

On the practices of autonomous more-than-human political communities

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Abstract

This article analyzes how autonomous more-than-human political communities emerge in practice. We study an agro-ecosystem in the Catalan Sub-Pyrenees, where a peasant land use cooperative runs a regenerative farm. Through interviews and observations, we map and explore different more-than-human alliances, solidarities, and contradictory and conflictual relationships. We discuss the political practices through which this political community is constituted and reproduced, with a specific focus on multispecies care and the harm that it can bear. To complement these empirical insights, we embrace a speculative political ecology to further explore how specific practices of inclusion-exclusion, conflict-harm, and alliances-mutual aid (can) play out in more-than-human political communities. Finally, we discuss the possible types of autonomous political praxis in, for, and with more-than-human political communities in-against-and-beyond capitalism and the state. This article thus proposes an empirical account of more-than-human anarchisms in action, as well as collective and situated speculations on their potential for emancipatory, autonomous, and egalitarian more-than-human collective futures.

Keywords: anarchist political ecology, more-than-human anarchisms, Catalan Pyrenees, agro-ecology, peasant agriculture

Résumé

Cet article analyse comment émergent dans la pratique des communautés politiques autonomes plus-qu'humaines. Nous étudions un agro-écosystème dans les sous-Pyrénées catalanes, où une coopérative paysanne exploite une ferme régénératrice. Par le biais d'entretiens et d'observations, nous cartographions et explorons différentes alliances et solidarités plus-qu'humaines, ainsi que leurs relations contradictoires et conflictuelles. Nous discutons des pratiques politiques à travers lesquelles cette communauté politique est constituée et reproduite, avec un accent particulier sur le care multi-espèces et les dommages qu'il peut engendrer. En complément de ces observations empiriques, nous adoptons une écologie politique spéculative afin d'explorer plus en profondeur la manière dont des pratiques spécifiques d'inclusion-exclusion, de conflit-préjudice et d'alliances-aide mutuelle se déroulent ou peuvent se dérouler dans des communautés politiques plus-qu'humaines. Enfin, nous discutons des types possibles de praxis politique autonome dans, pour et avec des communautés politiques plus-qu'humaines, à l'encontre et au-delà du capitalisme et de l'État. Cet article propose donc un compte-rendu empirique des anarchismes plus-qu'humains en action, ainsi que des spéculations collectives et situées sur leur potentiel pour atteindre des futurs collectifs plus-qu'humains qui sont émancipateurs, autonomes et égalitaires.

Mots-clés: écologie politique anarchiste, anarchismes plus qu'humains, Pyrénées catalanes, agroécologie, agriculture paysanne

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Resumen

Este artículo examina cómo surgen en la práctica comunidades políticas autónomas más-que-humanas. Estudiamos un agroecosistema en los subpirineos catalanes, donde una cooperativa campesina gestiona una granja regenerativa. A través de entrevistas y observaciones, mapeamos y exploramos diferentes alianzas y solidaridades más-que-humanas, así como sus relaciones contradictorias y conflictivas. Discutimos las prácticas políticas a través de las cuales se constituye y reproduce esta comunidad política, con especial atención al cuidado multiespecie y al daño que puede causar. Como complemento a estas observaciones empíricas, adoptamos una ecología política especulativa para explorar más a fondo cómo las prácticas específicas de inclusión-exclusión, conflicto-prejuicio y alianzas-ayuda mutua se desarrollan o pueden desarrollarse en comunidades políticas más-que-humanas. Por último, analizamos posibles tipos de praxis política autónoma en, para y con comunidades políticas más-que-humanas, contra y más allá del capitalismo y del Estado. Así pues, este artículo ofrece una descripción empírica de los anarquismos más-que-humanos en acción, así como especulaciones colectivas y situadas sobre su potencial para lograr futuros colectivos más-que-humanos que sean emancipatorios, autónomos e igualitarios.

Palabras clave: ecología política anarquista, anarquismos más-que-humanos, Pirineos catalanes, agroecología, agricultura campesina

1. Introduction

This article explores the emergence of autonomous more-than-human² political communities in a Sub-Pyrenean agro-ecosystem. We analyze the case of a regenerative agriculture project in Catalonia (Spain), where a non-profit community land use cooperative is working toward "the regeneration of ecosystems, resilience and cooperation" (Project website). The cooperative, set up in 2020, focuses on regenerative agriculture, holistic livestock and forest management, environmental education, and sustainable rural tourism. It is located on the outskirts of a small village in the Catalan countryside, marked in recent decades by agricultural abandonment, a sustained rural exodus, and a rise in rural tourism (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015; Otero *et al.*, 2015). These trends have had clear implications in terms of local socio-environmental dynamics, land use, and ensuing landscape changes (Cohen *et al.*, 2011); extensive animal husbandry by small-scale farms has drastically decreased and become increasingly fragmented, biodiversity-poor forests have reclaimed large parts of previously pastoralist land and meadows, wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) populations have drastically increased, and wildfires have become more regular, widespread, and intense.

This context of changing human–other-than-human interactions, as well as the cooperative's explicit ambition to aid in steering these interactions in the direction of increased (bio)diversity, resilience, and reciprocity, made us believe that this agro-ecosystem could be an interesting case study of more-than-human political communities, i.e., communities that collectively negotiate the premises, terms and practices of living together (Balaud & Chopot, 2021; Smessaert & Feola, 2023). The more-than-human community weaved together through the regenerative agriculture project of the cooperative appears to comprise a small group of adult humans, a young child, two dogs, one cat, a herd of sheep, a herd of cows plus a bull, a vegetable garden, a forest, and the living web of soil organisms that maintains, nurtures, builds, and co-constitutes this community. We believed that this community *was*, *could be*, or *could become* political for two main reasons. First, at least some of the (human) members of the community were attempting to enact an explicit political project of 'eco-social transformation', autonomy, and social-ecological justice. Second, the community seemingly engaged with a diversity of *political practices* through which the premises, terms, and practices of living together were implicitly or explicitly negotiated.

While the "destruction but also [the] regeneration of community [are always] more-than-human, more-than-social process[es]" (Tacchetti *et al.*, 2022: 1399), the potential of more-than-human-communities for emancipatory action against capitalism's social-ecological destruction remains an open issue (Balaud & Chopot, 2021). However, 'community' does not pre-exist outside the social and political practices of living together; on the contrary, it is constituted, performed and reproduced through these very practices. Furthermore,

² The term 'more-than-human' encompasses human as well as other-than-human actors, the latter referring to a variety of living organisms (e.g. plants, insects, trees, bacteria) as well non-living entities (e.g. mineral, water).

...it remains unclear how autonomous human–other-than-human political communities emerge in practice. This includes questions on the ways in which autonomy-generating movements take into account other-than-humans as well as the criteria upon which emerging human–other-than-human communities can be considered manifestations of multispecies democracy. (Smessaert & Feola 2023: 24)

Similarly, Scheidel *et al.* (2022: 17) note the importance of "paying ... attention to the specific ecological characteristics of the more-than-human world in which [contentious actions and politics] unfold." In their view, this "may help activists and academics to think and learn about how ecology can become a dynamic source of power" (*ibid.*) in social-ecological mobilizations that strive for multispecies autonomy in-against-and-beyond capitalism and the state. As such, this article aims to explore these mobilizations and envisioned multispecies futures in a concrete case study through the following research questions: first, what are the political practices and tensions that constitute and reproduce the more-than-human community? Then, what autonomous political action (that is, collective action in-against-and-beyond the state and capitalism) might these more-than-human political communities be(come) capable of?

This article takes an anarchist political ecology perspective on the question of more-than-human political communities (Dunlap, 2020; O'Heran, 2021; Springer *et al.*, 2021). This means that both our theoretical framing and empirical analysis build on anarchist perspectives that reject all forms of domination and commit to direct action in favor of free, egalitarian, and autonomous multispecies communities (Smessaert & Feola, 2023). The empirical account presented in this article builds on ethnographic and participatory research conducted by the first author (JS) during two fieldwork periods (November 2022 and May 2023). Data was collected through semi-structured walking interviews (Evans & Jones, 2011), participant observation (including farm work; see van den Berg & Rezvani, 2022), and more-than-human research methods (Bastian *et al.*, 2017; Bubandt *et al.*, 2022; more details in Appendix). As an early-career researcher dedicated to social-ecological justice and sensitive to political–affective relations with more-than-human nature (specifically when expressed through political commitments to anticapitalism and peasant agriculture), JS was in a position to share many social norms, political practices, and ideological horizons with his human research participants. This facilitated his temporary integration and immersion as a guest/participant/(critical) friend/observer in this colorful, more-than-human community, and allowed him to harvest rich and situated insights on its functioning. Throughout the research process, JS consequently adopted an ethics of entanglement, in which he framed his research praxis "in terms of *walking with* differently situated others in intersecting, yet distinct and unequally constituted struggles" (Sundberg, 2015: 123). *Walking with* means "to be involved in the struggle for a just world from and in our own sites of entanglement and engagement" (Sundberg, 2015: 122). For JS, this meant making two-way connections and exchanges between this case study and other fieldwork sites and social-ecological struggles with which he is involved.

