

Anarchism and Animal Liberation

*Essays on Complementary
Elements of Total Liberation*

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“Nailing Descartes to the wall”

Animal Rights, Veganism and Punk Culture.

WILL BOISSEAU AND JIM DONAGHEY

Through bringing together material from numerous bands, zines, patches, leaflets, and newly researched interview material, this essay examines the relationships between punk culture and animal rights/vegan consumption habits. It is argued that this relationship is most strongly and consistently expressed, and most sensibly understood, in connection with anarchism. Examining the overlaps between animal rights/veganism and punk is important in several ways. Firstly, it is a significantly under-researched area—as environmental journalist Will Potter (2011) argues, given the importance that punk plays in the political development of individual activists, it is surprising that “there is a shortage of research into punk’s impact on animal rights and environmental activism” (pp. 101–102). Secondly, the themes raised in this essay resonate far beyond the punk scenes from which material is collected: focusing on broader questions of diversity and difference within activist communities, how these differences are managed (even “policed”), the prioritization of certain forms of activism over others, and the role of culture are all issues which cut right to the heart of contemporary activist and community organizing. Thirdly, the topic is of personal importance to the authors, both of whom are writing the essay from the impetus of their own life experiences.

In the first part of the essay the ways in which punk culture and veganism/animal rights coincide will be laid out, to stress the connection’s existence and to explore the different ways in which this connection is expressed. Next, the theme of politicization will be raised, examining the link between people’s exposure to animal rights/veganism through punk, and the adoption of vegan consumption habits or involvement in animal rights activism. Thirdly, the tension between individual choice and subcultural expectation will be explored, followed by an examination of the supposed dichotomy between

consumption and activist politics in animal rights. The essay will conclude by examining how anarchist perspectives cut across and inform these debates in an intersectional manner (Rogue & Volcano, 2012).

This essay is concerned with the *contemporary* UK punk scene, so new primary information collected from interviews by both authors forms the main basis for analysis. All the interviews were carried out in the UK from August 2013 to January 2014 and cover a period of involvement in punk stretching from the late 1970s to the present. The zines considered typically come from self-identified anarchist publications (such as *Artcore*, *Bald Cactus*, *Cargo Cult*, *Last Hours/Rancid News*, and *Ripping Thrash*). From the 1980s onward, animal rights/liberation and vegan praxis have been commonly debated within punk fanzines. Grounded theory informs the interview method, and is a fruitful approach for anarchist-associated themes in general for several reasons. For example, interviewees, and the data they offer, are given primacy over imposed theoretical abstractions. Indeed, as Strauss & Corbin (1998) argue, this approach “means openness, a willingness to listen and to ‘give voice’ to respondents” (p. 43) and “the need to get out into the field to discover what is really going on” (p. 9). This approach, then, helps prevent the foisting of ideological preconceptions onto a research topic, or the warping and misrepresentation of interviewees’ testimony to suit particular biases, while valuing the critical analyses generated from immersed and insider perspectives.

The research also draws on the principles of Critical Animal Studies (CAS). CAS promotes collaborative work that rejects “pseudo-objective academic analysis” and instead aims to produce work that links theory to practice and the university to the community, while advancing a “holistic understanding of the commonality of oppressions” and championing a politics of total liberation (Nocella et al., 2014). This commitment to avoid exploitation of interviewees, while emphasizing bottom-up theory construction, makes this approach highly compatible with an anarchist studies position. Most of the names of interview respondents have been changed to protect anonymity, and the interviewees have been extended a pre-publication opportunity to veto or amend any of the comments attributed to them. This ensures that respondents feel fairly represented, helps to prevent any basic errors, and is also important from a basic respect for individual privacy, particularly because of the sensitive nature of some of the activism discussed, and the background of harsh repression meted out to the animal rights movement over recent years.

Animal rights and veganism in punk

UK hardcore and animal rights went hand-in-hand.—Interview respondent George [24/11/2013]

Punk and veganism/animal rights are undoubtedly connected. This is expressed through the lyrics and imagery of punk bands, the editorial and interview content of zines, numerous benefit gigs and record releases for animal activist causes, and in the overlap between punk and veganism in cafés, social centers, Food Not Bombs chapters, and hunt saboteur (hunt sab) groups. This is not to say that *all* punks are vegan, or that *all* vegans are punks—but the prevalence of this connection cannot be ignored and is particularly striking when considered in conjunction with anarchist and intersectional politics.

Literature dealing with punk pays scant attention to vegan/animal rights issues in general. The majority of books written about punk follow very narrow, singular narratives which consider punk as a brief moment of the late 1970s, and even within that time period only focus on commercially successful bands. Such a focus ignores the emergence of animal rights in punk, which Alastair Gordon (2005) identifies

on the *Stations of the Crass* record [1979] with the track “Time Out” where comparisons are made to human and animal flesh. Animal rights became a central ethical theme over the next decade.... There were numerous anarcho records voicing animal rights issues such as the promotion of vegetarianism, anti hunting and anti vivisection themes [p. 112].

