

A black and white photograph of a city skyline, likely Boston, viewed from across a body of water. In the foreground, several weathered wooden pilings stand in the water. The city skyline, featuring numerous skyscrapers, is visible across the water under a cloudy sky.

**that
the ISSUES
are not
the ISSUE
is not the
ISSUE**

a letter to a letter-writer to Earth-First!
from the not-too distant future

Once upon a time,

I found myself before dawn hiding in the kudzu and ivy that grew just below the 'mountain gravel road' (which, among Earth Firsters at the time, was the preferred nomenclature for 'pleasure trail'). Time had slowed down, as it often does in these situations, but I'd like to see you not time travel after facing a blunt of stinging nettles laced with powdered cranial bone residue leftover from when 'Endgame' blew our #collective minds.

Eventually the moment came when a dozen others, armed with dreadlocks, a soon-to-be-disabled car (not like in an ablist way, though, like if the car had been able-bodied we never could have exploited it as a resource for sabotage). Not that crimethinc is OK with exploiting the disabled, we always fully disclose the relevant tactical facts to folks leading up to any activities. Fully disclose? More like fully dis-clothes, amirite? Not like in a sexist way though, because we've made 'That's What She Said' stickers and our friends who are wymmyn totally get that we're allowed to be joke-sexist) and a tripod materialized out of the darkness to block the mine's entrance. Perhaps you wouldn't be looking down your nose at this impassioned recollection if some cadre had bothered to clamber out of the darkness to block your mind's entrance, from the invasion of MSNBC, that is.

Looking back up the steep incline to see the barricade lit by flares, illuminating the Croatan Red Lobster up ahead, knowing we didn't need reservations at that beautiful place and how impossible it would be for them to deny us Cheddar Biscuits, for at least a few hours, remains one of my fondest memories.

Eight years have passed since that small experience. Although, come to think of it, I'm almost certain the past doesn't pass, so a lot of what I'm remembering might just be the result of bridgewater fluid flowing into my spinal column.

I continue to be involved in struggle, though more out of a desire for finding a non-speciesist way to rationalize the fact that my dog refuses to pay his share of the rent, than hope for social

change. Nevertheless the return of the Earth First! Rondy to my home state (not like home home because obviously this is occupied territory. And not like state state because obviously I say smash the state. I guess what I mean by 'home state' is more like 'cage of spiritual despair where I am able to store my truck and several guitars') seemed an appropriate time to renew certain critical questions, questions that have been raised like so many corpses before by better necromancers than I but were seemingly set aside under the constant pressure like so many deep-fried state fair morsels to address the newest threat that would destroy The World. Though certainly an eminently satire-able essay, I hope that this can be seen as a well-thought-out counterpoint to the notion that people would have even ever considered using the phrase 'to live wild and free' if they hadn't heard Wiz Khalifa, a celebrated product of civilization.

An Image from the Past

The larger world of radical politics during my EF! years was suffocated by the anti-war movement, whose 10 year bid for Murder 2 seemed both too lenient to my politics as survivors and also too harsh to my politics as prison-abolitionists. Even as a perolee, the anti-war movement dominated, with help from the Left and various socialist sects. If you ask me I'd rather be having various socialist sex, #thatswhatshesaid. But I digress. These folks were lost in the anti-capitalist riots of the anti-globe era but at home in the lukewarm waters of anti-imperialism. A lot had met with Xzibit and were playing poker with their parents' sisters watching Ken Burns' Civil War PBS special, so they could ante with their Aunties in Antietam while they anti'ed.

Anarchists, for the most part, felt awkward and at odds with this period, especially those of us like myself who had never menstruated. We sharpened our political teeth in the street conflicts at the turn of the century, as was the popular style of bod-mod at the time. The anti-war days molded our thinking and our practices nonetheless, which was triggering to the vegans among us who knew that Jell-O was made with

horses hooves.

We became sequestered in "community building," which is what we called the building we all hung out in. And single-issue politics which could never fully reflect our ideas or desires the way Full Communism, The Collapse, or CT scans could. And who could afford those?