To explore more-than-human political communities, we first describe the various more-than-human actors that come together in the cooperative's regenerative agriculture project, as well as the questions that emerge from a politicized reading of more-than-human communities (Section 2). We discuss the practices through which the political community is constituted and reproduced in and around the regenerative agriculture project, with a specific focus on (multispecies) care, as well as the exclusions it can perform and the harm that it can bring (Section 3). In Section 4, we embrace a speculative political ecology to further explore how specific political practices of inclusion–exclusion, conflict–harm, and alliances–mutual aid (can) play out in more-than-human political communities. Finally, we apply insights from our diverse empirical, speculative, and theoretical material to reflect deeper on the possible types of autonomous political praxis in, for, and with more-than-human political communities.

2. Against depoliticized more-than-human communities

In the 20th century, the mountain peasant communities of the Catalan Sub-Pyrenees were integrated into capitalist networks of agricultural production and exchange, only to be confronted with their inability to compete with industrialized dairy and food production in a European single market (del Mármol & Vaccaro,

2015). The second half of the 20th century saw the massive abandonment of traditional silvo-agricultural economies (extensive livestock, forestry) and of forest resources as energy sources (Poyatos *et al.*, 2003; del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015). As a result of the abandonment of farmland and a broader rural exodus, the region has been subject to a vast reforestation, entailing landscape standardization and the fragmentation of farmed landscapes (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Cervera *et al.*, 2019). Against some common perceptions that establish an alleged positive relationship between (farm)land abandonment and ecosystem recovery, Otero *et al.* (2015) link the disappearance of traditional peasant land use mosaics (that is, a diversity of agro-silvo-pastoral land uses structured by a network of small cities, villages, and farmhouses) to a remarkable *deterioration* of landscape heterogeneity and ecosystem biodiversity. In fact, they argue that most studies on reforestation—in their focus on forest ecosystems with limited ecological and aesthetic interest (Cohen *et al.*, 2011)—greatly underestimate the ecological importance of non-forest habitats, such as rain-fed farmland, vineyards, and pastureland (Otero *et al.*, 2015). In addition, the expansion and increased density of forest areas have greatly increased the risk, intensity, and propagation of wildfires (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Úbeda *et al.*, 2019; Aquilué *et al.*, 2020). Finally—and crucially—scholarship points to the social-cultural implications of forest expansion and peasant land mosaic disappearance. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011: 80), "[m]any inhabitants have the feeling of being enclosed within a 'wild' landscape that they no longer recognize, and that they cannot control any longer," while del Mármol & Vaccaro (2015: 12) state that "elders who used to live 'from the land' in their youth express their dislike and discontent by affirming that the situation is proof that the country is unkept, neglected."

Considering these evolving social-ecological dynamics, renewed representations of peasant and regenerative agriculture have been proposed as viable and desirable models for lively rural communities (Vaccaro *et al.*, 2024). Their extensive livestock model (Figure 1), crop rotations, and landscape and forest management practices contribute to not only increased biological diversity in these ecosystems but also maintaining and renewing cultural identity (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), wildfire management and ecological restoration (Cervera *et al.*, 2019) and preserving 'traditional' landscapes (for their social, cultural, or aesthetic value or as commodities for consumption by urban dwellers under the banner of rural tourism; del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015; Badal, 2017).

These historical trajectories—and the changing human–more-than-human entanglements they provoke, favor, or imply—inform how more-than-human communities are always constructed through inheritance and negotiation (del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015; see also Spanier, 2023). Capitalist developments—like the integration of (pre)mountain peasant communities into capitalist economies (and these communities' subsequent abandonment of 'unprofitable' agriculture) and the commodification of the countryside at the expense of lively rural communities (del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015)—are always more-than-human, more-than-social processes (Tacchetti *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, developments that move in opposite, postcapitalist directions—such as the construction of a regenerative farming model premised on building healthy and lively soils as a basis for multispecies life, diversity, and abundance—draw in a variety of more-than-human actors and processes.

The cooperative in question was set up by a group of five university-educated, white, Spanish persons on the family farmland of three of its members, with the objective of contributing to a postcapitalist eco-social transformation. The cooperative's contribution to this transformation was understood by its members to lie in setting up a land-use cooperative based on horizontal and anti-authoritarian principles, revalorizing primary sector production and reinvigorating politicized peasant identities through the conversion of conventional pig-farming to regenerative agriculture. In and around the cooperative, this transition from conventional to regenerative agriculture weaves together soils that are slowly being reconstituted, cultivated crops, a degraded forest that had not been managed for decades, a small herd of sheep from a local breed, and 15 cows well-adapted to slopes and mountainous areas. Human and other-than-human practices that bring these different actors into relation include specific interventions for building and regenerating the soil (integrating carbon by adding wood chips and hay), stimulating soil life (adding micro-organisms and bacteria from the forest), de-compacting the soil (using small livestock herds with short pastoral rotations), structuring the soil to prevent erosion and retain water (building contour lines of trees, shrubs and annual plant species on hillslopes), and enhancing biodiversity (clearing parts of the forest, introducing various tree and plant species on the pastures, and adding manure).



Figure 1: Remaking agro-silvo-pastoralist landscapes in the Sub-Pyrenees. Source: The cooperative

Through these practices, the humans of the cooperative attempt to enhance the regenerative potential and respect the natural cycles and seasonal rhythms of the agro-ecosystem that they live in and depend on. With healthy soils as a foundation and informed by local and traditional agro-ecological knowledge, they embrace the interdependence of different lifeforms and strive to develop a holistic understanding of healthy ecosystems—a crucial element of their project of eco-social transformation:

I understand regenerative agriculture and livestock farming as a set of practices that emphasize care for and the construction of the soil in its most lively and dynamic format possible. To this end, you use a set of techniques... that increase the soil's vitality, its capacity to sustain more life, to produce more, not in a productivist and commodity sense, but in the sense of generating ever more organic matter based on photosynthesis. (Snaketongue Truffleclub, interview)³

However, celebratory or uncritical accounts of 'harmonious' more-than-human communities do not do justice to the nuances, contradictions, conflicts, or exclusions that any community performs and navigates through. 'Opening up' a community by including other-than-human actors comes with challenges and raises specific *political* questions: first, which actors and actor groups can or should be part of the community, what

³ All names are fictional and have been selected from Caitlin Schneider's article "70 totally amazing common names for Fungi", available at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/71159/70-totally-amazing-common-names-fungi> [consulted on November 7th, 2023]. No identification with actual persons is intended or should be inferred. All interviewees mentioned throughout the text were, at the time of the fieldwork, members and workers of the cooperative.

are its criteria for inclusion or exclusion, and who has the authority to set (or settle on) the boundaries of the community? Furthermore, how does one deal with actors, lifeforms, or artifacts that cannot be included, that do not want to be included, or whose voices or agency one cannot politically make sense of (Stengers, 2005; Watson, 2011)? Second, how can the obfuscation of power relations and subalternity be prevented, either within (e.g., the group of humans) or between (e.g., specific more-than-human actors) actor groups of more-than-human political communities? More-than-human political communities are not on a level playing field; they do not emerge *ex nihilo* but are both the product and expression of structural domination (patriarchy, human supremacy, classism, racism) and potential attempts to counter these structures and tendencies. Yet, as Springgay and Truman (2018) note, in assuming that *politics are everywhere*, more-than-human theories have a tendency to elide specific contextual questions of power and its (re)configurations. To avoid contributing to the reproduction of such elisions, we attempt to draw out these political questions from the onset and address them head on.

The tensions that emerged through examining the more-than-human community as a *political community* (i.e., one that collectively negotiates the premises, terms and practices of living together) became strikingly clear during JS's first fieldwork phase in November 2022—an exploratory phase to get to know the cooperative, the project, and its members and become familiar with the agro-ecosystem they work in and engage with. The authors' broad research interest lay in attempting to understand human–other-than-human entanglements as political communities, so they had prepared introductory questions, as well as ideas of practices and observations of farm and forest work and livestock management. However, JS soon noticed that he had arrived at the cooperative in a delicate, critical moment. Briefly before his arrival, two members had decided to leave the cooperative, and in the middle of the first fieldwork phase, another member announced they would also leave. The atmosphere was consequently quite loaded, with various group discussions and bilateral conversations on the topic, as well as the emotional load and sense of loss that came with these (anticipated) separations. Being an outsider to these dynamics yet also associated with some of the discussions and finding himself in the position of emotional support and engagement, JS found himself enmeshed in a primarily 'very-human' political community.

