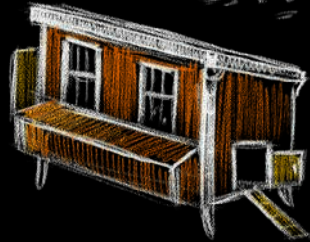
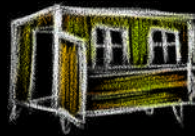


# Escape, Resistance and Solidarity

*Farmed Animal  
Sanctuaries  
as the Heart  
of the Movement*



just wondering...

**just wondering...** is a small autonomous collective that creates critical and speculative animated essays. The productions often explore anti-speciesism, posthumanism, social and environmental justice. The collective consists of Aron Nor, independent researcher and self-taught filmmaker-artist, Mina Mimosa, visual artist and illustrator, and M. Martelli, writer and scholar-activist.



What you're about to read is a transcript from the animated essay "***Escape, Resistance and Solidarity - Farmed Animal Sanctuaries as the Heart of the Movement***", created and produced by **just wondering...**

"Animals running away from factory farms need all the support they can get, from activist protesters to caregivers in vegan sanctuaries. In this film you'll hear about actions of escape and animal resistance, such as those of Matilda the pig, but also those of Tilikum the orca, Tatiana the tiger, and Tyke the elephant. You'll find an exploration of what animal sanctuaries are, what they try to achieve, what tensions they bring forward, and what possible futures they help materialize. And, by raising the voices of the Cuori Liberi antispeciesist activists from Italy, as they were defending the lives of pigs inside the sanctuary from the forces of the state, the film navigates just how entangled animal and human liberation are."

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Watch the animated essay  
by following the QR code,  
or find it on our website  
[justwondering.io](http://justwondering.io)



Director, Editor & Narrator- Aron Nor  
Writer & Narrator- M. Martelli  
Art Director & Illustrator- Mina Mimosa  
Music Composer- Teodora Retegan  
End Credits Music- Cuori Liberi by Alice Olivari,  
Valentina Rubini, feat. Francesca.



## 1. Escape

2021. Summer had not yet entirely begun when the pull for some sort of freedom called with all its might. Maybe not even freedom, just elsewhere, a no-place that wasn't what she already knew: fences, enclosures, violence, and misery reflected in another's eyes. Inside of her, life was growing and she was heavy with her love for it. So she ran, it is not known how. If she made plans, or simply acted on a moment of carelessness from her overseers. If she saw a real potential for another world in a burrow under an electric fence, or just took, with desperation, any hope, any-way-but-here. What we know is that she got out. She ran, she walked, she hid until she found a safe-enough place. The woods. They welcomed her with foliage, shadows, and hiding spots. They tucked her away in their many-leaves so she could rest, sprawl, and begin the greatest labor of all: giving birth.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Ed Browne, "Mother Pig Who Escaped Farm and Gave Birth in Woods Could Be Slaughtered," *Newsweek*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/mother-pig-escaped-farm-gave-birth-woods-slaughtered-1601810>.

## 2. Resistance

Animals have been resisting human order for as long as it has been imposed. It was the stuff of legends and folk tales. In the last decades, people have begun to systematically collect their stories, acknowledging these acts as resistance instead of brushing them off and minimizing their meaning.<sup>2</sup> When you look, there are so many of them. Fantastic stories of courageous escape, with chickens throwing themselves off transport trucks, cows jumping over high walls, pigs destroying fences to get out, orangutans coordinating with others to open locks.<sup>3</sup> Their acts of responding to human violence with aggression are often accounted as “unusual” or “crazy” rather than seeing them for what they are: self-defense.



**Think of Tilikum the orca**, who was captured at two years old, imprisoned, and forced to perform tricks most of his life at Sea World. Is it that “crazy” that he would snap and throw himself at his trainers, taking them underwater? Allegations of madness are often used as a tactic to discount people’s legitimate claims, be they human or non-human. In the wild, orca attacks are so rare that there are no recorded fatalities. But living in boring enclosures with no friends but trainers and, at times, others of your species who abuse you, are bound to make one angry. Of the four human deaths related to captive orcas, Tilikum was involved in three.<sup>4</sup>

