

## Uncivilising the Future: Imagining Non-Speciesism

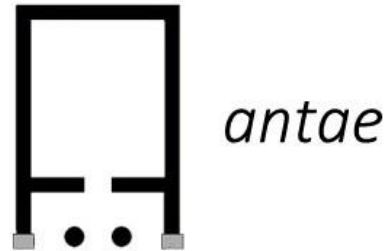
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## Uncivilising the Future: Imagining Non-Speciesism

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### Introduction

In Thomas More's utopian fiction, the concept of animal cruelty is brought to the fore in different occasions with different, and sometimes paradoxical, modes of ethical consideration. The inhabitants of Utopia do not slaughter their own animals for consumption, because the practice of butchering would gradually kill off the finest feeling of human nature: mercy. Instead their meat is brought into town, killed and cleaned by slaves who live outside of the city. Furthermore, the text proposes that taking pleasure in animal suffering and killing is wrong, but the use of animals to satisfy human needs is justified. The place of the animal in More's utopian society, then, remains ambiguous in his text.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in contemporary narratives that imagine histories or futures which experiment with ideas of egalitarianism, feminism, post-colonialism, post-humanism, post-capitalism, and so on, the normalisation of animal usage, exploitation, and oppression often remains unquestioned.<sup>2</sup>

In reality, animals are facing quite the opposite: more than 150 billion animals get slaughtered every year. To put things in perspective, during the time it likely took you to read this essay up to this point, it is estimated that 120,000 chickens have been killed.<sup>3</sup> The number of farmed animals is still increasing every year. However, our growing body of knowledge on animal sentience and subjectivity, the general rise of veganism in society, and our current ethical debates on animal treatment emphasise that many of us wish to advocate for fundamental changes that propose to rethink our moral consideration of animals today and towards the future.

In his 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, philosopher Peter Singer proposed what would become the founding ethical statement of the animal rights and liberation movement. Rather than focusing on emphasising cognitive differences between humans and animals, Singer grounds his statements in terms of what humans and animals seem to have in common. Following a utilitarian approach, he argues that the interests of animals should be considered because of their ability to experience pain and suffering. Starting from this principle, he popularised the term 'speciesism', which denotes discrimination on the grounds of belonging to a certain species. He argues that all beings

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Verso Books, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> For example, this claim has been made with regards to post-colonialist studies in: Philip Armstrong, 'The Postcolonial Animal', *Society and Animals* 10(4) (2002), 413-420, and the strong existence of a feminist-vegetarian literary and historical tradition is elaborated upon extensively in Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> 'Animal Kill Counter', (2008). See <<http://www.adaptt.org/killcounter.html>>. [Accessed 22 April 2017].

that can experience suffering are worthy of equal consideration.<sup>4</sup> Thus, giving more value to a human being becomes no more justified than discrimination based on skin colour, gender, class, and so on.

The interdisciplinary field of Critical Animal Studies offers a place for critical academic discourse that focuses on the relationships between animals and humans, as well as the notion of speciesism. These discourses are usually firmly grounded in theories of intersectionality, meaning that reflections on animal exploitation and oppression are discussed and analysed in their relation to critical theory about other forms of oppression (such as sexism, classism, and racism) with the idea of revolutionising current societal and political norms. According to Critical Animal Studies theorists, it is not only wrong and unjustifiable to treat animals as lesser beings, but also that the act of being violent or oppressive should be abandoned in *all* forms and towards *all* beings.<sup>5</sup> Put simply, the main message here is that a utopian future will never manage to be free of oppression (for both humans *and* animals) if we continue using, killing, mistreating, and exploiting animals for purposes such as food, clothing, or research—purposes for which we already identified equally viable, but far less violent, alternatives.

Here we should not only radically rethink the foundational aspects of society and question what is not commonly questioned, but we also need to make space for a multiplicity of theories, knowledges, disciplines, and practices that are already developing, and draw inspiration from those. We are not looking for a single “best” solution. The world consists of diverse inhabitants and surprising engagements; so rather than reinforcing one dominant perspective that gains power once again, we need to move towards a space for freedom, possibilities, and coexistence. This will allow us to imagine worlds in which we enact, construct, learn, and adapt, rather than resist, comply, and oppress.<sup>6</sup> This approach is characterised by an interest in learning rather than judging, and taking responsibility rather than alienating ourselves.