Earth First! made sense in some ways, like how having an exclamation mark in its name instantly catapulted us head-and-shoulders over every other fencewalking, dispassionate, punctuationally tepid 'radical' groups. This was the best possible version of that model, and many of us got involved with eco-defense in this period. So many so, in fact, that for a few months in 2008 the Eco was fully defended (no squirrels were hit by cars during this period, no lovers mutilated tree-trunks with their anthropomorphocentric carvings, no ducks got fed cheetos laden with preservatives at the park, no dissertation was won on the backs of unfairly traded coffee beans, etc. etc.)

The prevailing winds changed, however: riots broke out in the slums of Europe, Greece was set ablaze when Alexis was murdered, the black bloc re-awoke at the '08 conventions, university occupations in '09 refused to make any demands of Power, widespread and generalized antagonism to police broke out in the Northwest a year later, Oakland got revenge for Oscar Grant and a couple years later went on general strike. Needless to say, this was a golden era for the communique. Many of us felt like we had a shot at a career in publishing again. Hell, I'm writing an essay at this very moment. The ripple effect is quite serious.

Others, however, remained in the activist house they had built for themselves, limited but comfortable, 3 Bedrooms 2 Baths, no central air but internet included, animals and smoking ok. Seeking a non-Craig roommate for this house, and also different experiences, we began to speak different languages that reflected not only conflicting analyses but, maybe even more divisive, different desires. This was a time when you could walk down main street and hear fervent

debates in Klingon, R'lyehian, Black-Metal Old English, and 13375P34K. This was not fundamentally a conflict over specific activities (we all agreed that kickball would suffice so long as no one got too drunk or braggy about it) or post-rev visions (i.e. how to reconfigure our fashion tastes after quasi-androgynous anti-femme anonymity becomes unnecessary in a gender-liberated surveillance-free anti-state, or how long we're going to dick around before we just get on with it and elect me as King of anarchy), but over how the matrix of capitalism, politics, activism, and issues, functioned, and thus over what it meant to try to intervene. It means sticking to yr straightedge guns (whoops liberals that's right, guns, we like em cuz we're violent) and saying "neither" when Morpheus offers you the red or the blue pill. It means acknowledging that that moment in the Matrix is a total metaphor for electoral politics, and that the equivalent anarchy is logging into netflix only if it's yr friend's mom's, and never ever paying for it.

Increasingly it has become difficult even to talk to each other, we keep getting shushed during movies or kicked out of theaters by ushers for not paying or mowed down by ever-more-pricey ammo (whoops liberals that's right, ammo, from guns, and a joke in poor taste [not like in a classist way though, because poor folks have a right to taste anyway they want] about a mass-murder, because being an anarchist means having an irreverant wit and toying with the bounds of humor, except don't tell any survivors of that shooting or people triggered by gun violence about this. And not like, 'triggered' as in the device to actuate the firing mechanism on a gun, but like, shit...) Our words and deeds passing unheeded like ships in the night. And spoiler alert that ship was Friendship and without this mutiny of an essay we'd all be drowning in a pool of our own vomit at an airport Applebee's.

A Glimpse of the Future

If it was not already, it became clear to many of us that single-issue politics and its activist campaigns were a dead-end (not like, in a way that uses figurative language that depends on the reader's coercively socialized understanding of

the united states roadway system and privileges techno-literate folks with motorist privilege). This understanding was rooted in the desires of admittedly impatient and unruly participants, as it should be, but also in a hard-nosed analysis of late 21st century industrial capitalism, a system that is always able to evolve one step ahead of even the most radical demands, like a Clefairy with 10,000 moon stones. I'm more than willing to replace fracking with tar sands, tar sands with coal, coal with wind, wind with solar, solar with hydro, hydro with nuclear, forever leaping from one issue to the next until I'm guaranteed tenure and a vice-president position at Crimethinc's corporate HQ. I'm a fighter and not afraid to do what it takes to win in this dog-eat-dog world of competitive anarchy.