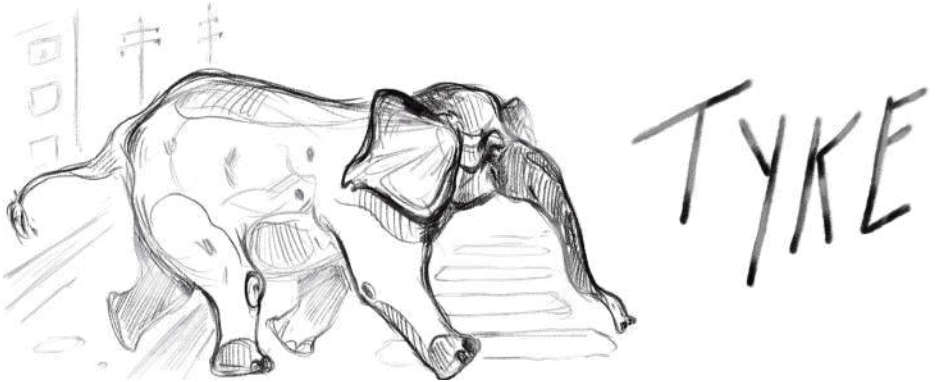
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<sup>2</sup> See Sarat Colling, *Animal resistance in the global capitalist era* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020); Jason Hribal, *Fear of the animal planet: The hidden history of animal resistance* (Edinburgh: AK, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> These stories are all explored in more detail in Colling’s book.

<sup>4</sup> Colling, 37-39; Hribal, Epilogue: When Orcas Resist; Wikipedia, “Tilikum (ORCA),” January 29, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tilikum\\_\(orca\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tilikum_(orca)).

**Think of Tyke the elephant**, who had enough of the circus and kept saying so, refusing multiple times, protecting herself when hit, escaping twice before finally, during one fateful performance, killing her trainer. Then she ran, she ran for her life through the streets of Honolulu until she was found and shot 86 times.<sup>5</sup>



**Think of Tatiana the tiger**, who escaped over the 12-foot-high wall of the zoo enclosure she was held in to attack the teenagers who had been taunting her, throwing rocks. She roamed the zoo grounds for long minutes, never slashing her fangs at anyone else but them: those she recognized as having belittled and harmed her.<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> Colling, xxvi; Hribal, Chapter One: Elephants Exit the Big Top; Wikipedia, “Tyke (Elephant),” December 30, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyke\\_\(elephant\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyke_(elephant)).

<sup>6</sup> Colling, 42-43; Hribal, Prologue: A Message From Tatiana; Wikipedia, “San Francisco Zoo Tiger Attacks,” December 26, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San\\_Francisco\\_Zoo\\_tiger\\_attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Francisco_Zoo_tiger_attacks).

**Think of Tilikum. Think of Tyke. Think of Tatiana.** And dare say animals don't resist, or that their resistance doesn't matter. Matter for who, one might ask. Their resistance is the drawstring that keeps them attached to life- to the desire to live according to one's will, to act as one pleases, to pursue one's wishes. It is the desire we all have, it is an animal desire, one we put into practice every day. It is not found just in these grand stories of escape and retribution. It is staring right at us in the mundane, enormous violence of the animal industry, if only we dare look. What else are the cages there for, if not to keep one from fleeing?

The slaughterhouses know very well that animals oppose their killing.<sup>7</sup> None of them "give us" their milk, eggs, and meat as willingly as some children's books describe it. That is part of why working at an abattoir is one of the most dangerous jobs, with a very high degree of injury.<sup>8</sup> The pigs, the cows, the chickens, they resist every morning as the shift of their imprisoned life begins, pecking, pulling, pushing, jumping, doing all they can with their bodies bred for consumption, bred for a disability that is profitable, their flesh turned into fat for our tables.<sup>9</sup> Even the fish, yes, even the fish, they defy us, or what would you call that frenzied tug at the end of the fishing hook? How would it be a 'sport' to catch them, if all they wanted was to lay quietly at our feet?<sup>10</sup>

**Think of Tilikum. Think of Tyke. Think of Tatiana.** They said no to the life that was given to them, and suffered for it. Yet they had nowhere to go. The whole human world was a cage for them. What do you think happens to a non-human animal who manages to run off from their imprisonment?

**Think of Tilikum. Think of Tyke. Think of Tatiana.** So many of them are found, killed or put back. Captivity, suffering, boredom, and death, these are the pillars of most animal life under capitalism. Yes, most, because most mammals today are farmed animals- cows, chickens, pigs, and other mammals called "livestock"

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7 See more about this in Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, *Animal and Capital* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

8 Karol Orzechowski, "Caught in the Gears: The Dangers of Slaughterhouse Work," *Faunalytics*, July 13, 2022, <https://faunalytics.org/caught-in-the-gears-the-dangers-of-slaughterhouse-work/>.