Embedded in this complex interpersonal situation, it felt odd and sometimes inappropriate to ask abstract questions about multispecies relationships and more-than-human political communities. Some human members of the cooperative did not seem mentally available to discuss more-than-human topics; others were (at first) not willing to talk at all, while still others preferred discussing interpersonal rather than multispecies dynamics. As a result, JS ended up discussing a mix of group dynamics, visions of the project, personal reasons for leaving, different multispecies relationships and practices, and connections between multispecies and interpersonal relationships. Together, these interactions allowed him to grasp how, in politicizing more-than-human relationships, he unwittingly contributed to depoliticizing or rendering invisible other power dynamics or systems of oppression, particularly between humans with different identities not occupying equally powerful positions. The experiences and stories of these interpersonal human relationships and micropolitics contributed to an understanding that discussions of more-than-human political communities should actively work against ignoring and depoliticizing conflicting human relationships and potentially harmful behaviors.

This understanding was a motivation for exploring this political community in terms of more-than-human anarchisms; since it became clear that a single focus on the structural oppression of other-than-humans in more-than-human communities did not suffice to grasp the intersecting systems of oppression at play in any political community. More-than-human anarchisms means, *inter alia*, applying an anarchist lens to more-than-human political communities; it posits human supremacy as a specific type of structural oppression that must be challenged, not in isolation but along with (and connected to) the combined refusal and challenge of patriarchy, classism, and racism (Springer *et al.*, 2021). More-than-human anarchisms, then, attempts to question domination, hierarchy, and unjustified authority in an intersectional way to remain constantly vigilant regarding power dynamics—within both the more-than-human political community and its different constitutive actor groups. Applying this lens to the cooperative and its surroundings meant refusing to allow the category of 'humans' in 'more-than-human' to become a unidimensional, unified actor and acknowledging dissensus, conflict, privilege, subalternity, and diverse intersections of structural oppression within this actor

group. In this way, more-than-human political communities are not a uniform 'human' actor group relating (collaboratively, conflictually, often both) to a uniform 'other-than-human nature', but rather a diverse, conflictual group of humans with different backgrounds, identities, interests, and positions of power that relate (collaboratively, conflictually, often both) to a diverse, conflictual group of other-than-human nature with different lifeworlds, practices, and agency.

More-than-human anarchisms, as a conceptual and experiential encounter (see also O'Heran, 2021; Arregui, 2022), allows us to complicate and nuance accounts of the emergence, delineation, and constitution of more-than-human political communities. Against depoliticized more-than-human communities, it brings in conflict as a driver of politics and democracy (Rancière, 1999; Temper *et al.*, 2018), asks explicit and uncomfortable questions about inclusion and exclusion in politics (Stengers, 2005; Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Springer, 2010), and links these questions with systems of oppression and types of harm (Springer *et al.*, 2021). It is to these questions that we now turn.

3. Constituting more-than-human political communities

Practices of more-than-human care and responsibility

More-than-human political communities are constituted and reproduced through interplays of care, conflict, mutual aid, harm, privilege, and the constant negotiation of boundaries through inclusion and exclusion (Kropotkin 1902; Watson, 2011; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Pitt, 2018; Swyngedouw & Ernstson, 2018; Springer *et al.*, 2021; Ejsing, 2023). No singular story can be told about how these processes intersect or how they weave together different actors and lifeforms into interdependencies that are partly desired, partly imposed, and always exceed dualisms. We start with care and complicate matters from there.

Care was both stated and observed to constitute a central organizational principle of the community inhabiting the agro-ecosystem of the cooperative. Often foregrounded in conceptualizations of regenerative agriculture (Seymour & Connelly, 2023), care manifested during the fieldwork in inter- and intraspecies ways, preliminarily sketched in the previous section. The human members of the cooperative considered care a foundation for reciprocity, for example, when Barometer Earthstar stated that "the relationship with the soil is to always try to remind ourselves and trust [in the fact that] we have to take care of it so that in time it will take care of [us]" (Interview). Building on these elements of reciprocity, care was also seen as a condition for relational survival and multispecies vitality. As Weeping Toothcrust testifies,

I see a very clear relationship between my environment and the soil... doing well so that I can be well, so that my community can be well... We need the soil to be good so that the plants come out with a high nutritional level, so that they are healthy and that the sheep eat them and then the meat from the sheep also has this quality and this productivity, whatever it be... And that I can sell it at the market and my neighbors can share it with their families... Like all these layers of health, and I really believe in that [holistic] health, going to the roots of everything, you know? (Weeping Toothcrust, interview)

Caring for and with the sheep, cows, soil, forest, and ecosystem more globally comes with feelings and practices of responsibility on behalf of the human members of the cooperative. Bonfire Cauliflower mentioned the responsibility for taking care of the forest and the human and other-than-human actors surrounding him — *loving them*— as an acknowledgment of his family's history, that is, of the fact that he can do things differently due to his family's hard work in the past.

My father spent a lifetime working for the [capitalist] system with very hard jobs, not very vocational, [and] he did not feel fulfilled. From all that work and sacrifice came the next generation, which is me and my sister... In earlier generations there was... so much hardship that there was no space to love each other, because everything was very hard, and then this was very

noticeable in his character and personality. And we have ended up differently, we are the fruit of that generation of sacrifice. So, of course, I say to myself that I cannot just settle down [with my privileges] and reproduce [all the capitalist exploitation] that is taking place, can I? No... (Bonfire Cauliflower, interview)

Various human members of the cooperative also referred to the responsibility of caring for the ecosystem to preserve and regenerate the traditional Sub-Pyrenean landscapes that have drastically changed in recent decades. This responsibility comes in various forms and has various origins. For example, it is related to the cultural identity associated with traditional mountain foothill extensive livestock systems, which are disappearing due to rural abandonment and rapid reforestation. Against-and-beyond competing cultural identities of entrepreneurial farmers, multispecies landscape care is a way to reconnect with the cultural identity of smallholder peasant farming and to foster updated, expanded, and politicized versions of it (Badal, 2017; l'Observatoire de l'évolution, 2019; Vaccaro *et al.*, 2024). Indeed, in their connection with food sovereignty struggles and demands for collective self-determination, these renewed peasant identities present clear anti-capitalist and autonomist tenets and, as such, provide an ideological home to the struggles for the 'eco-social transformation' the human members of the cooperative claim to be waging (l'Observatoire de l'évolution, 2019; Balaud & Chopot, 2021; Kass, 2023).

Nonetheless, a clear ecological dimension to this responsibility also exists, which manifests in the need to guarantee the possibility of lively and diverse webs of interactions between lifeforms (Seymour and Connelly, 2023). Actively managing the density and composition of the surrounding forest by removing specific trees and keeping pastures clear from 'uncontrolled' reforestation limits the intensity and potential damage of wildfires (Lecina-Diaz *et al.*, 2023). A landscape mosaic of managed, multispecies forests alternating with patches of pastures and extensive agriculture is not only more biodiverse than the types of pioneering forests that have proliferated in the Pyrenees but also more resilient to such fire episodes (Aquilué *et al.*, 2020). When these dynamics were considered with the interviewees, the reciprocal dimension of this ecosystemic care became showed itself more clearly. Various members of the cooperative mentioned *feeling cared for* by the more-than-human actors living in and around the cooperative: by the forest, where Bonfire Cauliflower finds refuge when he wants to be away from other humans and feel secure; by the soil, which allows Weeping Toothcrust's circle of care to radiate well beyond the cooperative; and by the cows, with whom Snaketongue Truffleclub is slowly becoming able to communicate with tenderness and mutual trust.

More-than-human politics of care: abandoning pig-rearing

In the cooperative, the construction of a regenerative agricultural model involved the progressive phase-out of intensive pig-rearing that was present at the farm upon the arrival of the members of the cooperative, and run by an agricultural entrepreneur, as it is common in Catalonia.⁴ The decision by the cooperative's members to discontinue this and move towards a less exploitative model illustrates how harm, care, and exclusion are simultaneously constitutive of more-than-human politics; it also questions where, at any given moment, the authority lies to set new community boundaries that, up to that point (and however violently) included pigs raised and fed to be slaughtered.

The cooperative's human members took seriously the more-than-human inheritance (as well as the associated social identity of peasant entrepreneurship), with its hyper-concentrated monoculture in highly artificial environments, lying as far from regenerative agriculture as one could imagine. The cooperative worked for three years with the entrepreneur who was leaving the farm to scale down and gradually phase out industrial pig husbandry (Figure 2). The interspecies and intraspecies violence inscribed in these industrial farming practices are described as follows by Bonfire Cauliflower:

⁴ For a historical overview of Catalan pig-rearing and its entrepreneurial farming model, see Clar (2010).