The anarcho-punk scene held animal rights as a central theme, so those accounts of punk that get beyond 1979 *do* frequently mention veganism and animal rights, but even here it is often as a brief mention within a list of other political engagements. The blurb to Roy Wallace’s *The Day the Country Died* documentary is typical: “Many anarcho-punks are supporters of issues such as animal rights, feminism, the anti-war movement, the antiglobalization movement, and many other social movements” (Wallace, 2007). Mike Dines’ (2004) thesis discusses a “‘punk rock’ resistance that accompanied the expansion of protest into areas such as animal rights, feminism and environmental issues” (p. 214). Similarly, Tolga Güldallı (2007) writes of punk’s “anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, anti-authoritarian, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, deeply ecological, pro-animal rights ‘ideology.’” This understanding of veganism and animal rights in conjunction with other radical politics is valid and useful. However, it is worthwhile to examine punk’s adoption of veganism and animal rights positions in isolation as well—especially because, for many, animal rights is an issue of prime concern. Interview respondent Ryan, who has been involved in the Belfast anarchist and punk scenes since the early 1980s, recognizes that “animal rights was always a very very key type of thing. But it was one of the things that, for me, it became almost too exclusive ... *it came at the top of all the people’s chains*” (Interview, 08/10/2013, emphasis added).

When *Last Hours* (2006) zine attempted to compile a “Punk Rock Census” they found that 54.6 percent of the 306 respondents were either vegan

or vegetarian, as compared to less than three percent of the total UK population (VegSoc). That the survey even asked about dietary practice reveals that some connection is presumed, and the high number of respondents who did not eat meat further demonstrates the connection. The musical and artistic output of bands adds more weight to the evidence of the connection between punk and animal rights. There are far too many examples to cover exhaustively here, but a few selections will serve to illustrate some typical approaches. Among the numerous anarcho-punk (and other punk sub-genre) bands to embrace animal rights and veganism in the 1980s, Conflict stood as a totem. To supplement their lyrical exhortations they projected video footage taken from inside abattoirs onto screens behind the stage as they performed. They also exalted the animal liberation activist movements of the 1980s. As Mike Dines (2004) writes:

Much of [Conflict]'s material provides a "call to arms" in the fight against butchers, the police and government structures alike. "This is the A. L. F [Animal Liberation Front]" a track on *The Ungovernable Force* (1986) particularly highlights such an idea. "What does direct action mean?" begins the track. "It means that we are no longer prepared to sit back and allow terrible cruel things to happen," proclaiming "direct action in animal rights means causing economic damage to those who abuse and make profits from exploitation" [pp. 232–233].

Benefit gigs and record releases provide a poignantly material connection between punk and animal rights. Here, the everyday cultural production processes of punk are turned toward activist causes. The 2013 North London punx picnic was a benefit for the FRIEND animal sanctuary in Kent (<http://www.friendsanimalrescue.org.uk/>), and was organized by an active animal liberationist and hunt saboteur. This individual had in fact been recently incarcerated for his animal liberation activities as part of SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty). A benefit CD was released called *Prisoners of War*, and the songs included cover a range of political themes, pointing again to the interconnectedness of activist struggles associated with punk. One former punk rock hunt sabber, Jon of Active Distribution, started a tape distribution called "Lively Tapes" which he "made... a benefit for the Swansea hunt sabs" (Interview, 19/09/2013). In all these cases the role of the benefit is two-fold: as a material fund-raiser for activist causes; and as propaganda and information (and even as entertainment too).

Punk-engaged social centers are overwhelmingly vegan, and also anarchist. Examples include the Warzone Centre in Belfast, the Cowley Club in Brighton, the Sumac Centre in Nottingham, the 1in12 Club in Bradford, Kebele in Bristol. Interview respondent Liam, a current member of the Warzone Collective in Belfast, commented, "we do operate a vegan café, which obviously results in discussion and opportunities for anyone who maybe wouldn't have eaten anything vegan before to come and eat it and realise it's

fucking nice [and] a lot better for ye than the crap that people eat” (Interview, 06/10/2013).

The connection between punk and animal rights is also recognized by animal rights activists who are not punks. Simon, the current chair of the Hunt Saboteurs Association, acknowledges that “there’s always been that push within the punk movement to support animal rights, and because the punk movement is by its very nature anarchist—they push towards organisations like us and not the more [mainstream] organising groups.” The connection persists to the present, emerging at the end of the 1970s when there were “anarchists coming out of the punk movement, so there’s always been that sort of angle within hunt sabs, because it doesn’t involve any authority, it doesn’t involve anyone telling you what to do, anybody can get out and do it” (Interview, 25/04/2014). Hunt sab groups and Food Not Bombs chapters are frequently populated by punks: at least three of Gordon’s (2005) interview respondents were involved as a direct result of being in a punk scene (p. 89), and interview respondent Jon Active remembered “it was, hunt sabbing during the day and then punk rock at night.” “We used to go hunt sabbing... and then we’d [find out] ‘right, where’s the gig’... ‘cause the van was hired for 24 hours, so we [would] go to a gig anywhere we could potentially drive to, get to the gig, drive back that fuckin’ night, wow jesus, and then take the van back the next morning” (Interview, 19/09/2013). Ryan, discussing the make-up of political groups during the 1980s in Belfast, commented that “in terms of animal rights [it was] almost exclusively punks” (Interview, 08/10/2013). This connection continues today, and even where personal involvement in the punk scene has lessened, animal rights activism continues. Tommy, who organises punk gigs in London and has been heavily involved in the animal liberation movement, notes “in a group, an animal rights group, you’re thinking ‘what kinda music are they into?’ And suddenly you’re talking to ‘em about Crass and ... they know all the old bands ... so yeh, in the animal rights scene there are a lot of so-called ‘ex-punks’” (Interview, 19/10/2013).