9 To read more on how animals are bred to be disabled, see Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of burden: Animal and disability liberation* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2016).

10 Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, "Do Fish Resist?" *Cultural Studies Review* 22, no. 1 (April 2016), doi: [10.5130/csr.v22i1.4363](https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v22i1.4363).

make up most of the biomass on earth, more than all of the others.<sup>11</sup> And just below them in the ranking- there's us. Their captors.

Think- if there is one who escapes, how little that matters in the whole scheme of things... And yet it's everything. A whole life. In the case of Matilda, the sow who, heavy with life, smelled summer coming and ran into the woods, it's the life of a whole family. The Ollerton Eleven, they were dubbed, she and her piglets, nested in the Nottinghamshire forest in the UK. Small, pink bundles, suckling, unaware of how much their mother fought for them. Some people melt at that sort of sweet sight. So they tried to save their lives, as they were not safe yet. They were still property of the farm, searched for, and when found, they were taken back. It was then that vegan animal activists began to organize a protest and a petition, to put pressure on the farm and have them released. But released where, you might ask? Where can pigs go when they escape?<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Sanctuary

With the wilds dwindling and the rest of the world human-centered, farmed animals seem out-of-place anywhere but on a farm. With their bodies modified to maximize the monetary gain of their owners, they are adapted to live and die next to us, rather than far away. With laws that render them property, regardless of where they are, what place might they even need? A sort of refuge, maybe. A sanctuary.

Farmed animal sanctuaries are the spaces in which previously exploited animals can unfold their whole lives in peace, according to their species-specific needs, whether to root, to roam, to flock or to bathe. Sanctuaries provide care, center these animals in their own lives, and remove them, forever, from a cycle of exploitation and profit-making. Within them, the animals carry out lives no longer destined to please, entertain or satisfy humans. Their status as commodities is unmade.<sup>13</sup> Finally, we see they are much more than cogs, removed from the

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<sup>11</sup> See Hannah Ritchie, "Wild Mammals Make up Only a Few Percent of the World's Mammals," *Our World in Data*, December 15, 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/wild-mammals-birds-bio-mass>. This only refers to mammals, not to all animals as we mistakenly spoke in the animated essay.

<sup>12</sup> See Jusep Moreno, director, *When Pigs Escape*, (2022), <https://www.whenpigsescape.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> See Elan Abrell, *Saving animals: Multispecies Ecologies of rescue and care* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

machine. Their personality, which was previously subdued, can develop and stand out. Given a context to express themselves, to socialize and to convey preferences, they take it, oh, how they take it!

You see, Matilda and her piglets made it to sanctuary that year, because there were activists working towards it, public pressure, and a sanctuary to take them in. She couldn't have done it alone, she required solidarity from us, and solidarity was enacted. Finally there, she could feed her children for as long as she wanted - they were not taken from her after only a few weeks, weaned early to be turned into meat. She could roam around and, after having her nose ring cut off, she could root, which is the natural behavior of pigs.<sup>14</sup> The nose ring is a device of control, used to prevent forms of resistance, because through rooting pigs can move the soil and push through structures. Pigs use their snouts to find food, but also to communicate and cool off. These are just some of the behaviors that were interdicted to her on the farm, as they still are to hundreds of millions of pigs worldwide, right now.<sup>15</sup>



In the face of this scale of suffering, sanctuaries seem like some sort of tiny utopias, places of peace, tucked away from exploitation. They are where pigs roll in the mud joyfully, chickens dust bathe next to their friends and cows graze with no hurry, no worry at all. Yes, maybe we could call them utopias, but

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<sup>14</sup> Caroline Lowbridge, "‘ollerton 11’ Escapee Pig Family Saved from Slaughter," *BBC*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-57518634>; Moreno.

<sup>15</sup> M Shahbandeh, "Number of Pigs Worldwide by Country 2023," *Statista*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263964/number-of-pigs-in-selected-countries/>.



then we'd fail to see their real potential.<sup>16</sup> They don't only nurture peace, but a "quiet rage", the low roar of those who have to deal with the aftermath of the factories' inflicted trauma.<sup>17</sup> Sanctuaries are not the end goal, as many, if not most, caregivers, thinkers and activists underline.<sup>18</sup> In fact, sanctuaries wish for their own disappearance. To not be needed at all. But how to even get there? What would that look like? We believe that sanctuaries begin to answer these questions in practice, to experiment with other ways of being together, with care-beyond-utility and with multispecies community-making.