It was a production model that we did not feel comfortable with... loaded with violence in the whole process... personally, it affected me very much... There were 600 pigs, which is not nothing... The conditions of the people who work, the transporters, the people working in the slaughterhouses, the animals' living conditions... Very hard conditions, you see the animals in very bad conditions. Having to take decisions that, in the end, are in favor of life, so to speak, but which are loaded with violence and death, right? ... So, I was not at all comfortable with that. Having to take out dead animals, having to sacrifice animals because they are dying, and if [I don't kill them], the other pigs eat them. Very difficult things which affected me a lot. (Bonfire Cauliflower, interview)

The decision made by the cooperative's human members to discontinue these practices constituted an evident act of exclusion: unilaterally, one actor-group decided that another one did not have a place in the more-than-human community anymore. Yet, this decision illustrates the nuanced connections among violence, care and exclusion. Stopping raising pigs only for them to be slaughtered can be considered an act of care: the refusal to continue perpetuating a cycle of violence into which human and other-than-human actors were drawn. Although it may appear contradictory, since the discontinuation of the activity meant the exclusion of the pigs (and their offspring), excluding the pigs was, in fact, an act that avoided further harm. Finally, discontinuing the activity gradually and collaboratively with the entrepreneur who was working on the land, can be seen as caring and respectful of both this person's social identity and the cultural heritage in which this activity and the new cooperative were embedded.



Figure 2: The disused hangar where the pigs were raised. Source: The cooperative

While the pigs are no longer physically part of the community, the human memories of them and the histories of violence live on in the cooperative through both the traumas of its human members who had interacted daily with them, and the sustained effects of one person taking on most of the pig-rearing tasks to 'protect' the other human members from the industry's violence. These histories of exclusion, of violence and each human person's way of dealing with them also live on in the abandoned hangar on the farm, which various human and other-than-human members of the community continue to walk by daily. As such, the physical disappearance of the pigs is a story of the exclusion that was embedded in practices of care. It shows that more-than-human political communities are weaved together through this variety of sometimes contradictory practices—that these practices *constitute* the community, its members and its boundaries.

Harm through and in spite of care

As the previous testimonies and observations suggest, a nuanced story of practices of care brings together violence and exclusion, the voices of past generations, practices of reciprocity, the inheritance and adaptation of identities, and renewed questions of belonging and connection. However, practices of care play out very differently in different relationships (Pitt, 2018). The banner of care simultaneously carries conflict with it, as members of the community continuously negotiate who they care for or with (and thus, who not) and in what ways. It can also obfuscate harm: care for one type of relationship can justify, caution, or silence violence in other relationships (Hankivsky, 2014). These insights emerged when JS was attempting to understand the connections (or lack thereof) between the relationships of care among the humans of the cooperative and the practices of care embedded in regenerative agriculture and holistic forest and livestock management. For one human member of the cooperative, the care they exhibited in their relationships with other-than-human actors (in their case, the soil and herd of cows and sheep) was intimately linked with the caring relationships between the humans in the project.

Yes, I think [the two] mutually impact one another. It's changing me a lot, having taken this profession... It's helping me to understand that the way in which, as humans, our social context has taught us to relate [with others], that this is not the only way to live. And that helps me to relate in other ways with humans, more purely from my point of view, less superficially, less urban, more wildly. This gives me peace, and [this] peace gives me strength for what is difficult. And then also from humans I learn to... because I receive a kind of care based on affection, based on intimacy, which I allow myself to transmit and relate in this way with animals... and plants. (Snaketongue Truffleclub, interview)

Others did not make spontaneous connections between the two types of relationships and were curious why JS posed the question. Weeping Toothcrust observed,

I think there is something in my role, but I find it easier to see it within the community of people, it's like bringing people together, getting people to come close, taking care of them too. I recognize that connecting role and maybe it can be extrapolated to the environment, like connecting people who are in the region with the farming that is being done here. And maybe I am also attracted by this thing of taking care of the soil, of making it alive, so that it does not depend on me, but accompanying it. This is something that comes naturally to me and that I can clearly identify in my relationships with people. That I have this tendency to accompany and take care, and the need not to be indispensable to anyone, you know? Like also helping these people to be well on their own, and maybe this is a little bit what I am doing in the vegetable garden. (Weeping Toothcrust, interview)

Cryptic Bonnet, in turn, explored different understandings of care, as well as different protagonists:

Care at the center. But well, maybe we also understand the term differently. And we are all learning how to do a [collective] project and how to take care of ourselves, of others, of the ecosystem, of the animals we work with. I have no doubts that the animals are being cared for, for example. Or that everything we know and learn is being done to regenerate the soil. And sometimes [we make] mistakes and we learn from this..." (Cryptic Bonnet, interview)

For other members, discussing more-than-human relationships in terms of care—and linking them with interpersonal care—fell somewhere between a discursive façade and a hypocrisy covering interpersonal harm. From different angles, questions were indeed raised about how harm might be obfuscated through the very affirmation of the cooperative's practices of multispecies care, while various human members of the cooperative have repeatedly felt 'not cared for' or even harmed. Different human members of the cooperative stated that the cooperative had not succeeded in collectively managing harmful interpersonal power relations.⁵ Given this perceived deficiency, one human member argued that statements about multispecies care, eco-social transformation and revolutionary praxis are little more than an empty shell; real revolutionary praxis occurs when a political community *truly* builds new types of relationships—ones that condone neither domination, arbitrary authority, nor harm—or at least develops collective mechanisms and institutions for challenging these behaviors.

These different voices show how the human members of the cooperative speak from different positionalities and thus different power positions. From these diverse positions of subalternity–superiority,⁶ different humans have distinct appreciations of interpersonal and interspecies care, as well as the relationships between the two, as they unfold and change in their more-than-human political community. Furthermore, these positionalities strongly condition how one is able *to conceive of* the more-than-human political community in question, as well as to influence its political practices. With this, we do not draw a direct causality between social positions in, visions of, and power in the more-than-human political community, since neither are stable realities and a variety of contextual and structural elements must always be considered—e.g., personal relationships, shared histories, discursive strategies. Nonetheless, contingent social positions do condition who is capable, in a given context, of saying what, of impactfully contributing to specific decisions—as well as with which authority, and with what effects. This appreciation of differential positionality of human actors within more-than-human political communities should not be obfuscated, as it further complicates and politicizes the more-than-human, more-than-social processes of constituting and reproducing these communities (Tacchetti *et al.*, 2022).

Through their practices and discourse on relationships of care, the human members of the cooperative continuously perform inclusion and exclusion, both of others and of themselves. This affects how the more-than-human political community is conceived of and delineated, and the practices through which it is weaved together and reproduced. As authors, we attempt to keep as many doors open as possible—by refusing closed accounts of the boundaries and constitutive–reproductive practices of the community and by describing a variety of actors and practices falling in the gray zone of consideration and inclusion–exclusion (e.g., the past, pigs, cultural and historical identities, belongings, etc.). Yet, by bringing in these questions about care, harm, inclusion, and exclusion, we also contribute to performatively constructing these entanglements as more-than-human *political* communities (i.e., communities that *do politics together* in a variety of ways). In the next

⁵ For confidentiality reasons, we do not explicitly discuss personal social positions or concrete situations of interpersonal harm. See also Footnote 6.

⁶ The different social positions of the human members of the cooperative were influenced by the intersecting effects of (1) socio-economic background and ensuing class privilege, (2) gender, and (3) relational and family ties within the cooperative and in the wider region. While this is not an exhaustive list, nor an analysis, these were the main effects observed by JS during his fieldwork.

section, we fully embrace this performativity through a speculative political ecology in a bid to explore the diverse types of political action of this more-than-human political community.

4. Political communities in action: Multispecies municipalist assembly

During his second fieldwork phase, in May 2023, JS organized a multispecies municipalist assembly (hereafter, 'the assembly') in the cooperative to allow further investigation of the dynamics, tensions, and practices discussed above (i.e., care, conflict, harm, mutual aid) (Figure 3). Specifically, the assembly served to explore how these practices condition or explain how this more-than-human political community can deliberately *act politically*. For this, we follow Harris and Santos' (2023) recent call in this Journal for developing experimental and speculative political ecologies —with explicit pleas to "study and stage interventions... and to examine their outcomes as a means of creating the world we would like to see" (Harris & Santos, 2023: 528). In this, they follow earlier work, especially in (multispecies) anthropology and cosmopolitics, that investigates the possibilities of, openings for, and practices of multispecies life in the ruins of capitalism (Stengers, 2005; Ogden *et al.*, 2013; Tsing, 2016; Ejsing, 2023). With regards to more-than-human politics specifically, speculation "may serve as a tool... to orientate thought, propose constraints, and help to resist some [dystopian] dreams... that would presuppose the taming of nonhumans and the freedom of humans to decide how to live together through intersubjective communication" (Stengers, 2010: 25). One sunny spring afternoon, the human members of the cooperative received the following invitation:

A radical municipalist collective of humans, animals, plants, shooting stars and voices of the past has taken over the municipality of Sant Gertrude. They have abolished capitalism and representative democracy and want to build new political communities where everyone and everything is free to live and thrive. However, their new political project is in danger: conservative forces want to take back political power, and project developers want to continue destroying the countryside... You are invited to join the multispecies municipalist assembly to try to find ways together to face this situation: what do we think about it, how can we deal with it, what can we do?