There is, then, an undeniable connection between animal rights/veganism and punk. As already intimated above, this relationship is not straightforward, so attention must be paid to the complications that are thrown-up, looking particularly at politicization through punk, the tensions between subcultural expectations and individual choice, and the supposed dichotomy between activist engagement and “mere” consumption habits.

Politicization Through Punk

It’s just what you did, which sounds horrible and trendy, but it’s true. You became punk, you found out about animal rights and

you quit meat.

—Interview respondent Phil Chokeword [19/01/2014]

One of the key assertions here, and a main explanation of their relationship, is that an exposure to punk culture encourages people towards veganism/animal rights. Paul Gravett describes this consciousness raising effect, going from growing up “in a right wing Tory working class family” to involvement in campaign groups such as London Animal Action through “the influence of punk music” (Interview, 07/12/2013). Isy Morgenmuffel, who was active in the Cowley Club, believes that “punk rock is a great entry point to lots of rebellious ideas,” but this does not mean that *all* ideas will be meaningfully adopted by participants (Interview, 17/12/2013). For Phil Chokeword involvement in the South Coast hardcore punk scene during the late 1990s coincided with a time of “finding out about a lot of political issues for the first time as well as developing really strong ideas about DIY culture and politics” (Interview, 19/01/2014). Many of these ideas were intertwined with anarchist politics, but it was through discussions with fellow punks, rather than studying anarchist or animal rights literature, that Phil adopted a vegetarian diet. Of course the process of politicization is by no means simple, and politicizing effects can emerge from any number of sources, mainstream as well as alternative. Paul, who became an anarchist, “never actually read much by anarchists in the early days. My main source of reading... was the *New Musical Express*” (Interview, 07/12/2013). Similarly, Roger Yates, who was active as a press officer for the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) became interested in animal rights in 1977 when he “saw an article in a music paper” which focused on the anti-bloodsports movement (Interview, 11/12/2013). The music press was particularly important for spreading alternative ideas; indeed DIY zines, which habitually feature animal rights issues, remain a key method by which punks can spread ideas from scene to scene. The process of politicization is further complicated because many activists are already interested in animal rights, and other radical politics, before they are attracted to punk. Isy, for instance, became vegetarian partly inspired by The Smiths, but through her involvement in leftist politics she came into contact with “anarchist vegans who I felt affinity with. I ended up much less involved with animal rights and more with community organising,” and it was only through this process that Isy became involved with DIY punk (Interview, 17/12/2013). Interview respondents Tommy, Megan, Oisín, and Sonia were all also already vegetarian before becoming involved in punk. Tommy describes the relationship between animal rights and punk in his own politicization as “a bit like a circle. I was already into animal rights ... and then I discovered these bands who were as well ... like a lot of other people it got me more involved into animal rights ... both fed off each other really with me, um both things been a big part of

my life” (Interview, 19/10/2013). Those who are already vegetarians or interested in animal advocacy when they become involved in punk are encouraged to become vegan, get more active in direct action politics, and feel a sense of cohesion within punk scenes that is lacking in mainstream society. Further, the politicizing relationship between veganism/animal rights and punk operates *in both directions*—suggesting a very strong, if complicated, relationship.

Politicization through punk typically involves an awareness of animal liberation. Since the growth of anarcho-punk in the late 1970s and early 1980s, bands would often “include in their records information and images of the horrors of animal use and abuse” (O’Hara, 1999, p. 134). Gordon (2005), in his study of the Leeds and Bradford DIY scenes, found that one of the most “salient demonstrations of commitment” to the punk *lifestyle* was a vegetarian diet. Indeed, “the most striking similarity ... was that *all of them* were, or had at some time in their subcultural careers, been either vegetarian or vegan” (p. 89, emphasis added). However the politics of punk are not confined to animal issues, and as such, punk has acted as a site of discourse between anarchism and animal liberation. Interview respondent Liam said, “Personally speaking, for me, it definitely comes from ... an anarchist viewpoint, because it was lot of the early bands I listened to ... that sort of got me into that way of thinking, of vegetarianism.” He continues:

[I]t was definitely started by punk bands [but thereafter] it’s something I just continued on myself because I realised that my veganism was more about poverty than actual ... rights for animals, where I realised that like vegetarianism just wasn’t enough.... To be totally honest I think protest politics is kinda flawed but I can see no other way around like making myself feel OK about my diet. Like I can’t partake in that, so that includes like ethical eating, like not just what I’m eating, but where it comes from [Interview, 06/10/2013].