## 4. Tensions

It is hard to tell how many farmed animal sanctuaries there are worldwide, but we can safely say that more are appearing. Since the 80s there has been a sprawl of them, refuges of diverse sizes and with differing geographies, counting much over fifty just in North America.<sup>19</sup> Philosophers Sue Donaldson & Will Kymlicka seriously consider the idea that sanctuaries are "the heart of the movement", as they are a focal point for rescued animals, community and advocacy, often doing education and outreach work as well.<sup>20</sup> They engage in the direct action of aiding animals in need and providing them with a "safe-enough" place.<sup>21</sup> Some focus on one or two species that are most farmed in the region, others take in a variety of animals as they best fit into the space available. Some are big enough to shelter hundreds of animals, operating as non-profit organizations; others keep just a

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Pachirat, "Sanctuary," in *Critical Terms For Animal Studies*, ed. Lori Gruen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 337 - 356.

<sup>17</sup> Activists from Ippoasi Sanctuary dubbed it a "quiet rage". See Vitadacani, Ippoasi, Santuario Capra Libera Tutti, Rifugio Miletta e Agripunk, "La voce dei rifugi sul Decreto Ministeriale del 7 marzo 2013," *Liberazioni*, no. 54 (2023): 69-84.

<sup>18</sup> See Pachirat; Abrell; Karen S. Emmerman, "Sanctuary, Not Remedy," in *The Ethics of Captivity*, ed. Lori Gruen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014): 213-30, doi: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199977994.003.0014](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199977994.003.0014); Marie Leth-Espensen, "Care in a Time of Anthropogenic Problems: Experiences from Sanctuary-Making in Rural Denmark," in *Feminist Animal and Multispecies Studies: Critical Perspectives on Food and Eating*, ed. Kadri Aavik, Kuura Irni, and Milla-Maria Joki (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2023): 97-116, doi: [10.1163/9789004679375](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004679375); Miriam Jones, "Captivity in the Context of a Sanctuary for Formerly Farmed Animals," in *The Ethics of Captivity*, ed. Lori Gruen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014): 90-101, doi: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199977994.003.0007](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199977994.003.0007).

<sup>19</sup> Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, "Farmed Animal Sanctuaries: The Heart of the Movement?" *Politics and Animals* 1, no. 1 (October, 2015): 25.

<sup>20</sup> Donaldson and Kymlicka.

<sup>21</sup> "Safe-enough" is a term used by patrice jones in an interview with Rebecca Shen in "Tending Sanctuary". See Rebecca Shen, *Tending Sanctuary. Multispecies Entanglements at VINE Sanctuary*, (Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2022).

few in a sort of extended multispecies family unit, dubbed a microsanctuary. All of them symbolically undo the animals' property status and day-to-day, they deal with the difficulties of care in captivity.<sup>22</sup> Sanctuaries don't mean complete freedom, either- they have rules for well-being and fences for safety.



For farmed animals, living in a sanctuary means receiving proper food, having the context to socialize, the space to stroll, and the opportunity to exercise some form of agency over their daily routine;<sup>23</sup> but the space is not infinite, the context is chosen by others, the food options are limited and the routine is a collective decision, at best. Moreover, animals are subjected to veterinary actions that make little sense to them, and, while some are for their own good, others are enforced for the good of the community: the almost-obligatory neutering, as sanctuaries try to prevent breeding on their grounds. This isn't easy to do, because veterinary knowledge on farm animal castration stems from the industry, where it is extremely painful and done without anesthetics. Therefore, sanctuary caregivers have to push through 'common' veterinary practice, look for and ask from veterinarians what they haven't yet been taught how to do: care for the

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<sup>22</sup> As shown by Abrell, in *Saving animals*, and by Jones, in "Captivity in the Context of a Sanctuary"; it also appears in the author's personal interviews with sanctuary workers in Romania.