In reflection, I realized that what was meaningful about these EF! campaigns to me was not the ever-elusive possibility of reform or change but those rare accidental moments of rupture, the time when my hernia flared up and spleen ceased to function. The lockdown unintentionally became a christian sleepover in the office lobby, or when the Appalachian campaign spilled over into an epic 10-cup beerpong tournament where, after about seven 30-racks and twelve pairs of cargo pants ruined, Seabass and Scooter ruled the day. This was not mere adventurism, but a real desire to break out of the stranglehold of politics and into the stranglehold of heroism.

I gave up on the idea of gradually increasing our power with small, floating orbs come from a cursed parallel dimension, for this approach had little to no basis in reality. Insurrections do not erupt on the surface of history via gradualist-oriented issue-activism. They erupt on the surface of time's once-pristine teenage face as acne the night before the big dance. Put another way, Turkey is the state and we're fixing to make that bird gobble.

There are a thousand different reasons against every aspect of capitalist life. Ten Thousand people do not riot to save a few trees, they riot to save One Hundred Thousand Trees. For that matter, the life of one murdered youth is equivalent to one old-growth sequoia, and we're

working on a spreadsheet to make sure our politics are still mathmetically sound based on this point system. In this sense the struggle in poultry is politically legible neither to Power nor to the social movements that would manage it, only to the Turkey itself, the feeling in its breast before being filled with with a spray of lead pellets just so Earth First could have its thanksgiving dinner and yet I was still somehow shafted out of getting a single fucking slice of cranberry sauce. Including the country's radical environmentalists, who have managed to systematically deny this author cranberry sauce for close to a decade. Bombshell: This is an advantage. My hunger for sauce has sharpened my wits and steeled my resolve.

The camps of Occupy, the Arab Spring, the austerity riots across Europe, the demand-less explosions which occur every time the police murder youth, the flash mobs that steal en masse, even just the general breakdown of civil society, all make it more clear where industrial society and our resistance are heading. They're heading to Kohl's for \$8 graphic ringer tees.

Months after a black bloc awakens at the heart of a second Egyptian revolution, Turkey explodes, and weeks later Brazil's cities are set ablaze by its poorest inhabitants, explained away by the media as a response to 'corruption.' The time between these moments is decreasing, the ruptures themselves increasingly violent and generalized. We are entering a period where the state of exception is increasingly permanent and deterritorialized, like a sharpie writing on the very fabric of spacetime itself. This is our future. Sound odd? Earthfirst is a Wolfgang, not a genius mozart but a ruff and violent natural crew, and we will tear apart society and as for its power-weilders and leaders, we'll kill them all.

In this context, to speak of drawn out, gradually escalated strategic parodies against specific ecological dudes' essays makes no sense. After witnessing and participating in these events, many of us have trolled to find a different path, keeping our love and fondness for the land while seeking new ways to develop it and make a little money on the side collecting rent. But also to

make it into a social force that can contribute to a more total break with the society we live in. Like any experiment, this has been wrought with admonishments from our chemistry teacher for screwing around with the bunsen burner and threats of ISS.

But we have also undoubtedly interrupted and intervened fully in many of the other science classes we were in before senior year. Much of what was once specific to the trajectory discussed here has become general features of rebellion around the world: a refusal to not blog about ourselves, the creation of autonomous communal spaces via ikea feng-shui, a hatred of the police whose only bounds is an unwillingness to express it ever except on the occasional tee shirt, tattoo, or ACAB mixtape; a critique of the media (canceling breaking bad after only 5 seasons? Seriously?), a critique of the Left (much too dangerous to make left turns on a bicycle), a critique of direct democracy (voter fraud is much harder, at least it has been for me), a sharpened understanding of recuperation (it's more than just bed-rest and a forehead washcloth, it just has to be!), an emphasis on attack (when was the last time you won a game of ERS by playing it safe, hmm?).