In putting these arguments together, it becomes clear to me that, besides criticising current practices and engaging in animal activism, we need to start imagining and considering futures that are non-speciesist. But what does a non-speciesist future actually look like? Given that animal oppression is deeply embedded and normalised in society today, how can we even start imagining a future that is so fundamentally different from today's world? In this essay, I aim to bring together the intersectional approach found in Critical Animal Studies and Utopian narratives as alternative (under-emphasised) perspectives that allow us to consider and construct futures that are non-speciesist.

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<sup>4</sup> See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See: Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha and Atsuko Matsuoka, *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013), and John Sanbonmatsu, *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See J.K. Graham-Gibson, 'Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for "Other Worlds"', *Progress in Human Geography* (2008), 1-20.

## Uncivilising the Future

Throughout the last century, critique of dominant Western culture, capitalism, civilisation, masculinity, colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchal dualism has been articulated extensively within the context of future thinking. For example, as novelist Ursula K. Le Guin put it:

Utopia has been yang [as opposed to yin]. In one way or another, from Plato on, utopia has been the big yang motorcycle trip. Bright, dry, clear, strong, firm, active, aggressive, lineal, progressive, creative, expanding advancing, and hot. Our civilization is now so intensely yang that any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, we could say that imagining a more yin-like future demands a radical re-thinking of the world. According to a 2009 manifesto by an initiative called the Dark Mountain Project, we are living inside a bubble called civilisation, made up of stories on human “progress”, “growth”, and other myths sustain this bubble. We believe that our norms are correct, our currency is valuable, and law and order should be maintained. However, beyond this Western bubble, we face failure, oppression, violence, and destruction. Species go extinct, resources are exhausted, and workers are exploited. According to the writers, nobody still believes that the future will be better than the past.

Most significantly of all, there is an underlying darkness at the root of everything we have built. Outside the cities, beyond the blurring edges of our civilisation, at the mercy of the machine but not under its control, lies something that neither Marx nor Conrad, Caesar nor Hume, Thatcher nor Lenin ever really understood. Something that Western civilisation—which has set the terms for global civilization—was never capable of understanding, because to understand it would be to undermine, fatally, the myth of that civilisation. Something upon which that thin crust of lava is balanced; which feeds the machine and all the people who run it, and which they have all trained themselves not to see.<sup>8</sup>

However, as much as we are trained to believe in civilisation and human progress, we can now try to un-train ourselves and face our problems. We can look over the edge, move our attention away from ourselves, acknowledge our failures, and become *uncivilised*. The undersigned of the Dark Mountain Project argue that artists, in the broad sense of the term, are particularly needed in order to break down civilisation:

We believe that artists—which is to us the most welcoming of words, taking under its wing writers of all kinds, painters, musicians, sculptors, poets, designers, creators, makers of things, dreamers of dreams—have a responsibility to begin the process of decoupling. We believe that, in

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<sup>7</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘A Non-Euclidian View of California as a Cold Place to Be’, in *Utopia*, pp. 163-194, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> The Dark Mountain Project, ‘The Dark Mountain Manifesto’, (2009). See <<http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/>>. [Accessed 22 April, 2017].

the age of ecocide, the last taboo [the myth of civilisation] must be broken—and that only artists can do it. Ecocide demands a response. That response is too important to be left to politicians, economists, conceptual thinkers, number crunchers; too all-pervasive to be left to activists or campaigners. Artists are needed.<sup>9</sup>

Here, I do not wish to disregard the importance that all professions and all aspects of society could have in their manifestations of resistance and activism. Instead, I wish to emphasise that artists, rather than solely criticising the past and present, have the complementary power to imagine, create, and try out futures. As artists, we can contribute to shaping different—so called uncivilised—worlds. Since their manifesto in 2009, the Dark Mountain Project network has drawn in over 1,700 people, contributes with an active online discourse in the form of blog posts and other social media discussions, and has published eight books with collections of uncivilised writing and art. Radical as this may sound, the notion of non-speciesism does not (yet) seem to be part of this initiative.

