympathy (understood in its proper sense) which induces a herd of ruminants or of horses to form a ring in order to resist an attack of wolves; not love which induces wolves to form a pack for hunting" (1902: xviii). Ruminants, horses, wolves, and people can effectively self-organise to exert violence in defence of dignity, life, or the humane.

Planetary leaders remain oblivious to the possibility of reimagining a global politics through this kind of science.

That biology, ethics and politics can be rekindled in this way makes me think that the relational heuristic we identify as "anarchism" should be expanded beyond the *anthropos*. This is to simply say that, in the event of wanting (or needing) to become anarchists, we can't possibly do it alone. Social and ecological existence is irremediably built upon alliances *within and across* [species](#). And despite human pulsion towards all-out acts of domestication, many of these alliances are still based on situated, practical arrangements between specific collectives (not entire species) or even among individuals (Arregui 2020: 823-25, forthcoming). I'd say these practical arrangements are closer to mutual aid, self-organization, and anarchism than they are to the "state" and "domestication"- the pinnacles of our anthropocentric projects.

So, if mutual aid is a fine relational orientation for a more-than-human politics, multispecies anarchism could be a motto, or perhaps the only available option, to relaunch life after the atomic ejections of world-leading machos. These ejections can be materialized in the near future, or they may remain as a disastrous potential. They are either way extremely harmful. Or isn't there already a



“nuclear damage” inflicted in our spirit? The very possibility that current chiefs of state’s decisions can trigger The End extends nuclear fear well beyond Ukraine. But it also extends the impulse to collectively resist, and the anticipatory imagination of a reconstruction.

“Anarchism” should be expanded beyond the anthropos.

Since elaborating on the present will only make us feel like an irredeemably stupid species, I’d prefer to speculate with a postnuclear future – whatever that might be. Just imagine for a second where to start if we need to rebuild everything from scratch. What would we do? Would we start again with Darwin, Spencer and the survival of the fittest? If fitness today equals to military strength, I am afraid that mutual assured destruction will lead to none of the “fittest” left there to tell the remaining what to do. It might rather be the case that relatively small human and other-than-human collectives would need to make their own choices about what is best for the common interests. It looks like social and biological fitness would need to be after all reframed, along Kropotkin’s ideas, in more collaborative terms.

I invent multispecies anarchism not to save the planet, but to intellectually and (above all) emotionally navigate this awful, self-destroying moment. And I invent it because it already exists. Take the urban wild boar I accompany as an example (figure 1). These ethnographic subjects are unruly, smart, and creative. They produce new urban ecologies and say domestication and state measures of conservation are not an option. Of course, states and scientific institutions effectively cull and control wild boar populations for sanitary, ecological and biosecurity reasons all over the world – tracing institutionally-driven control of wild boar populations is in fact the goal of [the collaborative project](#) in which I participate. So, if these pigs with a mohawk partly succeed in Barcelona, it is because they are finding unexpected comrades among humans who feed, pet, or simply tolerate them in the city. I am not celebrating nor rejecting those alliances, just noting that multispecies partnerships follow dynamics that from a



conventional ecological purview could appear as being recalcitrantly “anarchic”, autonomous, and unforeseeable.



Figure 1. Urban wild boar re-occupy Barcelona’s suburbs. Photo by author

The fact is that wild boar are re-occupying parts of the outskirts that were previously invaded by expansive real-estate projects. Barcelona provides illustration of how wild boar flourish in and despite the Anthropocene. They do not obey species-level ascriptions in terms of habitat or behaviour, and while they weave intimate alliances with suburban neighbours, they do not show signs of planning to subjugate to human designs at any point (Arregui, forthc.). They are, as Spanish anarchist Federica Montseny liked to think of herself, “indomitable” ([1926] 1991). Gaining more and more iconic traction in recent decades, wild boar have been claimed as a [totem for an unruly Barcelona](#), a reminder that cities can enact freedom in unexpectedly wild and admirable forms. Killer chiefs of state should be wary of wild boar totems and other forms of radical resistance. And



even in the worst-case scenario of the atomic ejections being materialized, these pigs have proven to be still quite good in reinhabiting postnuclear environments (Bell 2020; Morimoto 2022).

Killer chiefs of state should be wary of wild boar totems.