To be sure, this generalization is not something any single 'we' can take credit for. We only take cash or check. These positions are as much descriptive as prescriptive, less the product of a certain milieu advocating certain strategies and more a geometrically complex kite made of light dowels and sheets of plastic that we'd hoped to have a windier day to try out.

But this is our world, and our kite, the one that creates us just as we created it. Our revolt flows inside it, provided a few drinks and a dope enough beat to freestyle over. Many of these positions incubated awkwardly during the mid-2000s (I could say the same about a lot of you nerds in middle-school), but are now reflected by everyone from Raging Grannies to homeless youth to New York Times editorialists to New York Times arts desk columnists to New York Times layout and design staff members. That such premises have found expression around the

globe in so many circles, and yet stay more or less aloof from the Earth First! activist subculture, remains a mystery to me. I swear to god I'll write another essay if that's what it takes for you to pay attention to me. And another after that g-head test me. When so much has changed, not just within the boardrooms of our enemies but in the kinds of revolt present among our friends, how can a network of creative and brilliant people still be doing punk-rock in the same old ways? I seriously haven't seen a DIY punk band express themselves outside the early-80s paradigm since 1986, and crimethinc wasn't even a record label back then.

When a formerly middle-class Obama voter can become a thoroughly ruling-class Obama president in the matter of 43 years, I have hope. If that hope can be heard articulating a critique of the demand-form at an illegal public encampment, how and why does such a critique elude the militants of Earth First!? Do you even listen to my podcast? Hello? Why won't anybody answer me? Stop being a slave to the assumption that reading an essay is a one-way conversation. At least have the balls to fight me if you won't speak up. Do Earth Firsters still believe they can save the World one forest, one species, one dirty energy method at a time? Well you dumb idiots, do you? Is the change they (and by 'they', remember I mean 'you') wish to see merely the summary of every individual campaign issue?

Nothing Doing and Doing Nothing

Amen to this section title, not gonna even make fun of it now cuz I think it rules.

Sike here I go: Driven by an almost theological morality, many will respond with the age-old 'joke satire essay' or the strawman (not like, that all folks of straw need be thought of as men, it's just that as an ally of transient beings used as rhetorical devices, I like to err on the side of dudes) that to not do activism means to do nothing, that to not try to stop fracking or save the wolves we are letting the world burn. Because honestly, when was the last time you saw a wolf even try to put out a fire? Go ahead and marinate

on that for a minute. Such a statement may have held Sway in earlier, quieter times, before he was doing MTV news segments. But the events of the past few years have exposed this to be a false dichotomy (not like, that I'm advocating for a woman who's gay to have the 'dyke' taken out of her, you know, like a tracheotomy. I don't even understand why you would assume that's what that means and like sometimes dude, honestly, you take this whole 'PC' thing too far.)

I am not contesting involvement or even engagement with issues per se. I have prolly a hundred issues of the Tiny Toons comics they came out with, no problem. But rather the manner in which it occurs, a manor that I believe to be haunted. The intention behind the activity itself would be to exorcise that manor. Put another way, I would argue that what is exciting about the ZAD struggle in France is not stopping the airport, because #duh how would we get there, and which will likely just be built elsewhere in France if the occupiers 'succeed,' but the actual rupture, the hot sheet of spleen fluid coating the inside of my ribcage, the mass revolt itself, no longer willing to be constrained by 'density over volume', represented both by the conflicts with police as well as the network of communal relationships established via the illegal occupation. The activist would see the ZAD as a tactic to protect a piece of land; I am arguing that it should be seen instead as an end in itself, a glorious dead end where no cars would be refused, and perhaps a path to other, even more unfathomably beautiful dead ends in the future.

One might suggest that this is all mere semantics, which doesn't matter because one is wrong. Some say it doesn't matter why someone is excited about doing direct action as long as they're doing it. This is wrong and whoever said it is wrong and has bad breath. Who even let them in here to say that, I can never know. That which we find meaningful and useful about an experience affects the kind of experiences points we earn upon completion; affects how well our party will do in the quest. Will we choose to create the future? I proffer here that it's a woman's right to choose. It drives the trajectory of our struggle, like a new car careening toward a dead-end road.