<sup>23</sup> See Shen; Charlotte E. Blattner, Sue Donaldson, and Ryan Wilcox, "Animal Agency in Community: A Political Multispecies Ethnography of VINE Sanctuary." *POLITICS AND ANIMALS* 6 (February 2020): 22.

animals' own well-being, much beyond their utility.<sup>24</sup> This is one reason why sanctuaries are also spaces for knowledge-making, encouraging new forms of care both through life and at the end of it. By marking each passing with a ritual, recognizing each death as individual, not a number, and each arrival as a joy, sanctuaries narrate new, meaningful life-stories for these animals.<sup>25</sup> And, while they do not allow reproduction, that doesn't mean parenthood is impossible. In fact, many sanctuary residents welcome newcomers under their caring protection, and there are countless stories of youngsters being taken under the wing of an older resident.<sup>26</sup> With what they are given they forge their own paths, just like any of us would.

*“Every year for the past thirteen years I have watched and learned from these individuals—thousands of them—with one primary purpose in mind: to ensure that their lives in captivity are as rich and meaningful to them as possible.”* wrote Miriam Jones of VINE, a queer, ecofeminist sanctuary from the US.<sup>27</sup> This marks an attention to the contradictions inherent in sanctuary work, and to the uneasy position humans occupy as caregivers and guardians of animal others. There is an imbalance of power, one that isn't straightforward to deal with. Humans can't just remove themselves from the situation. They- we- shall stand there, along with other animals, in community, care-giving and receiving. It is not a unidirectional relationship, and it shouldn't be seen as such. Aiding animals should not be a matter of saviourism, done from a position of superiority or martyrdom. Rather, it can be seen as fighting together- against exploitation, against polluting industries, against capitalism. And even if many animal sanctuaries don't see themselves as necessarily anticapitalist, they do the work of untangling beings from the market, making them unfit for capital.<sup>28</sup> Solidarity is enacted as we are allying ourselves with other animals because we, too, are animals, and in the large scheme of things, we can see the threads that bind us together, the common oppressions.

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<sup>24</sup> Leth-Espensen; this is also confirmed in the author's personal interviews with sanctuary workers in Romania, as is the case of Nima the cow who received a surgery which was probably never before done in the country (from the Nima Sanctuary).

<sup>25</sup> See the social media pages of sanctuaries such as Nima Sanctuary, Spirit Animals Sanctuary, or the newsletter at VINE.

<sup>26</sup> Hether Rosenfeld, “Sanctuaries as multispecies safe spaces,” in *Feminist Animal Studies: Theories, Practices, Politics*, ed. Erika Cudworth, Ruth E. McKie, and Di Turgoose (London: Routledge, 2022); Colling.

<sup>27</sup> Jones.

<sup>28</sup> Abrell.

## 5. Trauma

2023. It was almost the end of summer when the African Swine Fever hit Northern Italy. Only a few leaves were turning brown and it was still warm as the virus scoured through the country's farms, affecting tens of thousands of pigs. Those who were not killed by the virus itself were "culled", as the outbreak had to be "quickly extinguished" since it "posed a major threat" to factory farms.<sup>29</sup> ASF can't be passed to humans, but it is devastating for pigs and there is no vaccine<sup>30</sup>. Because it spreads so easily, extreme measures are taken, but even so, it is impossible to stop when thousands of pigs are being bred constantly. It keeps spreading everywhere. Even in sanctuaries.

**Cuori Liberi, meaning Free, or Liberated Hearts**, is a farmed animal sanctuary in the Pavia province of Italy, sheltering over 300 animals: cows, ducks, geese, chickens, sheep, goats, turtles... and yes, pigs.<sup>31</sup> Somehow, the virus found its way in, taking the lives of most of them, as it is known to do. Some remained, seemingly surviving it. For a while. A public order was given to cull them, as for the industry to function, no trace of the virus could be permitted to exist.



<sup>29</sup> Sophie Kevany, "Italy culls tens of thousands of pigs to contain African swine fever," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/25/italy-african-swine-fever-asf-outbreak-lombardy-culls>.

<sup>30</sup> just wondering..., "Where are the pigs? African Swine Fever in Deadly Assemblages," December 19, 2021, Youtube video, 12:28, <https://youtu.be/Q5L4JpC2fdQ?si=VzAc-RX-OtzUbl57a>.

<sup>31</sup> See Progetto Cuori Liberi, <https://www.progettocuoiriliberi.it/>.

There was a big outcry.<sup>32</sup> These were pigs in sanctuary, living in relative safety and freedom. They were individuals who were loved, who had been already taken away from the practices of exploitative capital, and ultimately, in legal terms, they were the property of lawful citizens, living on their private property, just as companion animals are. And yet. None of these reasons held high enough for the public officials: pigs were seen as part of a species, numbers to be dealt with, vectors of disease. And the species? The species belonged, entirely, to those who profited off its living and dying.