A few days later, the terrace of the cooperative's farmhouse witnessed its first multispecies municipalist assembly. Inspired by a more-than-human anarchist ethos striving to build free, thriving, autonomous multispecies worlds, the assembly aimed to stimulate discussion and speculation between the human members of the cooperative regarding the political alliances and practices that are possible across and beyond the boundaries between different lifeforms. Through a role play in a fictitious setting, participants reflected together on where interests between more-than-human actors converge, where they diverge, and how it is possible to navigate these divergences. Can we speak of more-than-human political communities or multispecies political alliances? If so, what would be their political project and their ideas and political practices of living together? How do they react and interact when faced with a shared concern with regards to which they do not have the same interest? Bearing these questions in mind, the assembly was designed and facilitated to create new political arenas for dissent. We drew on local and embodied historical–agricultural–ecological knowledge to speculate which multispecies alliances and communities could emerge in the face of threats by capitalism and the nation–state. For this, the authors invented a fictitious scenario comprising three threats:

- (a) the conversion of large parts of the farm into a fenced-off nature reserve where farming is strictly forbidden and humans can no longer enter,
- (b) the expropriation and conversion of the farmhouse into a museum to celebrate the rich history of peasant agriculture and workers' cooperatives in Catalonia, and

- (c) the transformation of the vegetable plots into eco-lodges managed by a multinational company with headquarters in Barcelona.⁷



Figure 3: Multispecies municipalist assembly participants in discussion. Source: The cooperative

The actors present at the assembly—that is, the roles embodied by the human members of the cooperative—were the wild fauna surrounding the cooperative, the humans of the cooperative, the soil, the forest surrounding the cooperative, and the humans of Sant Gertrude, which is the village at the outskirts of which the cooperative is based and with whose citizens the members of the cooperative mostly have a positive relationship.

Overall, during the assembly we observed a diversity of interventions, premised on the idea that any intervention in socio-natural arrangements is political (Swyngedouw, 2011) and that no *a priori* desired way to 'do' politics exists, even in the context of an assembly (Smessaert & Feola, 2023). At the start of the assembly, the participants were reminded that they were not obliged to act constructively, since the (often implicit) obligation for engaging in constructive politics can be considered a silencing and othering of other-than-humans, as well as those humans who disagree with the moral premises of consensus-seeking democracy. Despite these remarks, we witnessed a predominance of deliberative practices (i.e., actors engaging in discursive debate about their perceived situation and how to address it). More marginally, the wild fauna decided, at some point, to disengage from the assembly, stating that they were indifferent to the 'threats'—which they considered, in the end, only threats to the "miserable humans of the village."⁸ The forest actively threatened the humans of Sant Gertrude out of anger for how they have historically mismanaged and over-exploited it, then engaged in building strategic alliances with the soil and the humans of the cooperative to pressure the humans of Sant Gertrude into

⁷ For detailed information about the workshop structure, script, and scenario, as well as its methodological considerations and political premises, we refer the reader to the Appendix of this article.

⁸ After declaring their withdrawal, the wild fauna still made some interventions, one of which consisted of expressing gratitude to the assembly for creating a space where different lifeforms attempt to listen to one another and understand one another, even though it turned out that "only a few humans are able to understand other languages than human language."

signing a contract in which they promise not to harm the ecosystem further. We zoom in on some of the dynamics concerning

- (1) inclusion–exclusion,
- (2) conflict–harm, and
- (3) alliances–mutual aid observed during the assembly.

First, in terms of negotiating inclusion-exclusion, we witnessed contrasting behaviors between the two human actor groups. The humans of the cooperative chose to primarily remain silent and not take too much space because they wanted to leave space for the words and interventions of other-than-human actors. They consider themselves humans 'of another type' than the village people (i.e., humans who, because they understand the needs and values of other-than-human actors, can be a bridge between different lifeforms and languages and translate other-than-human perspectives into effective communication to attempt to stop government plans). In other words, through their attitude and interventions, the humans of the cooperative tried to include and make space for the perspectives and actions of those actors who are usually overlooked. The humans of Sant Gertrude, in contrast, initially wanted to talk *only among humans*. They were frustrated with the multispecies setting of the assembly and did not understand why these other actors, who, in their eyes, have no political voice, had been invited. The following dialogue illustrates the difficulty in communication, as well as the continuous discursive exclusions that this frustration provoked:

Wild fauna: "But it is very nice that there are some actors with whom we can think together, be in an assembly. This does not usually happen."

Humans of Sant Gertrude: "Yes, but a minute ago you were saying you didn't want to talk to us, I mean... You are a radical; you are a hippie too, because you are talking about doing spectacles [of beauty] and taking naps. And here, well, it's about *work*."

Wild fauna: "Sure, this is [exactly] the thing that I think limits the very ability to have a multispecies debate."

Humans of Sant Gertrude: "Yes, but here we are... We also have a voice, no?"

Wild fauna: "Until we change language."

Humans of Sant Gertrude [*agitated, to humans of the cooperative*]: "I don't know; [you there], say something, no? Are you with Sant Gertrude, with the people of Sant Gertrude, or not?"

Humans of the cooperative: "But what does Sant Gertrude want; do you want the nature reserve and the museum and the tourism, or do you want to boycott this plan?"

Humans of Sant Gertrude: "Sant Gertrude is very worried. Because Sant Gertrude, on the one hand, wants the museum, because the museum is cool and because we have to have more natural and protected areas... and on the other hand, well fuck it, we also come from peasant families and we have spent many years working the land with respect for it, in order to feed our communities of Sant Gertrude, so it's very hard that the government wants to do this without taking into account what the needs of Sant Gertrude are. Well, no. But it is true that we want to talk about it a little bit among us [humans]. Because all this, to me it feels..."

Humans of the cooperative: "We are not going to talk about anything without the rest, I am sorry..."

Wild fauna: "And we can't ask you..."

Humans of Sant Gertrude: "But at the very least you should respect me, no?"

Wild fauna: "To the human of Sant Gertrude, perhaps we can veto the participation of the 'conventional humans', of whom we have known for centuries that they are not capable of talking with us. [Instead, we can] gather those individuals that they used call 'poor people', 'witches' or

'crazy people', or other persons with whom we have been able to converse throughout our history..."

Paraphrasing the humans of Sant Gertrude, "[W]e have always done politics just among humans, so we don't see the point in doing it differently, and in any case, we don't understand what these hippies, these radicals [the wild fauna] are blabbering about." Nevertheless, the humans of Sant Gertrude did remain throughout the entire assembly and, in the end, even reluctantly agreed to sign a contract in which they committed not to harm the ecosystems and learn more about multispecies and ecosystem dynamics, out of fear of potential retaliation from other-than-human actors. The humans of Sant Gertrude thus began as the perfect embodiment of the idea that politics only occurs between humans and that other voices are irrelevant; yet in their negotiation of inclusion and exclusion and understanding of their relative isolation with regards to the variety of actors present, they later accepted the principle of 'one voice, no vote': they could give their opinion on the content of the contract but had no decision-making power.

Second, the assembly dynamics highlighted interesting perspectives on conflict and harm in political communities. The excerpt above demonstrates the tension and conflict arising in the assembly. Beyond an uncritical 'conflict of interests' between 'humans' and (other-than-human) 'nature', the assembly was designed to elucidate more nuanced forms of conflict and power struggles. What materialized were situated conflicts between humans and other-than-human nature, between different types of humans, as well as between different other-than-human actors. In the first category falls the conflict between the forest and humans: the forest was angry with (generic) humans due to their historical mismanagement of the forest, as well as by their having disrespectfully entered the forest with cars. The second category is exemplified by the village people pejoratively portraying the humans of the cooperative as neo-rurals and hippies who do not truly understand what it means to be a peasant, a behavior rooted in a general distrust and disappointment in the formers' perceived lack of support from the humans of the cooperative when faced with an 'exceptional' multispecies situation exceeding the frame of conventional human politics. Finally, conflict between the different other-than-human actors present at the assembly stemmed from their having neither the same temporalities nor the same indifference toward 'human' agency. The soil, for example, proposed to go on strike, so that the wild fauna would not be able to eat, thus forcing them to participate in the mobilization against government plans. Later, when the soil realized that threats of violence did not work, it changed strategy and proposed feeding the wild fauna so it could come and help.⁹

Third, the assembly elucidated various manifestations of mutual aid, as well as interspecies alliances and solidarity —as the changing strategy of the soil began to illustrate. This solidarity was most manifest in the participants' variety of proposals for addressing the three threats of capitalism and the state inscribed in the scenario. The forest, for example, proposed first confiding in the humans of the cooperative to speak with the government about their opposition to the plan, but simultaneously beginning to prepare for direct action.