This text is an attempt at bringing the practice of speciesism into this discourse on the same level as other forms of oppression. The field of Critical Animal Studies is often focused on discussing the past and the present. However, I propose that we need to complement critical thought by trying to imagine the potential shape in which non-speciesist futures could exist among other futures seeking to abandon oppression and violence. Worlds in which we can allow ourselves to listen to—and be inspired by—the marginalised of the marginalised and, perhaps, the most uncivilised of all: the animal.

### **What Happens Under the Radar**

If we cannot be sure that the utopian direction we propose as an ideal alternative society will solve all the issues in the world, how can we determine a successful path of uncivilisation? The second question then becomes: who decides what we mean by “successful”? And the third question consequently questions the very idea of something being successful in the first place. In other words, there is no single path.

In trying to imagine a society that completely abandons speciesism, or any utopia for that matter, we face the impossible task of trying to foresee and rethink the totality of all things that make up the world and come up with a viable alternative. For example, what will happen in a world where animals and humans have equal rights? Will all beings be eligible for citizenship?<sup>10</sup> Should everyone adopt a vegan diet?<sup>11</sup> What about using animals for research?<sup>12</sup> Can we still have

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<sup>9</sup> See The Dark Mountain Project.

<sup>10</sup> See Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> See *Animal Liberation*.

<sup>12</sup> See Steven Best, 'Genetic Science, Animal Exploitation, and the Challenge for Democracy', *AI & Soc*, 20 (2006), 6-21.

pets?<sup>13</sup> What happens to our understanding of ourselves? It would be impossible to take all possible details into account, foresee what will happen when changes are implemented, and imagine the one-and-only set of guidelines for oppression-free living with animals.

Instead, in a more flexible scenario of imagining possible futures, we could try to continuously make, remake, test, and evaluate potential ideas. As author and academic China Miéville writes in the introduction of the 2016 edition of *More's Utopia*:

[I]f we take utopia seriously, as a total reshaping, its scale means we can't think it from this side. It's the process of making it that will allow us to do so. (...) We may pour with a degree of intent, but what we make is beyond precise planning.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, we are already deeply involved in the continuous process of reshaping the world. Rather than presenting a utopian process with a clear starting point somewhere in the future, we could argue that the world is already full of alternative ideas that we can reflect upon as attempts to uncivilise and extend as utopian thinking:

If utopia is a place that does not exist, then surely (as Lao Tzu would say) the way to get there is by the way that is not a way. And in the same vein, the nature of the utopia I am trying to describe is such that if it is to come, it must exist already.<sup>15</sup>

I would therefore suggest closer attention to the multiplicity of alternative—non-dominant—practices that are already enacted in society. These practices are usually not regarded as constitutive of society's cultural hegemonies, meaning that they do not determine our central, dominant, capitalistic, and effective system of meanings and values. In other words, where most members of society experience reality according to the meanings and values that appear as reciprocally confirming, other forces exist as well. These forces consist of alternative opinions, attitudes, practices, feelings, meanings, and values, which are not considered to be the norm but can somehow still be accommodated and tolerated within dominant culture. Even though these alternatives do not determine the status quo, they are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture on which reality depends.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it is those alternatives that can give us insights into what uncivilisation could be.

These under-emphasised practices are not driven by the productive forces that make up capitalistic society, but they are created and lived by. They can be tolerated precisely because they are under-valued, opposed, unrecognised, or neglected by the dominant culture. And even though the majority of society seems unconcerned with practices that do not seem profitable, there is a space where emergent politics are negotiated, new ideas are formed, and opposing views are enforced. It is a space where we can safely fantasise. It is also a space where artists can

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<sup>13</sup> See Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Animal Pets: Cruelty and Affection', in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classical and Contemporary Writings*, ed. by Linda Kalof, L and Amy Fitzgerald (Oxford, NY: BERG, 1984), pp. 141-152.

<sup>14</sup> China Miéville, 'The Limits of Utopia', in *Utopia*, pp. 11-28, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> 'A Non-Euclidian View', p. 185.