On the 7th of September, activists started gathering at the gates of the sanctuary in resistance to the public order. They were called from all over the country: vegans, antispeciesists, and animal activists of various beliefs, standing in the town, trying day and night to prevent the police from entering. When the police attempted a raid, the activists chained themselves to the sanctuary gates, convincing them to give up. So, day and night, activists were present, asking only for time, for the possibility of recovery or at least, for a dignified death.<sup>33</sup> For within sanctuary, death is an event, a ritual for the departed, individualized, mourned. It is not the same, to die by the side of your loved ones and be let down into the earth quietly, or to be dragged by the feet to be thrown away, like trash. It is not the same.

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<sup>32</sup> Marco Reggio, “Peste suina: il progetto Cuori Liberi e l’appello per salvare 30 suidi”, *Rewriters*, September 17, 2023, <https://rewriters.it/peste-suina-il-progetto-cuori-liberi-e-l-ap-pello-per-salvare-30-suidi/>.

<sup>33</sup> Radio Radicale, “Presidio contro l’abbattimento dei maiali del rifugio Cuori Liberi per peste suina: intervista a Sara D’Angelo” September 16, 2023, <https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/708332/presidio-contro-labbattimento-dei-maiali-del-rifugio-cuori-liberi-per-pest-suina>.

*“In the face of a comrade sentenced to death, one pushes themselves to the limit. Whether a companion is healthy or sick is completely irrelevant. One stands together until the last breath”*- activist Silvia Molè wrote about that day.<sup>34</sup>

Because the gates could not be held forever. The police had gotten tired of laughing at the “crazy” activists, making such a fuss over a couple of hogs.<sup>35</sup> At the dawn of the 20th day of September, the police, fully equipped in riot gear, broke through, violently battling the chained activists, smashing them with batons and destroying the fences. They raided the interior of the Cuori Liberi sanctuary together with veterinarians from ATS Lombardy, surrounding the pigs and brutally hauling them towards death as if they were mere things, incapable of feeling. After the killings, one of them said, satisfied “We’ve made it!”.<sup>36</sup> The humans who had cared for the pigs most were not even permitted to say farewell.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. Solidarity

That morning is burnt into the eyes of those who were present. It haunts the dreams of any animal advocate who has heard of it. A *Heart of the movement* was violently broken into.<sup>38</sup> The sanctuary, which we thought was “safe-enough”, was not. Even worse, in Italy the status of “sanctuary” had begun to be recognized by law that year, after more than ten years of campaigning.<sup>39</sup> In a ministerial decree, the word “sanctuary” was used to distinguish a place of refuge from livestock farms and to designate its inhabitants as not destined for consumption. That

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<sup>34</sup> Silvia Molè, “Una Voce Da Sairano: ‘Quando Il Gioco è Truccato Solo i Folli Seguono Le Regole.’” *Radio Città Aperta*, October 23, 2023, <https://www.radiocittaperta.it/informazione/una-voce-da-sairano-quando-il-gioco-e-truccato-solo-i-folli-seguono-le-regole/>.

<sup>35</sup> Martina Micciché, “Peste Suina, Cosa Sta Succedendo in Lombardia e Perché Vengono Uccisi Anche I Maiali Liberati.” *LifeGate*, September 21, 2023, <https://www.lifegate.it/peste-suina-cosa-sta-succedendo-in-lombardia-e-perche-vengono-uccisi-anche-i-maiali-liberati>.

<sup>36</sup> retedeisantuari\_official, “Quelle che vi mostriamo sono immagini,” Instagram (post), <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyEFuzZIC9X/>.

<sup>37</sup> Local Team, “Sairano (Pavia), gli attivisti dopo lo sgombero delle forze dell’ordine: ‘Tutti morti i maiali,’” September 23, 2023, Youtube video, 5:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TVpvjuR4ZA>.

<sup>38</sup> A reference to what feminoska said in a facebook video. feminoska, “Il giorno dopo il mas-sacro, pensieri sparsi, agire sgangherato,” September 21, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/femoska/posts/pfbid02QvxPwunws7E3GnDY5HyQfzhGoQGPyRi5EVqr7KFBw9BXH6t9QKi-WyhMv8snqDF3l>.