Then we can start with more radical actions like... I don't know. As the forest, I don't really know what powers I have, but I'm connected to everyone; I can talk to all my surroundings, I can block walking paths, I can fall down, I can uproot myself, I can stop photosynthesis and provoke moments of suffocation... (The forest, multispecies assembly)

Similarly, when the humans of the cooperative explicitly asked the wild fauna to be an ally in defending the place against the project developers, the wild fauna did state that they would be ready to help, notably the forest and the soil, because the wild fauna depends on these two actors, but only within the confines of their "natural capacities". As such, they proposed staging "spectacles of beauty and connection" to impress humans

⁹ In all these examples, it is paramount to note that there is nothing inherent, inevitable, or determined in these conflicts or the way they play out. On the one hand, they are situated in the specific agro-ecological and historical context of the place, and on the other hand, they emerged from the way in which specific roles were embodied and performed by the human members of the cooperative.

as well as to create new forms of contact and relationships with those humans (i.e., children, crazy people, and witches) who can understand other languages and types of communication. The wild fauna repeatedly referred to its dependence on healthy soils and forests and, implicitly, made the recognition of interdependence between lifeforms a *precondition* for political action.

5. Openings for autonomous more-than-human political communities

While the dynamics of the assembly allow us to record precious insights in terms of inclusion–exclusion, conflict–harm, and alliances–mutual aid, we must not extrapolate the interactions of this speculation to the concrete functioning of this more-than-human political community. Nonetheless, both the recorded practices that constitute the community (Section 3) and the assembly's interventions and dynamics (Section 4) raise important questions about agency, alliances, and the potential for deliberate political action in these communities. Asking what specific political actors —human or other-than-human, alone or in alliances— *are actually capable of* strongly resonates with broader questions in anarchist political ecology of the type(s) of autonomous political action that these more-than-human political communities enable or constrain (Balaud & Chopot, 2021). In this discussion, we distill some lessons from our combined observations and speculative political ecology, to further discuss possible types of autonomous political action in and with more-than-human political communities.

Normative anarchist political ecologies

Throughout this article, we have described the more-than-human community surrounding the cooperative as a collaborative–conflictual entanglement of different lifeforms. Entangled here are adult and child humans, domestic and livestock animals, plants, trees, insects in the vegetable garden and the forest, and lively soils —along with a near infinity of other living and non-living entities greatly exceeding our description and understanding. We have argued that this community is political since it —deliberately and non-deliberately— negotiates questions of inclusion-exclusion and power configurations between actors and actor groups. Furthermore, we have observed that this community is constituted and reproduced through practices of care, mutual aid, and multispecies solidarity—as well as conflict (and potentially ensuing harm), which is sometimes acknowledged, sometimes silenced, and has both covert and overt, symbolic and material manifestations. In this discussion, we further develop these insights to reflect more deeply on the *types of political action* enabled by these more-than-human political communities. We begin with normative claims about more-than-human political communities before drawing upon our empirical work to discuss autonomous more-than-human forms of political action.

Harris and Santos (2023) combine their call for speculative political ecologies with one for developing and exploring more explicit normative claims. In line with an ethics of entanglement (Sundberg, 2015), we are not in a position to speak on what the political objective and associated practices of *this specific* more-than-human community should be. However, in more general terms and as a contribution to anarchist political ecology, we believe that more-than-human political communities should strive to develop emancipatory multispecies relationships (i.e., multispecies relations that are not based on, nor condone, domination or structural harm), enable multispecies flourishing, and allow for autonomy and coexistence in-against-and-beyond capitalism and the state (see also O'Heran, 2021). More-than-human political communities should attempt to live together collaboratively and conflictually, based on the presupposition of equality and the generation of autonomy, with self-determined collective mechanisms for questioning and challenging power structures and structural oppression, as well as with a clear recognition of context-specificity and an acknowledgment of social-ecological inheritances from the past (see also Smessaert & Feola, 2023). In these explicit attempts to *coexist*, multispecies municipalist assemblies might serve as a tool and practice within a larger tapestry of emancipatory political praxis, including deliberation, direct (autonomous) action, overt conflict, practices of care, and mutual aid within and between species —building common understandings but also navigating inevitable misunderstandings (Ejsing, 2023).

These normative claims clearly follow the directions of anarchist, autonomous, and cosmopolitical approaches that can be convened under the banner of 'more-than-human anarchisms.' Other scholars have discussed related ideas, political strategies, or social-ecological horizons in terms of insurrectionary political ecology (Dunlap, 2020), multispecies anarchism (O'Heran, 2021; Arregui, 2022) or anarchist political ecology (Springer *et al.*, 2021). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, this is among the first studies to propose an in-depth empirical–speculative account of more-than-human political communities *in action* (see also Balaud & Chopot, 2021). Beyond general accounts of multispecies anarchist politics and practices (e.g., O'Heran, 2021), specific insights have emerged from our empirical account: the need to (a) assess conflict and subalternity within and between actor groups of more-than-human political communities and (b) take an explicit stance against authoritarian and statist tendencies *within* these communities. In fact, the assembly served, in great part, to question multispecies relationships, interdependent worlds, existing and potential alliances, and the political practices of responsibility and reciprocity that they call for. We now turn to broader points of tension that our empirical insights reveal about multispecies emancipatory political praxis.

Tensions in multispecies emancipatory political praxis

A first point of tension concerns discussions on agency and intentionality that were inaugurated both in the assembly and during many of JS's fieldwork observations. During the assembly, the forest proposed stopping its photosynthesis to temporarily asphyxiate humans so that they would become crudely aware of their dependence on the forest. For a brief period, this type of intervention remained in the realm of possibility; it was not contested, and other actors took the threat seriously. However, later, the wild fauna retorted that other-than-human actors are only capable of doing what helps them reproduce and conserve their genetic legacy — in their case, eloquently expressed by the activities of "fucking and taking naps." This means that the wild fauna declares itself not *capable* of deciding to destroy the fence of the future nature reserve or of sending its birds to call for help in other forests. In other words, the wild fauna argued that one cannot attribute deliberate political agency to other-than-human actors (see Kowalczyk, 2014; Pearson, 2015; Balaud & Chopot, 2021; Arregui, 2023). This statement aligns with Kowalczyk's (2014) distinction between *primary* agency —stemming from an "involuntary occupation of a position in the distribution of resources in society" (Kowalczyk, 2014: 195)— and *political* agency —which would involve a collectively coordinated attempt at an "articulated transformation of [an other-than-human group's] living conditions" (Balaud & Chopot, 2021: 224, our translation). With their intervention, the wild fauna did not mean that other-than-human actors do not have any agency, just that one should not take for granted any *a priori* political intentionality.

The intensity with which the wild fauna made this argument led to a swift, collectively accepted shift from a position in which other-than-human nature has deliberate political agency to one in which only humans possess political agency. In the assembly context, this shift clearly played to the advantage of the humans of Sant Gertrude, who triumphantly celebrated this agency–superiority while simultaneously refusing the responsibilities for allyship that come with it. In a broader perspective, however, the wild fauna's statements take sides against simplistic accounts of more-than-human alliances against capitalism and the state or attempts to fill in, *for* other-than-human actors, how they *should* be allies with (anarchist) humans in their specific struggles. Indeed, against anthropomorphism and the co-optation of other-than-human agencies (i.e., their instrumentalization for human struggles against capitalism and the state), Balaud and Chopot (2021) rhetorically ask,

But are we [humans] in a position to demand of animals or plants a capacity for a political transformation for which, ultimately, we are responsible? Rather than asking of them a political agency identical to our own, we should make ourselves the bearers of significant and decisive behaviors with regard to [their] resistance to [exploitation] and the ecological implications thereof." (Balaud & Chopot, 2021: 224, our translation)

A second point of tension concerns representation (and the harm it can inflict) through the question of who has the right to speak on behalf of whom in more-than-human political communities. Throughout the assembly, a productive tension persisted around practices of representation: are the different participants representing their 'actor group' or just acting on their own behalf? Can they claim to represent others, and what mandate, if any, do they have? Some participants found it easy to speak 'in name of' or 'on behalf of' their actor group. The person who adopted the role of the wild fauna, for example, repeatedly began their interventions with "As the wild fauna, we think that..." The person adopting the role of the humans of Sant Gertrude, in contrast, recognized the different opinions and voices present within their actor group and that it was unclear whether she represented all, some, or none of them, as well as how she would go about consulting them about the matter at hand.