Liam’s initial exposure to animal rights through punk was augmented by his exposure to, and involvement in, anarchist politics, and became part of an overarching critique of oppression, combining veganism with an economic critique.

Punk has a clear politicizing role, and many people exposed to animal rights and veganism continue their activism after ending their involvement in punk scenes. This suggests that while punk has a politicizing role for young activists, working as their first point of contact with radical activism, it is not regarded as a significant end in itself. Former ALF activist Roger Yates argues that whereas some animal rights activists “seemed to have a deep and informed commitment to anarchism,” “others simply liked the symbolism and anti-authoritarianism involved” (Interview, 11/12/2013). For Roger “punk music and the lyrics were probably more influential than the written anarchist texts.” Clearly, punk is significant for radicalizing young anarchists and familiarizing them with animal rights arguments, but this seems to suggest that punk is

merely concerned with “symbolism” rather than a “deep and informed commitment.” Contrary to this, many punks see themselves as involved in “a counter culture that has strong anti-capitalist values” and believe punk is more than just a gateway for people to pass through before entering more serious political activism (Interview, 19/01/2014).

Of course, there is a degree of difficulty in gauging the commitment and reasoning of those who adhere to the norms of any scene or movement. If a person desires to become a member of a scene, then they will adopt the norms of that scene. This may be understood as politicization, and exposure to a valuable culture—but it may just be, as interview respondent George (who grew up around the Liverpool punk scene in the 1980s, and now resides in Manchester where he is editor of a widely read zine) suggests, that “people in life just go with the flow, y’know, so, a lot of people in life go with what their... social group do,” resulting in empty rhetoric, “punks around the time [the ‘80s]... used very political language while not themselves being committed to the politics” (Interview, 24/11/2013). The important thing was to belong to “the culture.” Even Oisín, who plays in a London-based band, and who is vegan, suggests that hard-wrought political consciousness isn’t always the driving factor:

We’ve played benefits for everything. Half the time we don’t even know what we’re playing benefits for. The fucking transsexual badgers in fucking Somerset or something like that, y’know [Interview, 19/10/2013].

This can result in a superficial engagement with a scene’s underlying political motivations. George talks about “quite conservative kids who were into way-out music, y’know. And then grew up, grew out of it” (Interview, 24/11/2013). Once their involvement in the scene ends, so too does their adherence to the norms of that scene. Ex-punks *can* become ex-vegans, but as Tommy and Roger mentioned above, this isn’t always the case—many “ex-punks” carry on with meaningful political engagement after they exit a scene.

It seems overly ambitious to demand that all the members of a particular community must arrive at a thoroughly considered position of every issue of their everyday lives. It is true that in the case of veganism and punk this usually involves a change of diet and lifestyle, where one might expect some thought to have gone into the transition. But adhering to a cultural norm can be played out as praxis without much hand-wringing reflection. Consider the myriad behaviors that are culturally specific to contemporary capitalism, behaviors that, for many, are simply accepted as ways of life—as *normal*. If veganism were to become a normative value in a mainstream hegemonic society, then people would *just be* vegan—they might not ever agonize over the ethics of consuming another living creature, but the suggestion to do so would seem preposterous. If some people in punk scenes fail to make an ethical, deep-

seated commitment to veganism, but only play it out as a cultural norm, this does not necessarily undermine the value of that action entirely. It is also frequently the case that those who initially stop eating meat for purely cultural reasons later develop a more considered commitment to animal rights in general. A cultural motivation need not be considered void.

Nor is it the case that all activists who are focused on “more radical” activism have ceased their engagement with punk culture—many remain involved. Punk does not just have an initial politicizing effect, it also provides the intellectual and cultural support to ensure that activists remain politicized, motivated and undefeated. In Adam’s case “the more political stuff probably came through Conflict. Eh, and I remember getting albums that had contact addresses for different sorta anarchist groups and organisations. That, I suppose, was maybe, maybe the first step in terms of looking at anarchism more politically. Y’know, as opposed to just listening to music that I liked and I identified with, and I agreed with a lot of” (Interview, 28/08/2013). Jon Active was on the supply-side end of this propagandizing relationship: “I did [the distro] for the same reason I mentioned before basically. I knew that I really wanted to communicate all that stuff, those ideas, and I wanted to make some money for the hunt sabs selling the tapes, and I wanted to, y’know get more people interested in going hunt sabbing ... and all the other stuff which we were doing” (Interview, 19/09/2013). Punk commodities, in addition to being entertainment and offering inspiring invective against any number of oppressions, actually facilitate engagement in the anarchist movement by providing opportunities for listeners to *get involved*. As Elizabeth Cherry (2006) discovered, those involved in punk are more likely to remain politically active as vegans than those outside punk who lack the support structures that are entrenched within punk culture:

There are both relational and cultural differences in the social networks of these punk and non-punk vegans. While the punks found support for veganism in their everyday lives through friends or music, the non-punks did not have such support, or had support that did not encourage them to maintain a strict vegan lifestyle [pp. 164–165].