<sup>16</sup> See Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1980), pp. 31-49.

take inspiration to imagine new possible worlds. Our hardest task then, is to 'bring those marginalized, hidden, and alternative practices to light in order to make them more real and more credible as objects of policy and activism'.<sup>17</sup>

### **Emphasising Non-Speciesist Practices**

Graham-Gibson proposes three different ways in which alternative practices can be brought to light: an ontological reframing that enlarges the field from which the unexpected can emerge, reading for difference rather than dominance to recover what has been rendered 'non-credible' and 'non-existent' by dominant modes of thought, and valuing creative thinking as a way of generating possibilities.<sup>18</sup> What binds these suggestions together is their orientation towards theory. Instead of masterful knowledge or moralistic detachment, theory is regarded as a helpful tool to see openings, to provide a space of freedom and possibility, and welcome surprises. In other words, we are not aiming to find a single truth, but trying to be open to different perspectives and ways of understanding the world. This aligns with what feminist theorist Donna Haraway has called 'situated knowledges', as the partial and critical interpretations of possible world-views that allow for unexpected openings.<sup>19</sup> Following this path, valuing the multiplicity of non-dominant perspectives and alternative ways of engaging with the world is a necessary step—and perhaps even the only way—to enact and construct realities that are open to surprises. So, thinking about non-speciesism, what could be considered as alternative, non-dominant, and situated practices that already exist within the realm of human-animal relationships built on compassion and concern for one another?

Consequently, in what follows I am sharing an account of 'weak theory'.<sup>20</sup> Through personal experiences, emotions, and thoughts I share with others—phrased in the form of a personal reflection—I aim to provide insight into existing alternative perspectives. I argue that these practices can be reflected upon as personal attempts at uncivilisation; in other words: as radical break-ups with society and former self. The point here is not to make generalisable claims, but simply to share the fact that these perspectives exist, as alternative voices, and thereby declaring them valid and real.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Diverse Economies', p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See Donna J. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14(3) (1988), 575-599.

<sup>20</sup> The practice of "weak theorizing" involves refusing to extend explanation too widely or deeply, and could help us explore the many mundane forms of power: 'Weak theory could be undertaken with a reparative motive that welcomes surprise, tolerates coexistence, and cares for the new, providing a welcoming environment for the objects of our thought'. 'Diverse Economies', p. 7.

## Anger and Activism

As expected, when I learned more about animal exploitation, speciesism, or Critical Animal Studies, things changed. What is once seen cannot be unseen; and once you know, you cannot un-know.<sup>21</sup> As Le Guin writes, ‘the shift from denial of injustice to recognition of injustice can’t be unmade’.<sup>22</sup> During this process, I tried to liberate myself from the alienation of animal suffering and the idea that this is normal slowly (or sometimes abruptly) faded away. The result was, quite literally, a break with my former self. What I am left with are emotions like anger, disbelief, and hopelessness regarding the massive scale on which animals suffer the most horrible treatments, during every second, in every country, all the time. I continue wondering how it is possible that everyone else seems to be comfortable with what I regard as horrifying and even criminal.<sup>23</sup> Some people seem to have the ability to deny and continue conforming to civilisation and dominant culture, but for me the sensitivity to any form of oppression only grew stronger. Relationships with fellow human beings are becoming increasingly difficult, as I continuously shift between seeing kindness in others and developing conflicting emotions about the way everyone seems to participate in practices that I wish to oppose.

I also discovered that it is fulfilling to take part in activism. For many people and in many parts of the world, it is entirely possible to abandon consuming animal products in a healthy manner.<sup>24</sup> So I became vegan. I feel that this is one of the most direct and straightforward forms of activism and resistance that exists, because I have the power and possibility to personally decide to stop participating in animal cruelty. Furthermore, many other kinds of animal activism exist as alternative practices that oppose the current—dominant—state of affairs. According to the Animal Liberation Front, the spectrum of action includes personal actions (such as learning and adapting your diet), proselytising (such as spreading the word and sharing your thoughts with others), organising (such as joining organisations and getting involved in politics), and civil disobedience (such as spying, infiltration, and freeing animals).<sup>25</sup> It is both this spectrum as a whole, as well as each of those practices in particular, that shape different perspectives, create resistances, and inspire alternative realities. By recognising and emphasising them as counter-hegemonic forces, I aim to make the process of uncivilisation more valid and more real.