Nonetheless, individual decisions about the legitimacy of representing others —human or other-than-human others— should not divert our attention from the bigger picture, concerned with the limits to inclusion and representation in more-than-human political communities. Watson (2011: 71), for example, calls for political communities that "would accommodate the possibility that not all actors need to be —or can be— fully represented by any proposed politico-scientific institution." If we concur with Stengers (2005) that certain actors cannot, do not want to, or should not be represented, doing so *anyhow* is not only a way to pretend that multispecies assemblies might ever take this form, it also inflicts harm upon these actors by simplifying the complexity of their lifeworlds and turning them into just another 'stakeholder.'¹⁰ However, one should not conflate the assembly's role as a methodological tool with its potential as a future political institution. For us, the assembly and its speculative political ecology primarily consisted of a methodological tool allowing humans to act-talk *as* different more-than-human actors but without adopting the "problematic postures of witness or representative" (Balaud & Chopot, 2021: 291, our translation). Rather, in line with Balaud and Chopot (2021), we hoped that these embodied experiences would allow for understanding and expressing how other-than-human action and agencies *affect, unsettle, and upset* the (human) assembly participants. Indeed, through language and action informed by other-than-human lifeworlds (via the embodiment of a role in a specific setting and thinking-feeling with this role), the human members of the cooperative *politicized* their more-than-human social lifeworlds and, as such, they made emerge the more-than-human political community in which they are all weaved together. In other words, the intimate knowledge of the local agro-ecosystem and the daily interactions with its other-than-human actors has, in our view, allowed for harvesting "indications, indisciplines and conflictualities... that open [new] political situation[s]... which were not present before" (Balaud & Chopot, 2021: 290, our translation).

A third point of tension refers to autonomy and multispecies direct action beyond deliberation and constructive politics. Despite the invitation to transcend these, the assembly participants remained almost exclusively in discursive and argumentative registers. This shows that it clearly does not suffice to simply invite human beings to be creative or to go beyond the spoken word for them to feel comfortable or equipped to do so. What often undergirds practices of deliberation are moral incentives to engage in constructive, consensual politics, which sees conflict as a problem to be solved rather than a productive tension establishing what is at stake (Temper *et al.*, 2018). Scholarship on agonism and ecological democracy has long criticized both the terms and premises of deliberation (Smessaert & Feola, 2023). Furthermore, deliberative approaches often presume that different parties share a common ground, problem framing, or world (Stengers, 2005), yet one of cosmopolitics' main contributions to debates on more-than-human political communities lies in the very fact that we cannot presume *a priori* commonality. What is at stake in more-than-human political negotiation and conflict is not just worldviews or opinions but *worlds* as a whole (de la Cadena, 2010). Nevertheless, we observed the seemingly impossibility of *not trying to find common ground*. In the preliminary discussion to the assembly, no one disagreed with what was proposed or refused the framing that it was useful to discuss how to address the threats posed by the scenario. During the assembly, we saw repeated attempts to find a compromise,

¹⁰ This is an important point, and we believe that its corollary (i.e., that the design of 'real' multispecies assemblies should build in mechanisms for countering these forms of ontological violence) constitutes a fundamental principle for multispecies and representational justice (see Chao & Celermajer, 2023).

'solve' the question, or 'settle on' something on a superficial, executive level, with few considerations on the depth of each actor's lifeworld or the incommensurability of these lifeworlds.

These constructive interventions may be explained by, among other factors, implicit moral incentives to engage in constructive politics, the desire to be a 'good' assembly participant, or difficulties in challenging the foundations of a deliberative setting. More importantly, we should not focus excessively on deliberative praxis, since the great majority of political practices observed in the more-than-human political community (care, mutual aid, harm, conflict, inclusion–exclusion, direct action) are completely agnostic about (the need for) deliberation or consensus. Anarchist and radical democratic perspectives point toward an interpretation of these practices in terms of autonomy (Smessaert & Feola, 2023). On the one hand, this implies autonomy *from the state and capitalism*, with the corollary of being accountable only to the members of the community and autonomously created institutions. For the cooperative, this entails refusing productivism and engaging in conflicting, ambiguous relationships with certain institutions of capitalism (wage labor, self-exploitation, alienation), as well as refusing compliance with some, but not all, state norms. On the other hand, it implies *autonomous political action within the community*, that is, direct action that does not seek (*a priori* or *a posteriori*) external approval or complies with arbitrary authority or hegemonic norms. At the cooperative, boar (*Sus scrofa*) and roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) have destroyed dozens of young (fruit) trees planted as part of the contour-line syntropic system. The red spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*) has had a major impact on the yields of the vegetable garden, affecting mainly eggplants, green beans, and cucumbers during the warm and dry summer of 2022. Similarly, in Arregui's (2023) example, urban wild boar do not ask permission (or wait for humans) to roam around, destroy fences, or engage in multispecies alliances with the humans that pet or feed them —*they just do so* (see also Ejsing, 2023). There is no "because" to fill in for them, or for anyone — these are the types of political praxis and contingent alliances that more-than-human political communities must accommodate. Rather than 'asking' specific other-than-human actors to 'explain' their autonomous political practices or their situated, contingent alliances, the humans who wish to multiply, deepen, and broaden struggles against capitalist destruction must develop the tools for the political translation of these practices and alliances. These humans could ask themselves, "What does this action mean, and what are its implications? How does it impact the practicalities of our coexistence? How does it influence our political struggles and make possible new alliances? What can it teach us about our (potential) common struggle and about our (potential) common enemy? How can we make it contribute to just multispecies collective futures?"

6. Conclusion

By discussing a more-than-human political community and its existing and possible forms of political action, we have contributed to a better understanding of grassroots more-than-human politics for eco-social transformation and stimulated reflection on autonomous and multispecies political forms. Unleashing the potential of these political forms demands need to *politically* give meaning to both multispecies emancipatory political action and alliances and autonomous action, by connecting these actions to one's lifeworlds and specific struggles and by considering power dynamics and intersecting systems of oppression.

This article shows that autonomous more-than-human political communities are premised on the recognition of interdependence between lifeforms and of the ambiguous, conflictual, and contradictory nature of their political practices of constitution and reproduction. Furthermore, they are premised on the acceptance by their human members of being affected, unsettled, and upset by the agencies of their other-than-human members, as well as on an intersectional understanding of the power dynamics and structural oppressions at play in concrete social-ecological contexts. Building on these premises, autonomous more-than-human political communities may become capable of doing politics differently (with other actors, relations, premises, and procedures) and of building deeper, embodied, and lively social-ecological critiques of capitalism and the nation-state. Finally, they might become capable of consciously exploring various strategic constellations of multispecies alliances, peaceful coexistence, and intra-communitarian autonomy in a bid to challenge, in practice, capitalism and the nation-state. While theory sheds light on —and might even inform— action, it is in the fields and on the ground that concrete, more-than-human political communities come to exist and negotiate political alliances and solidarities, remaining a source of inspiration for practice and theory alike. We hope that

this article harvests some of these inspirations and contributes to moving in the direction of emancipatory, autonomous, and egalitarian more-than-human collective futures.

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Appendix: Multispecies assembly as a speculative political ecology

This appendix presents further information on the methodology used to collect data on entanglements and potential alliances between the humans and more-than-human actors coexisting in a specific (agro)ecosystem. The method served to speculatively explore how more-than-human communities can act politically and to stimulate discussion between the human members of the cooperative about the political alliances and practices possible across and beyond the boundaries between different lifeforms. We drew on local and embodied historical–agricultural–ecological knowledge to speculate on what multispecies alliances and communities could possibly emerge in the face of threats from capitalism and the nation–state.

The objective of the assembly was to propose a fictional but concrete conflictual situation for which we could explore the implications for the different actors. The situation presented allowed for the emergence of conflicts of interest between actors (between distinct types of humans, between different more-than-human actors, between humans and more-than-humans). The question that this conflictual situation raises is how to build communities across differences when 'alliances' are not straightforward, logical, or unambiguous. To address this question, we tried to strike a balance by proposing a situation that constitutes a real threat for all actors (and thus allows for alliance-building), but where the specific shapes that the alliances take on (as well as the exclusions they necessarily perform) must still be politically negotiated through a variety of practices and interventions.

Workshop structure

The invitation for the multispecies assembly read as follows:

A radical municipalist collective of humans, animals, plants, shooting stars, and voices of the past has taken over the municipality of Sant Gertrude. They have abolished capitalism and representative democracy and want to build new political communities where everyone and everything is free to live and thrive. However, their new political project is in danger: conservative forces want to take back political power, and project developers want to continue destroying the countryside...

The national government, which is hostile toward multispecies communities and lively countrysides, has decided to change the land use of the village. Big parts of [the village], including the farmlands and forest of [the cooperative], will be transformed into a protected nature reserve where farming is strictly forbidden. Government plans include the creation of a 'wild area' where nature can freely evolve without human interference. This wild area will be in the forest next to [the cooperative] and fenced off so that humans can no longer enter. Furthermore, the plan foresees the expropriation of the farmhouse where the cooperative is currently located and its conversion into a museum to remember and celebrate the rich history of peasant agriculture and workers' cooperatives in Catalunya. Finally, the current vegetable plots will be transformed into eco-lodges managed by a multinational company with headquarters in Barcelona. The construction works for the fence, museum, and eco-lodges will begin on July 1st; all human and nonhuman residents of [the cooperative] must leave before that day or will be evicted by force.

You are invited to join the multispecies municipalist assembly to try to find ways together to face this situation: what do we think about it, how can we deal with it, and what can we do?

The multispecies assembly consisted of seven parts. First (Part 1), the facilitator explained the objective of the workshop, introduced its various parts, and proposed a set of principles of engagement for fruitful collaboration. Second (Part 2), the participants were invited to again read the assembly's invitation, which contained the fictitious scenario (i.e., a combination of threats from capitalism and the state) with which the assembly participants were confronted.