Even if participants no longer believe that “punk rockers would be at the vanguard of a peaceful anarcho revolution” (*Ripping Thrash*, #24, p. 7) they may remain active partly to encourage those newly interested in the scene to consider radical environmental and animal rights politics, and also because punk is a prefigurative example of the society they wish to see in action—cooperative, non-hierarchical, and internationalist. Punk has often met the charge of merely preaching to the converted, of singing about animal issues to those who are already vegan, but as Kismet HC explain, “animal exploitation never goes away ... yet there are new faces emerging into the scene every day and

maybe ‘this song’ will touch them and make them think” (*Ripping Thrash*, #24, p. 8).

Subcultural Expectations and Individual Choice

A picture has emerged of punk scenes as spaces or communities where veganism is normative, in contrast with mainstream social situations where veganism is seen as “other.” As a norm, then, there is a degree of expectation for members of a punk scene to adhere to a vegan diet. This raises issues of how this norm is upheld or “policed,” and also the implications of people “going with the flow” and adopting a vegan diet without any real deep-seated commitment to animal rights. This essentially boils down to a tension between subcultural expectations and individual choice, and this tension is felt particularly sharply in punk because of the importance attached to personal freedom.

Jack, who grew up in the midlands, but is now involved in anarcho-syndicalist activism in Glasgow, recalls “a big emphasis on moralism, and a big emphasis on lifestyle [in the 1980s anarcho-punk scene]. I wouldn’t say *lifestylism*, but just having an alternative lifestyle.” “[A]lmost like developing a new genre of hippie-punk, right?” (Interview, 14/08/2013). This points to the sense in which veganism came to be part of the normative values and lifestyle practices of many punk scenes. These scenes nurture vegan consumption choices and offer a space for vegans to socialize with other vegans, and have some reprieve from the stresses of having to remain ever-vigilant in an animal consuming society. Punk scenes reinforce the vegan norm through the cultural reproduction of everyday practices (serving vegan food, beer, etc.), and can also (re)inspire the commitment to this consumption choice. Gordon’s (2005) research uncovers the importance of subcultural community in this regard. His interview respondent, Mr. C, “was explicit how his choice to become a vegetarian was both a combination of the need to impress his girlfriend at the time and his investigation of the anarcho-punk genre.... Mr. C shows how the level of commitment *is both a combination of peer pressure and the input of the political statements* of the genres of punk he was investigating” (emphasis added, pp. 89–90). Interview respondent Megan, who puts on feminist punk gigs in Brighton, revealed a very similar motivation. “I’d wanted to go vegan for many years but had always relied heavily on processed foods so I thought it would be too difficult, but when I was forced into a position where I had to learn how to cook [as part of a vegan household] I saw how easy it would be and then the transition to full veganism was easy” (Interview, 17/12/2013). Laura Portwood-Stacer (2013), in her investigation into the contemporary anarchist movement in the U.S., identifies the performative

and “identificatory motivations” in this dynamic (p. 41). Her interview respondent, Aaron, describes the importance of subcultural community:

You literally live with other people who call themselves anarchists, who have a similar frugal punk-y lifestyle, and you put a lot of time into creative projects, and into discussions about what it means to live out your politics etc. You’re in close proximity, and if anybody suddenly stops being vegan it’s a big deal. And I think the same is true as far as political identity. It’s easier to maintain a very abstract identity like “anarchist” when you have other people to orient yourself around, other compass points [Portwood-Stacer, 2013, p. 88].

Further, veganism is considered as “other” in mainstream society, so adopting this as a normative value helps to site the counter-culture outside of that cultural hegemony. It is a statement of identity, and a statement of resistance.

It is clear that this sense of cultural identity and belonging are important to participants in punk scenes, particularly where vegan consumption choices are concerned. Phil directly contrasts the role of this cultural identity with the importance placed on personal freedom, believing a sense of cohesion to be more important:

I don’t feel like it’s realistic to build a community based on people who are all doing and believing different things. There has to be shared values at least so that people can hang out and co-exist. One of the shared values could be a belief that exploitation of animals is wrong. If you go strongly against that value, is there a place for you in that community? Go off and find somewhere that is more to your liking, don’t hang around antagonising me. I don’t have a problem with taking that stance on individualism to be honest [Interview, 19/01/2014].