## Care and Empathy

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<sup>21</sup> On this, see Sarah Salih, ‘Vegans on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown’, in *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre*, ed. by Nik Taylor and Richard Twine (Florence, IT: Taylor and Francis, 2014), pp. 52-67.

<sup>22</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘A War Without End’, in *Utopia*, pp. 199-210, p. 205.

<sup>23</sup> These types of feelings and perspectives of vegan people towards other (non-vegan) people, are similarly though more extensively described in: J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Even though this is claimed in Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, as well as in other literature on veganism, differences in access to information, varieties of products, available resources, financial possibilities, and so on, tend to differ along the lines of social classes and geographic locations. Although this should be taken into careful consideration, vegan and vegetarian life styles have been adopted by people all over the world, and for many different reasons.

<sup>25</sup> Animal Liberation Front, ‘What are the Forms of Animal Rights Activism’ (2016). See <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Activist%20Tips/ARActivFAQs.htm>. [Accessed 22 April 2017].



I now realise how—similar to the general invisibility of human suffering and exploitation in the production process—the killing and abusing of animals is largely made invisible to the public domain.<sup>26</sup> I used to be conditioned to avoid the suffering animal by conforming to the myth of hierarchies in our society that stated that humans stand above animals. And I previously managed to distance myself from slaughterhouses and factory farms as much as possible.<sup>27</sup> But now I obtained a certain sensitivity towards animals and I dare to start caring for them again. With my newly found sense of compassion for other creatures, I try to leave the alienating norms behind, and with this I become more open to establish different, more yin-like, relationships with animals based on care, affect, and closeness.

Under capitalism, every part of the animal is turned into a commodity and animal exploitation is part of the systemic condition in which the effects of production and consumption are made invisible.<sup>28</sup> I was supposed to talk about beef rather than cows, pork rather than pigs, and meat rather than dead bodies. I was not supposed to get emotional about things, but I was convinced to listen to the rational forces of power and domination. I was not supposed to imagine what it would feel like to be an egg-laying hen, spending my entire life in dark confinement, standing on a metal grid, being unable to walk, getting covered in excrement, and remaining in a constant state of physical and psychological stress.<sup>29</sup> But actually, it is only through *feeling* that I found out that imagining other lives and developing empathy is so crucial to perceiving and being in the world, even if this means that I need to get rid of the comfortable notions with which I have habitually protected myself in the past.<sup>30</sup>

Instead of conforming to the emotional numbness that distances me from the animal, then, I let myself be guided by the inner energy that propels me towards empathy as a new form of knowledge,<sup>31</sup> 'it's a matter of *how*, rather than *what* you know'.<sup>32</sup> I learned many new things. I learn that I do not necessarily have to speak for the animal or generalise their traits and compare those with human abilities, because the animal can speak for herself, even if I cannot always understand her. I feel that it is more helpful to find alternative ways of listening that respond to—

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<sup>26</sup> See The Animal Studies Group, 'Introduction', in *Killing Animals* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 1-9.

<sup>27</sup> Under capitalism, animals have come to be totally incorporated into production technology designed for the purposes of exploitation, domination, and control. Similarly to other production processes, this encourages alienation and rationalisation with regards to the relationships we form with the animals that are involved in these processes. See Barbara Noske, 'Domestication under Capitalism', in *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* (Montréal, CA: Black Rose Books, 1997), pp. 11-39.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Paul Solotaroff, 'In the Belly of the Beast', (2013). See <<http://www.rollingstone.com/feature/belly-beast-meat-factory-farms-animal-activists#ixzz4V4FLFGMu>>. [Accessed 22 April 2017].

<sup>30</sup> See 'Vegans on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown'.