If petition drives and scary home demos (honestly a sunken living room? In 2013? yikes.) seem more 'realistic' ways of accomplishing a specific political goal, and that single issue is your priority, then you're less likely to make strategic choices than to take at least some of this homemade fudge with you, oh I couldn't possibly well ok. Which later you find out wasn't laced with coconut flakes as stated but with strong anarchist-made amphetamines and all of a sudden it put you shoulder to shoulder with a thousand comrades fighting cops among the trees. Still straightedge? I thought not. But maybe you will be in 6 days when you come down and realize those thousand comrades were the splintered bones of a diseased elk Butterfly had been trying to cure for months and since she failed we thought it'd be nice to make her a few small bone jewelries but now you've ruined the corpse of the elk and Butterfly's birthday because you can't hold your Circle-Amphetamine like a god damned adult. If a moment of revolt happens in this activist context, as does sometimes occur, it is more as a coincidence than anything else, one which the participants will be ill-prepared to spread and deepen, much the same plight as when faced with a near-empty mayonnaise jar and a stubby knife.

Both literally and figuratively, the activist is often at the back of the surging crowd in such situations, dragging their feet and desperately trying to hold back a fart from all that rancid elk meat. This is a struggle that threatens to break the barriers of their carefully chosen issue-narrative, not to mention the barriers of their carefully sewn pants, here again with substantial, forceful flatulence. Many Earth Firsters will personally object to such a characterization, but it is a framework of doing politics I'm discussing, not the authenticity of its individual participants, so just shut the fuck up for like 10 more minutes, you roody-poo jabronies and try not to embarrass yourself again by speaking, or else the people's elbow, the original populist communist body-politic. How that framework contributes (intentionally or not) to techniques of government by sequestering revolt to 'issues' is what concerns me, son, and frankly I don't think those 'Earth Fist' boys have your best interests at heart. A

more militant or DIY version of the same framework is not adequate, just as is the case in the matter of growing punk music out of tired, hackneyed tropes.

Political Identity vs. Affinity

The intention behind our activity also affects the cranks, tippy-taps, and boop-boop skrimpers with whom we form relationships. Earth First! is traditionally an ally of mainstream enviro groups in many campaigns; as the 'extremists' they offer a convenient whipping boy for the Big Greens, a convenient political chewing gum to be used up and spit out like Big Red, but benefit from the institutional connections and power-brokering that helps accomplish their issue-goals, all while maintaining a bitchin 1932 deuce coup hotrod. The historical analogy of MLK and Malcolm X is often made here, but misses the point that both these men were statists that were highly legible to Power, and were more or less politicians in their own way. And there's nothing funny about that.

When they ceased to be so, their relationship both to Power and each other changed dramatically, as evidenced by their mutually updated status to 'it's complicated'. Historically Earth First! itself has contributed to a critique of the Green Left, for example reminding them how they're pussies, but it nonetheless continues to operate in the same framework.

EF!ers are radical environmentalists, no doubt's a ska band, but they are still environmentalists still doing the same politics as Sierra Club and Greenpeace, just as No Doubt is still doing the same cultural appropriation with Harejuku fashion as they started out with the Bindi that Gwen wore in Tragic Kingdom. Is it any surprise that so many older EF!ers get day-jobs with Rainforest Action Network, Sierra Club, Ciara the Rapper's Fanclub, Greenpeace, etc.? A friendly relationship with the institutional Left makes sense given the group's issue-focus. This is not an accusation of selling out, a meaningless epithet in any case, but it is worth thinking about how the poseurs who call themselves our friends make us look like chumps in front of those cute out-of-

towners.

If, on the other hand, one's priority is to perpetuate a general culture of revolt (that is to say, one in which we elect Generals to mete out strategy and act as administrators of struggle in order to streamline our tactics), it makes more sense to be antagonistic to the Left but tight with one's neighbors or co-workers or 'non-political' friends, whomever one judges might go crazy with you when the shit hits the fan. This is why it is tactically sound to pursue other friends who listen to Ke\$ha and Icona Pop.