It might be expected that this subcultural identity will be defended against normative transgressions (“policed”). However, the idea of creating some kind of rule or law by which members of these scenes should abide directly infringes on the ideas of personal freedom held by participants in these scenes, and is likely to generate conflict. Nonetheless, when compared with something like a safer spaces policy, a shared commitment to challenge mainstream relations to nonhuman animals appears consistent (Website of the Coalition for Safer Spaces). Indeed the emphasis on conflict resolution and being “welcoming, engaging and supportive” are key elements of a safer spaces policy that punk scenes might take into consideration when thinking about how to maintain a vegan norm, without resorting to alienating behavior to police this (Website of the Coalition for Safer Spaces). As the CrimethInc. ex-Workers Collective puts it “a big YES! to do-it-yourself punk rock and all other expressions of rebellion and independence, and a little no to subcultural isolation and provincialism” (*Rolling Thunder*, 2007, p. 3). This dynamic is recognized by Gordon (2005) as well:

DiY [and vegan] purists have been accused of being inward-looking, preaching to the converted and being subculturally elitist with little chance of ever reach-

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ing to the broader body of people whose support would make DiY a significant political tool of empowerment. The purists in turn accuse those who defect of intellectual slack-mindedness, political populism and ethical bankruptcy. The dilemmas strike deep [p. 270].

This insular, or ghettoized, perspective is problematic—especially if propaganda, information, and politicization are considered to be of importance. Portwood-Stacer (2013) emphasizes the communicative motivation of veganism, and its prefigurative potential, which “rests on implicit assumptions about the capacity of small-scale actions to work as theatrical spectacles which publically represent political ideologies and convince others of their correctness” (p. 41). Inevitably, in trying to attract new people to animal rights and veganism, it is essential to talk to non-vegans and people who are not familiar with animal rights issues. This means welcoming them into your scene in order to expose them to alternatives, and open them up to the cultural norms practiced by punk scenes. As “best practice” this might be achieved with calmly weighted discussion, support and encouragement (as suggested by safer spaces policies), but is often played out as shunning, aggression, and even violence. Those who employ the latter approaches are labeled as “vegan police,” a pejorative term for those individuals who aggressively chastise others for not adhering to the scene norm of veganism. “The ostensible purpose of [‘calling someone out’] is to raise consciousness among one’s fellow anarchists [or vegans] and to encourage each other to stay committed to their shared political project” (Portwood-Stacer, 2013, p. 88). Jack identified this issue: “they would have like frowned upon [mere] vegetarianism, right? Same as if you were like wearing like leather boots and stuff, y’know?” (Interview, 14/08/2013). Again, Gordon’s (2005) respondent Mr. C echoes these views:

There has been a vegan police element which I’ve remembered. I remember from the days doing hunt sabbing that people would be like fucking going into people’s kitchens and looking in people’s cupboards and going “what the fuck is this in your cupboard?” That is just ridiculous like [p. 128].

Ryan spoke about the serious implications this “policing” attitude could have:

People who were involved in the original anarcho-punk movement will tell you it became so rigid with people who were thinking that you *had* to be vegan ... there was like all these kinda rulebooks ... from people that hadn’t read too much, or hadn’t really looked at any details about ... the bigger picture.... Anarcho-punk bands were doing this as well ... so they were getting this em, half-baked anarchism from bands who obviously didn’t know what they were talking about.... A lot of people will say that *they left the anarcho-punk scene because of this rigidity* that kind of formed in it [Interview, 08/10/2013].

Gordon (2005) describes this focus as “a symbolic site for the politics of cultural elitism” (p. 128). So by enforcing the scene’s vegan norm, possibly from an urge to protect the scene’s identity or in a ham-fisted attempt to encourage

somebody to become vegan, this “policing” in fact pushes people away from scenes and communities where they might be exposed to useful ideas and cultures. Conscious of this dynamic, interview respondent Megan tries to “live and let live” around vegan issues (Interview, 17/12/2013). Oisín, follows a similar logic:

I’m pretty much like live and let live, I’m not gona start going up and [saying] “you fucking cunt, you’re eating meat.” I’ve never been like that. I’d have no fuckin’ friends if I did, y’know [Interview, 19/10/2013].

One of Oisín’s bandmates eats meat, and he says, “Yeh I’ll wind him up about it, but it’s nothing serious” (Interview, 19/10/2013). Even though both of these interview respondents are vegan, and have both been vegetarian since a very young age prior to their joining in the punk scene, they don’t want to alienate people by preaching. This tension is not easily resolved—and indeed, there is nothing to suggest that it *should be* resolved. As well as this internal critical dialogue, there are also criticisms leveled at punk’s engagement with veganism/animal rights from outside the culture.

Consumption and Activism

Tied in with the accusation that veganism is a subcultural expectation is the question of whether some punks’ concern with animal issues is “proper” activism or “mere” consumerism. Moreover, when capitalist companies can happily produce vegan alternatives, and big-brand celebrities willingly endorse a version of veganism, it may be argued that this dietary habit is unconnected from any political critique whatsoever.