<sup>31</sup> Sociologist Eva Illouz argues how modernity and capitalism are creating a form of emotional numbness, advocating that we should refocus on emotion that gives us the inner energy to act. It allows us to engage in new ways of thinking about the relationship of self and others, imagining its potentialities. See Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> 'Vegans on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown', p. 64.

and respect—the animal’s otherness.<sup>33</sup> I learn that animals actually do resist oppression, stomp their feet, and refuse to work whenever they see an opportunity.<sup>34</sup> However, resistance of the oppressed is likely to be seen as passive or as so much a part of daily behaviour as to be all but invisible to the dominant culture.<sup>35</sup> But I also continually discover alternative perspectives. I try to develop a better understanding of the animal by getting closer to her and being open to surprising engagements. Even though we are inherently different beings, through care and empathy I discover that we can understand each other in many different ways. I understand when the animal is hungry. I understand how the animal likes to be petted. I understand when the animal is scared and suffering. None of these understandings fully determine or describe reality, but they are all real.

## Surprises and Play

The closeness and empathy I try to develop towards animals often stimulate feelings of compassion and pity. It might therefore be quite tempting to render the animal only as a static victim and feel bad for her. This risks placing the human on the dominant plane once again, as it generates the idea that animals depend on our pity and care for their existence. But in between moments of despair and hopelessness about animal oppression, I also find joy. And in thinking about utopian futures as artists, the moments of shared joy with animals are perhaps most inspiring, as they could lead to new ideas about the lives that animals *themselves* envision. These ideas could then cause more resistance in the political, cultural, economic, and social realms; and shift our perception of animals as a commodity to equally free agents that do not necessarily need any pity from humans.

Haraway writes that, through shared encounters such as ‘play’, we experience and discover degrees of freedom and possibilities to develop intuitive and bodily understandings between humans and animals.<sup>36</sup> These kinds of activities form a shared context where our relationships can continuously be negotiated. In being playful, I learn to be flexible and engage with my whole body. I put rationality on hold and deliberately let myself be guided by feelings for a while. When play arises between humans and animals, we explore alternative scenarios, practice our sensitivity, develop empathy, and try out different realities together with the animal.<sup>37</sup> We cannot

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<sup>33</sup> See *The Lives of Animals*.

<sup>34</sup> See Jason Hribal, ‘Animals, Agency, and Class: Writing the History of Animals from Below’, *Human Ecology Forum*, 14 (2007), 101-112.

<sup>35</sup> See ‘A War Without End’, p. 202.

<sup>36</sup> See Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Michelle Westerlaken and Stefano Gualeni, ‘Situated Knowledges through Game Design: A Transformative Exercise with Ants’, *The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference* (Valletta: 2016), 1-25. See [http://pocg2016.institutedigitalgames.com/site/assets/files/1015/westerlaken\\_gualeni\\_-\\_situated\\_knowledges\\_through\\_game\\_design.pdf](http://pocg2016.institutedigitalgames.com/site/assets/files/1015/westerlaken_gualeni_-_situated_knowledges_through_game_design.pdf). [Accessed 22 April 2017].

force anyone to play but we can always invite each other. Playing is actually most fun when we allow ourselves to be surprised.<sup>38</sup>

Because of its openness to surprise, play is also messy. It does involve rules and power, but also allows for continuously changing dynamics. These playful ways of being in the world together with animals, could help us to imagine different realities that place humans and animals on a more equal footing. And it is not only the human that comes up with new ideas, but the animal can surprise us too. When I start paying attention to practices that an animal engages in for her own sake, given the opportunity, I learn that all animals are curious, and perhaps even inherently playful. Even though these activities are not necessarily profitable, I find a lot of meaning in them. And I think that these meanings are relevant, because they could guide us towards imagining non-speciesist futures. As Haraway wrote more recently, '[p]erhaps it is precisely in the realm of play, outside the dictates of teleology, settled categories, and function, that serious worldliness and recuperation become possible'.<sup>39</sup>

The playground, understood here as the metaphorical ground on which play happens, allows us to explore, find, and celebrate things in new perspectives. By looking at the world in this alternative light, such as through a playful encounter with an animal, we do not necessarily engage in a practice that opposes dominant culture, or completely abandons speciesism, but we wilfully start paying careful attention to each other, and to alternative ways of manipulating things, in ways that we find interesting and appealing. And if all beings are in some way drawn to discovering surprising and pleasurable engagements with the world and with each other, there is much utopian inspiration to be found in play.