Humans are not wild boar, but multispecies anarchists of the future might need to negotiate domestic spaces with them and with other resilient critters. In this time of deep existential anxieties, the weirdest possibilities of future coexistence become increasingly plausible. This is why neurotic people already wonder how to re-organize things in case these militarized dudes really do what they implicitly or explicitly say they are going to do. Listen to the neurotic people, because the rest are just aliens. Then, take a look backwards in time, for this can bring some ideas to the table. One of the things that were recently being discussed is whether self-organisation, direct action and freedom is a rarity or in fact a core feature of homo sapiens. The answer is that archaeological, historical, and ethnographic evidence suggests these things are not only common, but that freedom can be (and has in fact many times been) scaled-up (Graeber and Wengrow 2021). Isn't this at least an interesting place to start? You may picture a myriad of counter examples of domination and submission driving history, and they are also true. Yet the goal here is to de-fix historical linearity, and to reckon with human agency in producing endless oscillations of socioecological forms. The linear narratives that go from savage egalitarianism to resigned bureaucratic subjection are the sprouts of a post-Darwinian science and politics, one which tells the fable of a lonely homo sapiens who is fiercely "homo" but very little "sapiens". This poor dull guy cannot foreclose the possibilities of what can be created.

The goal here is to de-fix historical linearity

My observation here is that fables, along with myths and scientific equations, always involve more than one species, so it makes no sense to rethink the whole story from the unique angle of the homo sapiens. If the goal is to stress non-



linearity, agency, and even cooperation in processes of ecology-making, then we might start by acknowledging that what can be created depends in part on how we think about our relations to other organisms. Kropotkin hinted that these relations are oriented by ideas as well as by how we act *directly* (that is corporeally, morally, affectively, and strategically) upon human and nonhuman others in mundane ecologies. This is why along with mutual aid and self-organisation, direct action will be a key issue for multispecies anarchists of the postnuclear world. Voltairine de Cleyre wrote that “direct action” was the way to grant that all have the access to “the sources of life, and all the natural wealth of the earth, and the tools necessary to co-operative production” ([1912] 2016). She was thinking of industrial workers in the early twentieth century, but nonhuman life itself has always worked that way. Look at wild boar. They don’t ask whether they can be free. No state and no nuke can stop the self-organisation of life, mutual aid, and direct action. These things are just natural, occur across species, and will again and again chase those who hide behind the brute monopoly of violence.

References

Arregui, Aníbal G. (2020) “Positional wildness: Amazonian *Ribeirinhos*, pink dolphins and interspecies affections”. *Ethnos*, 85(5):819-842

– (forthcoming) “Reencontrando al principito: de sintonías personales y ecologías infra-especie”. In: *Vitalidades: etnografías en los límites de lo humano*. Juan Martín Dabezies y Aníbal G. Arregui (eds.) Madrid: Nola

Bell, Otto (2020) [*The toxic pigs of Fukushima*](#).

De Cleyre, Voltairine (2016) *The selected works of Voltairine De Cleyre: Poems, essays, sketches and stories, 1885-1911*. Ed. Alexander Berkman. 1914. Chicago: AK Press



Channell-Justice, Emily (2022) [“Molotov cocktails and self-organization in a time of war”](#). Hot Spots, *Fieldsights*, March 11.

Graeber, David and David Wengrow (2021) *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Dublin: Allen Lane.

Haraway, Donna J. (2016) *Staying with the trouble*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Helmreich, Steven (2009) *Alien ocean: Anthropological voyages in microbial seas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kropotkin, Pyotr (1902) *Mutual aid: a factor of evolution*. New York: McLure Philipps & Co.

Margulis, Lynn (1981) *Symbiosis in cell evolution*. New York: W. H. Freeman

Montseny, Federica (1991) *La Indomable*. Madrid: Castalia-Instituto de la Mujer.

Morimoto, Ryo (2022) “A wild boar chase: ecology of harm and half-life politics in coastal Fukushima.” *Cultural Anthropology* 37 (1): 69–98. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca37.1.08>.

Spencer, Herbert (1864) [Principles of biology, vol. 1](#). London, Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate.

Tsing, Anna L. (2015) *The mushroom at the end of the world: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Feature image by [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons](#), courtesy of [Flickr](#).