Certainly, some anarchists involved in animal rights treat punks with suspicion, viewing it as a secondary, ill-informed activism. Urban myths of inebriated punks eating ham sandwiches on hunt sabs abound. One activist, who founded Re-Pressed anarchist distro, often saw “the punk scene being no use at all, just a load of pissed up knackers ... or over obsessive straight edge vegan fascists” (*Cargo Cult*, p. 13). However, even with this qualification, it is difficult to deny that punk produces “great practical examples of anarchy in action” and surges of political activity including involvement in anti-fascist action and hunt sabotage (*Cargo Cult*, p. 13). Anarchist punks often attended national animal rights demonstrations, contributing significantly to the anarchist presence (Interview, 07/12/2013).

There are numerous examples of punks putting animal rights theory into action. As well as promoting veganism/animal rights within DIY shows, and writing proselytizing animal rights lyrics, members of punk bands reg-

ularly work with local animal rights groups. Discussing the situation in the 1980s, interview respondent George considers that “if punk was affiliated with anything politically, it was animal rights.... The Animal Liberation Front were kind of very active, and it was a time of ... very little surveillance. So you’d get grubby punks throwing bricks through ... butcher-shop windows and things like that, and punk was far more aligned to that I think” (Interview, 24/11/2013). Kismet HC regularly ran “street stalls collecting money for animal aid & petitions against fur trades, circuses, HLS [Huntington Life Sciences],” and Leeds hardcore band Indictor regularly protested outside Covance Laboratories in Harrogate and Harvey Nichols, who sold fur, in Leeds (*Ripping Thrash*, pp. 6–14; *Bald Cactus*, 22, p. 16). In Brighton, punks supported the Anarchist Teapot, which began life as a “string of squatted cafes” and soon turned into a vegan mobile kitchen for mass catering at demonstrations. The Cowley Club, also in Brighton, took inspiration from the social centers of the Spanish revolution, and work to provide a “community-focused space with resources” and also hold veganism/animal rights as a key tenet (Interview, 17/12/2013). In London, punks were involved in London Animal Action’s vegan fayre, although perhaps this does not rule out the charge of veganism being a mere consumer activity (*Rancid News*, p. 18).

Of course there are some punks who are simply not interested in animal rights. Even at the Barry Horne Memorial Gig, put on to honor the memory of the ALF hunger striker and to raise funds for animal liberation magazine *Arkangel* and other animal rights causes, some audience members “were there to see Conflict and the Subhumans and probably got a big Mac after the gig” (*Bald Cactus*, 20, pp. 4–7). This *perceived* attitude has led some activists to question the sincerity of the punk scene’s commitment to animal advocacy, dismissing it as empty posturing at worst, and vegan consumerism at best. Some members of South Coast hardcore punk band Pilger, whose lyrics encouraged listeners to “think about what you eat,” believed that “what we buy and where we buy it shapes the world”—they commended the fact that there were no longer “animal fats in Mr. Kipling’s cakes” (*Artcore*, 2005, p. 11). But taken in isolation, such an attitude amounts to little more than supporting cruelty-free capitalism.

Ryan Gunderson (2011) believes the animal rights movement, and it would seem this could apply to certain punk scenes, have allowed themselves to be co-opted by cruelty-free capitalism, to the extent that activists “consume their identities as pseudo-political achievement” (p. 269). Rather than questioning structures of society and making links between varying forms of oppression, vegan consumers are willing to accept the “chocolate laxative” offered by capitalism. For Gunderson (2011), individualist ethical consumerism is not just limited and ineffective, it also “halts social justice movements from pursuing radical means of altering society because they have been co-opted”

(p. 269, emphasis in original). Critics of vegan consumerism believe that it does not offer a “critical assessment of social domination,” that it only challenges one aspect of hierarchical domination while seemingly allowing for “animal-free workhouses” to continue, and that it adopts the capitalist system’s way of conceptualizing change—through consumer power (*A Murder of Crows*, pp. 74–80). Of course, this criticism implies that ethical consumerism is not linked with a wider desire to change social institutions and challenge the economic system, which is not necessarily the case. The punk commitment to providing vegan meals, or sharing recipes, could be interpreted as vegan outreach in a capitalist society, and by sharing food or working in conjunction with Food Not Bombs punks can also work to subvert capitalist economic practices.

Peter Gelderloos (2011) (who seems to believe that merely wanting to eat adequately amounts to rampant consumerism) argues that “every vegan ... is actively supporting capitalism by participating in a great smoke screen which hides the true nature of how the present economic system actually functions” (p. 4). Rather than providing an insightful anarchist perspective, these criticisms of the “naïve vegan novice out to change the world” are often patronizing and offer no solutions to creating the better world their authors claim to seek (Gelderloos, 2011, p. 17). Considered alongside the veganism of Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Jay-Z and Beyoncé (Barford, 2014), punk veganism might be considered as merely part of the rising global consumer trend for vegan diets. Some vegan activists, who have often emerged from the punk scene, even consider that their actions do not amount to a political activity. For instance, the Pogo Café was run “as a workers collective where everyone involved has a joint say,” the collective “started as Emmaz ... the origins are in the punk rock community, who then joined with people from the animal rights community and the group got bigger” (*Last Hours*, 2006, pp. 74–75). Despite this, some Pogo Café volunteers believed that the collective “don’t really have any politics” (*Last Hours*, 2006, pp. 74–75). *Subversive Energy* (2012), a group influenced by Max Stirner, promote stealing or “freeganism” “in an attempt to subvert the consumer-product relationship ... [and] undermine the transfer of resources” of the capitalist system (p. 5). Indeed, punks frequently engage in skipping (known as dumpster diving in the U.S.) to provide for mass catering and Food Not Bombs initiatives. The fact that punks have so often combined activism with their dietary practice disproves any claim that they are merely engaged in consumerism. This link between dietary habits and activism separates veganism in the punk scene from the growing international trend. Another key difference is the tendency of punks to combine veganism with a critique of capitalism and—most significantly—with an anarchist engagement. Punk animal advocacy most readily and consistently emerges in connection to anarchism.