I would like to share some examples of existing projects and efforts that aim to re-negotiate human-animal relationships through playful encounters: as part of a project called *Playing with Pigs*, a digital game prototype was developed that connects humans and farmed pigs over distance and allows them to interact with each other (see Figure 1). Using the design artefact as a conversation piece, this project invites us to rethink and speculate about our relationships with farm animals through playful encounters as a form of 'doing multispecies philosophy'.<sup>40</sup> Another example called 'Animal Superpowers' approaches animal characteristics through the design of toy-like artefacts that explore sensory perceptions such as ant antennae that mimic the vision of ants and giraffe goggles that raise the user's visual perspective by thirty centimeters (see Figure 2).<sup>41</sup> Finally, I have personally tried to engage in playful encounters with cats<sup>42</sup>, dogs<sup>43</sup>, ants<sup>44</sup>,

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<sup>38</sup> See Ian Bogost, *Play Anything* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> See Clemens Driessen, Kars Alfrink, Marinka Copier, Hein Lagerweij, and Irene van Peer, 'What could Playing with Pigs do to Us?', *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, 30 (2014), 79-102, (p. 84).

<sup>41</sup> Chris Woebken and Kenichi Okada, 'Animal Superpowers' (2008). See <<http://chriswoebken.com/ANIMAL-SUPERPOWERS>>. [Accessed 22 April 2017].

<sup>42</sup> See Michelle Westerlaken and Stefano Gualeni, 'Felino: The Philosophical Practice of Making an Interspecies Videogame', *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games Conference* (Istanbul, TUR, 2014), 1-12. See

and penguins<sup>45</sup> as part of design projects with the aim to generate situated knowledges, transformations, and sensitivities that could propose new ideas about our relationships with other species (see Figure 3).



**Figure 1:** The *Playing with Pigs* project involves a game prototype that presents a touch sensitive display (left) that is connected to a tablet application (right). Images used with permission (HKU/Wageningen University 2011).

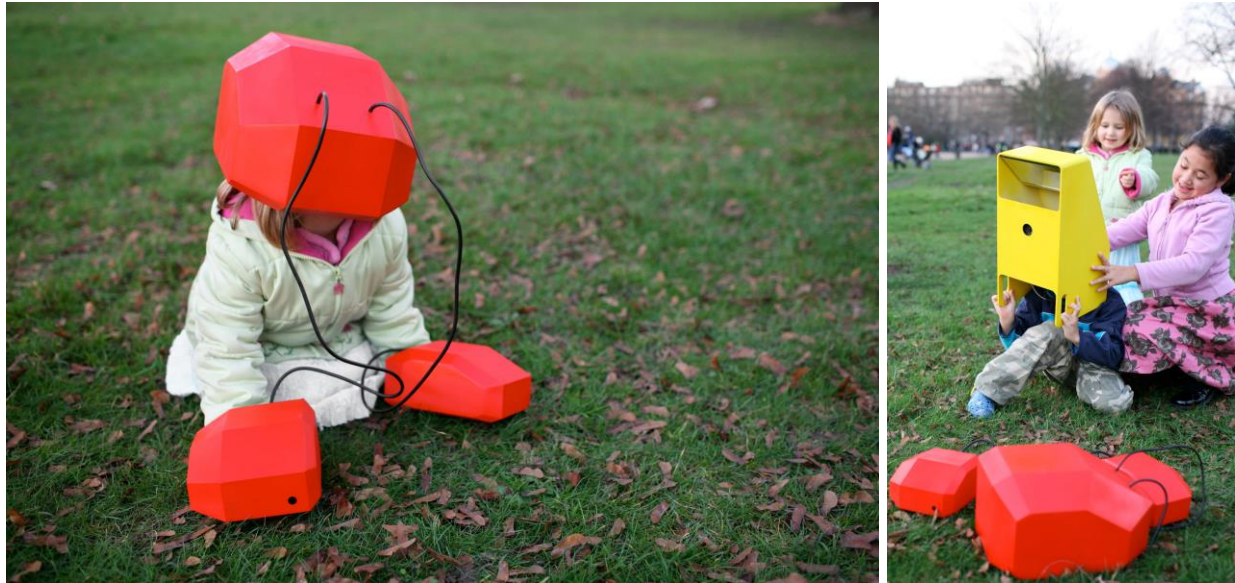
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[http://gamephilosophy2014.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Westerlaken\\_Gualeni-2014.-Felino\\_The-Philosophical-Practice-of-Making-an-Interspecies-Videogame.-PCG2014.pdf](http://gamephilosophy2014.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Westerlaken_Gualeni-2014.-Felino_The-Philosophical-Practice-of-Making-an-Interspecies-Videogame.-PCG2014.pdf). [Accessed 22 April 2017].