<sup>39</sup> Serena Fogli, “Di peste suina, allevamenti e santuari: il caso Cuori Liberi”. *Wise Society*, September 20, 2023, <https://wisesociety.it/piaceri-e-societa/santuario-cuori-liberi-peste-suina/>; See also Vitadacani, Ippoasi, Santuario Capra Libera Tutti, Rifugio Miletta e Agripunk.

was a victory in itself, one much sought for. Previously- as it is in most countries - there was no difference legally between a farm and a refuge, and they had to abide by similar welfare laws, including the suggestion to euthanize early instead of providing cure.<sup>40</sup> But in spring, it had finally been translated into the law that these animals were not livestock anymore. In their reflection on the matter, many sanctuary activists saw this as a symbolic step towards victory and not a complete win, yet there was hope within it.<sup>41</sup>

That September day, that hope was smashed with batons, turned into the color of blood and bruises. In the words of Puppy Riot, an anonymous activist who was present, the raid and subsequent killing was “*a political trauma*”, a shock “*rooted in our liberal delusions, a slap in the face of our beliefs about basic rights in a democracy.*”<sup>42</sup> They underline how, at dusk, the “*true face of the state*” was revealed: one that doesn’t really promise safety or freedom, not even to its privileged citizens. Not if higher, capitalist interests are at stake. The police, as usual, did its job of protecting profit-making, this time, by dragging activists away from the fences and pigs towards their death, in much the same manner.



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40 This is a generalized example from other countries, such as Denmark. See Leth-Espensen.

41 Vitadacani, Ippoasi, Santuario Capra Libera Tutti, Rifugio Miletta e Agripunk.

42 Puppy Riot, “I maiali di Cuori Liberi: reagire al trauma politico,” *Pressenza*, September 23, 2023, <https://www.pressenza.com/it/2023/09/i-maiali-di-cuori-liberi-reagire-al-trauma-politico/>. See english version Puppy Riot, “The Pigs at Cuori Liberi (Free Hearts): Responding to Political Trauma,” *Resistenza Animale*, September 28, 2023, <https://resistenzanimale.noblogs.org/post/2023/09/28/the-pigs-at-cuori-liberi-free-hearts-responding-to-political-trauma/>.

As the winds of autumn came, a protest was called for, as big as it could be imagined. ***Don't touch animal sanctuaries*** was their motto as they marched in the city of Milan in thousands.<sup>43</sup> The protest at the gates of the Cuori Liberi sanctuary, together with the massive demonstration in the city, became a historical moment in Italian activism for animals. It wasn't only for its thousands of people chanting in the streets, but also for its subject and organizing. For one, liberation for human and non-human animals was intermingled, as there was no denying a radical critique of the capitalist system was needed. Second, the sanctuaries became more openly politicized as intersections with other social movements were drawn, including the need for anti-fascist organizing. Finally, there was a leadership of women, as they have always been the majority, but often the men took the most visible positions.<sup>44</sup>

There was a bursting river of people flooding the streets of Milan that October day in the name of nine pigs. Their mourning was a fight, a public outcry, an occupation of bodies. Their resistance was underlined with presence, their defiance was physical, their struggle was materialized. That grief was mobilizing, to be taken, like a pebble in one's heart, through all further struggles.<sup>45</sup>

## 7. Politics

If you had been on the streets of Milan that October day, you, too, would have felt the roar of anger, the simmering pain, and the echo of hope in the multitude. In the crowd of thousands reunited towards a common goal, asking for the protection of farmed animal sanctuaries, banners stood tall hinting at everything from reform to revolution. Because yes, maybe the goal should be to ask for much more, to go beyond the recognition of state institutions which end up trapping animals “in the same speciesist system”.<sup>46</sup> But how? How can we learn to imagine new worlds in which sanctuaries are not needed for non-human animals to be able to survive?

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<sup>43</sup> Animali Liberi, “ROMA: MANIFESTAZIONE NAZIONALE, Giù le mani dai Santuari!” November 6, 2023, <https://www.animaliliberi.org/site/roma-manifestazione-nazionale-giu-le-mani-dai-santuari/>.

<sup>44</sup> The three reasons were explored in Puppy Riot's essay.