Conclusion

This is only one issue, it's a big issue, it's an important issue. But it's a single issue or several issues, which all have the same kind of cause, they all come from the same kind of capitalist, patriarchal, church and state system y'know, which looks at everything as product, including animals.—Interview respondent Ryan [08/11/2013]

As mentioned above, veganism and animal rights are generally included among a list of other political engagements connected to punk scenes. Megan echoes Ryan when she says, “everything’s kinda like interlocked, and these whole overarching systems of oppression, and they kind of intersect, and intersectionality’s great as a theory” (Interview, 17/12/2013). This intersectional understanding is underpinned by an anarchist political philosophy, and as repeatedly suggested throughout the chapter, it is from this understanding that the relationships between veganism/animal rights and punk culture make sense. Jon Active recalls the practical implications of this struggle against a wide range of oppressions. “It wasn’t just hunt sabbing ... there was going to the ... nuclear bases, going to Upper Hayford, and goin’ to Greenham Common.... And of course the anti-fascist stuff, and then there was the um ... Public Order Act, whenever that was.... Those kind of demos, and then the ... anti-McDonald’s stuff” (Interview, 19/09/2013).

However, the relationship between anarchism and animal advocacy fluctuates and there are anarchists who deny that animal rights has anything to do with their politics. Although the Class War Federation once believed that “animals are the lowest class imaginable” and “abolition of Class Slavery means freedom for all animals” (*Class War*, n.d, p. 4) a later pronouncement in their book *Unfinished Business* states that they do “not think that music, drugs or fashion will change the world. The Federation has no links with, or interest in, the animal rights movement” (*Class War*, 1992, p. 13). Some anarchists reject veganism as a consumer activity while others believe that “anarchism is a life without structure or authority, therefore my diet follows neither of these” or that an emphasis on a seemingly restrictive diet makes it difficult to organize with community groups outside of the anarchist movement (Anarchist Survey). Some anarchists reject the concept of “rights” while others deny that nonhuman animals are suitable candidates for liberation because they can less clearly engage in their own liberation struggle (Franks, 2006, p. 119). Interview respondent Adam, who was exposed to anarchism in the late 1980s Belfast punk scene, and who was vegetarian for a large part of his life, is now involved in anarcho-syndicalist activism and now doesn’t consider animal rights as “necessarily intrinsic to anarchist politics” (Interview, 28/08/2013). However, he is critical of the polarization that often occurs in the anarchist

movement over the animal rights issue. “In my experience the people that argue about this are, on one side, people that only give a fuck about wee fluffy animals, and don’t really care about exploitation of people ... there’s something about them that’s misanthropic. Uh, and on the other extreme you have people who have come through that sorta thing, who are fucking overly embarrassed about it, who think ‘aw, we have to be so materialist about everything.” In Adam’s opinion this lifestyle/workerist dichotomy is based on “stupid fucking arguments.”

If you join an anarcho-syndicalist organisation, or an anarcho-communist organisation for that matter, I don’t think there is any contradiction in having a debate and putting forward some sort of approach to agricultural industry and the way animals are treated and the way they’re farmed and processed and all the rest of it.... I would like to think people would generally agree at that level.... Really, I mean given the state the world’s in, right, people can come together and agree that the way they’re organised is to do certain things. And if people want to do stuff that is also more about hunt sabbing, or more about some sort of vegan or vegetarian activism, or not, they can do that outside the framework of that type of organisation. And they should not be berated or made to feel like idiots over it, at all. Uh, and I think that the whole lifestyle/class debate does that, and I think it’s fucking ridiculous [Interview, 28/08/2013].

There is, then, a deep and strongly expressed connection between animal rights/veganism and punk culture. This relationship is best understood in conjunction with anarchism and an intersectional opposition to all forms of domination. As Canadian anarchist punk band Propagandhi (1996) convey in the song that gives this essay its title: “I have recognised one form of oppression; now I recognise the rest.” The complications and tensions discussed here ensure that these issues will continue to be debated and discussed within punk scenes (the more the better!). It is hoped that this analysis can be a useful contribution to those debates, as well as introducing outsiders to this important subject area, and indeed, to the importance of veganism and animal rights more widely.

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