<sup>43</sup> See Michelle Westerlaken and Stefano Gualeni, 'Becoming With: Towards the Inclusion of Animals as Participants in Design Processes', *Proceedings of the Animal Computer Interaction Conference* (Milton Keynes: ACM Press 2016), 1-10.

<sup>44</sup> See 'Situated Knowledges through Game Design: A Transformative Exercise with Ants'.

<sup>45</sup> Michelle Westerlaken, 'Designing for Magellanic Penguins' (2017). See <https://michellewesterlaken.wordpress.com/2016/12/12/designing-for-magellanic-penguins/>. [Accessed 22 April 2017].



**Figure 1:** In approaching animal characteristics through design, the 2008 project *Animal Superpowers* explores the sensory perception of ant antennas that magnify the user's vision (left) and a giraffe device that heightens the user's visual perspective (right) ('Animal Superpowers', 2008). Images used with permission.



**Figure 3,** (from left to right): I have worked on design projects that aimed to facilitate playful encounters between humans and cats, dogs, ants, and penguins. More information about each of these projects can also be found online via <http://michellewesterlaken.wordpress.com>.

## Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, I have attempted to bring non-speciesism into the discourse of imagining utopian futures. I have also tried to emphasise some existing non-speciesist practices that oppose our dominant culture. By highlighting these partial and alternative perspectives, I hope to make more credible and more real the practices that counter hegemony and as a modest attempt at reversing our yang-focused civilisation.

Uncivilisation, in this sense, is not referring to a kind of anarchy, but rather to an openness to validating and emphasising the multitude of alternative forces and perspectives that already exist or can be imagined. With this task, I adopted a stance towards knowledge that is performative

rather than realist and emotional rather than rational. As a result, instead of presenting generalisable claims, this text specifically focuses on the possibilities and alternatives that can be created by artists (in the broadest sense of the word), with their creative abilities to draw, shape, reshape, expand, prefigure, prototype, inspire, defamiliarise, negotiate, test, and so on. I wish to emphasise that artists are building small utopias all the time, and I think that artists are the ones that can find new opportunities for the animal to join this discourse.

Of course, this strategy does not come without risks, for both animal and human. ‘Utopia is uninhabitable. As soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia’.<sup>46</sup> If the thing is not making a profit, it can be overlooked for some time, at least while it remains an alternative. But when it becomes oppositional in an explicit or dominant way, it will likely get countered or attacked.<sup>47</sup> So what will happen when we continue to emphasise non-speciesist practices? What if we inflict more animal suffering in our attempt to create utopias? What if we are forced to comply to current practices in order to find new openings and possibilities? What if cultural hegemony forces us to abandon our objectives?

Clearly, the persistence of our dominant society works against our goals and perhaps the notion of civilisation should be considered as more valuable than I treated it in this essay. However, my own perspectives, my gut feelings, the empathy I try to develop, and the moments of joy I share with animals seem to counter much of what our society currently proposes to be the norms to live by. But in our attempt to look for alternatives and imagine and shape non-speciesist futures, we will inevitably get our hands dirty, make mistakes, and cause trouble. However, if the alternative is to remain quiet and accept the slaughter of the—by now—a few million chickens as normal, we cannot allow ourselves to be silenced by these risks. Instead, we had better get to work.

‘If you want to be loved, it might be best not to get involved, for the world, at least for a time, will resolutely refuse to listen’.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> ‘A Non-Euclidian View’, p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> See ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> From ‘The Dark Mountain Manifesto’.

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