Third (Part 3), each assembly participant was asked to find and prepare the role they wanted to embody. Examples were given (i.e., the forest, the climate, humans of the village, the past), but they were free to choose one of these or invent other roles. They were asked to consider (a) the questions their role wants to raise in relation to the situation and (b) the types of interventions that would make sense or be effective for their role. The participants were given time to get into their roles and embody their actors, then asked to enter their roles for Parts 4–6 of the assembly. Part 4 consisted of an attempt to reach a collective understanding about the situation facing the assembly members. Participants were asked how they interpreted what was going to happen in the fictitious scenario, what the possible implications thereof were (globally or on specific actors), and consequently, what points should be addressed in the assembly. Part 5 was the assembly *sensu stricto*, where participants were invited to make their interventions and other participants to react to them. In Part 6, participants attended an informal drink after the assembly where they reflected, from within their more-than-human roles, on the assembly and the interventions of the other participants and shared their assessment on how the situation of the farm was likely to change based on the outcome of the assembly. Finally, in Part 7, the participants exited their more-than-human roles and, from their human perspective, had a group discussion about their experiences with embodying specific more-than-human actors, as well as about the questions the assembly raised for the human members of the collective.

Methodological considerations and political premises

Speculation was an important dimension of the multispecies municipalist assembly (Harris & Santos, 2023), in its attempt to cross borders and connect human and nonhuman worlds (Bastian *et al.*, 2017). This speculation was experimental and open ended; as such, the facilitator proposed as a foundational principle of engagement that "there is no right way to do it, [so] don't be shy" (workshop script). According to Dyke *et al.* (2018), "[temporalities], visceral and embodied experiences, becoming care-ful, and re-imagining our research subjects, are important aspects of any attempt to develop more 'concrete' ways of working with... the more-than-human." (Dyke *et al.*, 2018: 463).

We incorporated these distinct aspects in the following ways: concerning *temporalities*, we proposed more-than-human actors that present diverging and possibly conflicting temporalities and that would be differently impacted by the threats at hand. Clearly, the forest, wild fauna, and humans of the collective have different temporalities—at the level of their reproduction, the timescales on which it is appropriate to reason, or with regards to the imminence of the 'threat' they face. This focus on temporality was not only inscribed in the design but also actively exploited by the participants in the assembly. Concerning *visceral and embodied experiences*, we tried to integrate this by holding the workshop in an outside setting, proposing a time for participants to walk around or search for materials to embody their role, and inviting them to draw on their intimate knowledge of the agro-ecosystem to embody their roles. Concerning *becoming care-ful*, we invited the participants to cultivate empathy with the other beings that would be affected by the threat. We asked them to embody a more-than-human role and make emerge the questions or actions that come with it: what is important for these actors, in this agro-ecosystem, faced with this situation? Also, we asked them to draw on the preexisting multispecies entanglements and networks of care on and around the farm that might allow for potential political alliances. Lastly, concerning *re-imagining our research subjects*, we deliberately staged more-than-human agency in a political arena beyond deliberation (i.e., participants were not obliged to talk or participate) and beyond representation (i.e., participants were not representing, nor did they feel confident to represent, their specific actor group in its entirety). As such, participants speculated on what each actor, as well as a web of actors, "may become capable of" (Stengers, 2015: 34)—what intentionality and directionality can they give to their actions, relationships, and frictions? In our re-imagining of our research subjects, we incorporated rejections of anthropomorphism and human exceptionalism (Bastian *et al.*, 2017; Dowling *et al.*, 2017). We tried to overcome the centrality of discourse and deliberation by inviting participants to creatively consider political interventions that would be effective or relevant to push their political agenda or make visible their interests in the multispecies assembly.

In the principles of engagement (Part 1), collectively agreed on at the start of the assembly, we stressed the experimental, open-ended nature of the workshop; we did not have (nor wanted to have) any control over the outcome of this complex social interaction. We also stressed, unlike most types of collective workshops, that being consensual or constructive during the various moments of interaction was not needed. We explained that conflict can occur (in fact, the workshop was specifically designed for conflicts of interest to emerge) and that it was up to the participants (not the facilitator) to navigate this conflict within the confines of their role. This reminder of the possibilities of non-constructive and non-consensual ways of acting allowed us to then explain that different actors can have vastly different action repertoires. All types of action, behavior, and intervention are considered political; the challenge becomes finding ways of politically understanding, redirecting, and navigating them.

Underlying Part 4 ("Reaching a common understanding about the situation the assembly participants face"), we find the cosmopolitical premise of refusing to take for granted that all actors see (or should see) the world in the same way, refusing that they should (strive to) agree on a problem framing, on specific points that must be addressed. From a cosmopolitical standpoint, in fact, a common world is a possible outcome of, rather than a given starting point for, political disagreement (Stengers, 2005).

Workshop guide*Recommended number of participants: 4–10 persons**Recommended duration: 2.5–3 hours*

PART	GOAL	CONTENT AND ACTIONS	ADVICE FOR FACILITATOR	MATERIAL	TIME
Part 0	Workshop invitation	Facilitator sends out the workshop invitation	Make sure the invitation is clear, engaging, and sent out well in advance. Make it clear to both the facilitator and the participants who is invited to, and who actually will participate.		5 min
Part 1	Introduce the workshop	(a) Facilitator explains the objective of the workshop (b) Facilitator explains the different steps of the workshop (c) Facilitator goes through the principles of engagement and finds agreement (d) Facilitator checks in on time availability of the group and adapts workshop accordingly (e) Facilitator explains the role of facilitation: timekeeping, guidance between sections, facilitation of discussion (if needed)	<u>Principles of engagement</u> 1. This is an experiment; have faith in the process. 2. Try to embody your role and make emerge the questions or interventions that come with it. There is no right way to do this; don't be shy. 3. Different actors can have different ways of intervening. You are not restricted to making arguments with words; you can meaningfully contribute in any way your role deems fit, and all interventions are political. 4. Being consensual or constructive is not necessary. Conflict can occur, and it is up to you to navigate this within the confines of your role. <u>Further advice</u> Agree on a sign if participants want to step out of your role for a moment and make a comment about the process. Ask if participants want to add principles of engagement.	A comfortable setting to discuss together, a space where everyone can see and hear each other (outdoors if possible)	20 min
Part 2	Assembly invitation	Participants individually read the assembly invitation comprising the scenario		Printed invitation	5 min
Part 3	Finding and preparing roles	(a) Facilitator introduces some possible roles and invites participants to consider which role they want to embody (from list or other)	<u>Possible roles</u> The past, the local climate, humans of the collective, humans of the village, the forest, the soil, animals of the farm, magical forest creatures...	Pen and paper	20 min

		<p>(b) Facilitator invites participants to take the time to think about (i) the questions that their role wants to make/emerge in relation to the situation described and (ii) the type of interventions that would make sense or be effective for their role</p> <p>(c) Facilitator asks participants to write down ideas for inspiration during the assembly</p> <p>(d) Participants take a moment to get into their role</p>	<p><u>Questions for the role</u></p> <p>How does the situation impact me? How do I feel about it? What can I do? Which other actors have converging interests? Which actors have diverging interests?</p> <p><u>Possible interventions</u></p> <p>Making arguments, sabotaging the process, direct action, refusing to participate...</p>	Any material needed for the participants to get into their role (elements from their surroundings, images, sounds, etc.)	
PARTICIPANTS ENTER THEIR ROLES					
Part 4	Understanding the situation we face	<p>Facilitator introduces an open discussion between the participants based on the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do we understand what is going to happen? 2. What are the possible implications of the scenario, globally or on specific actors? 3. What specific points should we address in this assembly? 4. Can we reach an agreement on the objective of this session? 	Either the facilitator introduces all the questions at once and lets the group navigate them or introduces the questions one by one, with a short group discussion on each.		20 min
Part 5	Assembly	Facilitator introduces the assembly, followed by self-managed group discussion	<p><u>Assembly introduction</u></p> <p>This is the moment in which the participants carry out their interventions. Participants can react to the interventions of the others. Make participants think for their actor what they want to get out of this assembly.</p>		45 min or until saturation

Part 6	Reflection from inside the roles	Facilitator introduces reflection moment, then self-managed group discussion	<u>Reflection introduction</u> The different roles informally have a drink together after the assembly. What do they think about the assembly? How do they interpret the interventions of the other actors? How do they think the situation at the farm will evolve?		20 min
PARTICIPANTS EXIT THEIR ROLES					
Part 7	Reflection from outside the role (return to human)	Facilitator introduces reflection moment, then facilitates group discussion	<u>Reflection introduction</u> What do people want to share about their experience? How did they embody their role, what did they try to do, to obtain, to manifest? How do they interpret the interventions of others, from a human perspective? What questions does this assembly raise for them as a human member of this community?		20 min

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