Affinity rather than political identity becomes the center of gravity of the relationship. Whoops liberals, did I just blow your mind with that brand new concept of affinity that I dumpstered from 1999? thought so. What someone 'thinks about the environment' is meaningless to me, mostly because I can tell that they don't even train. Do they hate the police? Doesn't matter if they can't bench 225. Do they hate work? If so then how are they gonna expropriate creatine from GNC? Do they hate having mercury stored up in their gut? Trick question, bro, mercury's in retrograde. Do they hate some aspect of capitalist life? Picture this: change yr aspect ratio. Do they want to knee-cap nuclear execs? Would they have the courage to curb stomp a middle-management desk jockey at a sears whose mailers are printed with Dow Chemical inks? Do we do similar kinds of crime to get by? If it came down to an American Apparel in the middle of the woods where no one is watching, would they still accept this \$25 gift card my mom got me do you think? Could I be friends with them, and do we have meaningful skills or ideas to share with each other or teach other? Doubt they could keep up with me if they don't write essays and they don't even fucking train. These questions are more interesting than any ten blog posts you might come up with and you'd do well to choose one to have carved as an epitaph if you plan on continuing not to train, bro.

The Issues are not the Issue I realize none of this is particularly new [seems like he predicted being effectively trolled about the affinity thing, zing] Around 15 years ago now participants in UK anti-road struggles raised many of the same points, and in 2007 an editor for the EF! Journal proclaimed "Earth First! Means Reining in the Macho bullshit Last!" loud and clear, attempting to shift the direction of a wanging movement, writing that, Political identity and its limited effects have reached their expiration date. What little autonomy we carved out by refusing to abide by the recommendations of expiration dates in the past is now null. EF! as an activist approach is being taken from us, and we're left with only a wardrobe of earthones soaked in patchouli yet devoid of their original sacred meaning. Whether we call it 'climate justice' or whether we relate our notion of weed to a philosophy of THCentricism, we are still failing to draw lines that are based in reality.

That expiration date is now long past. The milk is spilled and there's no use crying over it. The yogurt's probiotics got turned into Probionics and she who is without magic among us shall cast the first spell. The priorities and restructuring of Capital in the 21st century, along with our own experiences of revolt of the last few years, have confirmed this fact irrevocably. The enemy we face is adaptable, flexible, horizontal, a better democrat and better environmentalist than any Earth Firster could ever hope to be. And he was like, a gentlemen in this way where usually it would feel patronizing but something about it was just like...idk dreamy Jennifer.

Likewise, the experience of comrades from Athens Georgia to Memphis Tennessee to Alexandria Virginia and all the way back to Eden, North Carolina has proven that it is easier to topple governments than to find a decent rate on a hotel the weekend of. This can only be more true when an 'issue' strikes at the core of industrial society, the way Johnny Appleseed struck at the core of an apple before being convicted for all those arsons. The methodology of campaign activism that Earth First! has inherited from forest defense and the animal

rights movement is hopelessly out of touch with this reality like a thousand desperate step-dads buying records from hot topic.

Left to itself, would Earth First! as it currently stands have conducted Occupy as a campaign against corporate tax policies? IF the dream I had last night is any indication, the answer is yes, and we should begin to gather dog eggs in the center of a trampoline to keep racist toasters from becomin microscopic controllers of my teeth. Would it see the insurrection in Istanbul as a campaign to save a few urban trees? Would a few Urban outfitters tees change yr tune? Would there ever have been a clothing line called Canadian Eagle or Hydropostale? Without weed would we even have asked these questions? I am left wondering.

I still look back fondly on the days when I considered myself an Earth Firster, but as I read the reports from around the world, and think about my own experiences in the US, I must admit it feels like I'm overpaying Time Warner for a connection this slow.

In love and struggle,
for good BBQ
and insurrection,

-NC