<sup>45</sup> Puppy Riot. You can find a collection of texts on the Cuori Liberi subject at: <https://cospirazioneanimale.wordpress.com/cuori-liberi/>

<sup>46</sup> Assemblea Transterritoriale Transfemminista Antispecicista NON UNƏ Dİ MENO, “#MOLTOPIÙ DI GIÙ LE MANI DAI SANTUARI,” *assemblea corpi terra*, October 19, 2023, <https://assembleacorpierterra.com/2023/10/19/moltopiu-di-giu-le-mani-dai-santuari/>.



Activists put out a call “*to find new spaces and times for collective construction, other than those dictated by emergency*”.<sup>47</sup> This call to dream in solidarity with non-human animals towards common liberation begs us to take a closer look at the current possibilities.

Sanctuaries have limited resources in terms of money, time, and workforce, and it often happens that very few people care for a multitude of animals, feeding, cleaning, and paying attention to their medical and social needs every day. This puts a big strain on a couple of people, who have to operate in inhospitable agricultural territories, under hostile laws and adverse conditions, with the possibility to provide care for only a few of the many.<sup>48</sup> But ultimately, the biggest limitation of sanctuaries is the context in which they exist. They share their rural settings, supply networks and veterinarians with the very same animal agriculture that they fight against, suffering terribly from its biosecurity hazards and ecological destruction.<sup>49</sup> They are strained to begin with, political zones of fierce resistance.

Under a globalized, industrialized system, farmed animals mean only the profit that can be gathered from them, they're seen as numbers which go up or down depending on how well they're growing or whether they're dying at the optimal moment. We've seen that even in sanctuary, they are prevented from being treated as individuals. The Cuori Liberi case is certainly not the only one that shows this. A year or so before, when the ASF outbreak happened in Romania, Ruby, a pig befriended by a young boy who wished very much to keep her alive, was almost not brought to sanctuary because of laws that prevent the movement of pigs. Even if she was completely healthy, she was thought of 'en masse', as simply one of a species and thus a vector of disease. The boy's mother, however, creatively pushed through all obstacles, finally managing to bring her to one of the three known vegan sanctuaries operating in the country.<sup>50</sup> This, and other

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<sup>47</sup> Arbusti, “Volantino Chiamata Antispe,” *Arbusti*, October 24, 2023, <https://arbusti.noblogs.org/post/2023/10/24/volantino-chiamata-antispe/>.

<sup>48</sup> Author's personal observations; insights from Leth-Espensen; Elan Abrell. “Sanctuary-Making as Rural Political Action,” *Journal for the Anthropology of North America* 22, no. 2 (October 2019): 109–111, doi: [10.1002/nad.12107](https://doi.org/10.1002/nad.12107).

<sup>49</sup> Stephanie Eccles and Darren Chang, “The Inescapable Harms of Animal Agriculture: How Might Sanctuaries Respond to Threats from Climate Disasters and Diseases,” *Global Journal Of Animal Law*, 12, no. 1 (February 2024): 81–104, <https://ojs.abo.fi/ojs/index.php/gjal/article/view/1797>.

<sup>50</sup> Knowledge from personal interviews of the author and from the short film “Ruby and Aram”. See Natura Umană Film, “*Rubi și Aram - film documentar | O prietenie care schimbă cursul “firesc” al sărbătorii de Crăciun*” December 21, 2023, Youtube video, 25:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zCZ4p8yV1A>.

examples, underline that as long as the animal industry exists, farmed animals will never be truly free.

Because society as a whole wages a war against animals, sanctuaries are made to stand as flickering beacons of hope, small schools of the otherwise.<sup>51</sup> They need to exist as long as systematic human domination of other animals exists. Beyond the sanctuaries' focus to directly and presently rescue lives, addressing the broader political order becomes more and more urgent.<sup>52</sup> They are at the crossing of critical tensions, existing, as political scientist Timothy Pachirat calls them, *“between freedom and management”*, in proximity with the oppressed, and thus uniquely endowed to become *“sites of potential rupture and resistance”*.<sup>53</sup> By subverting the human-animal divide, they challenge speciesism and also become points from which to respond critically to *“racism, ableism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy”*.<sup>54</sup> And, as anthropologist Elan Abrell calls them, they are living *“experiments in alternative species relations”* that refuse the dominant power dynamics.<sup>55</sup>



51 The phrase “war against animals” references Dinesh Wadiwel’s book of the same name.

52 Eva Meijer, “Sanctuary Politics and the Borders of the Demos: A Comparison of Human and Nonhuman Animal Sanctuaries,” *Krisis | Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 41, no. 2 (December 2021): 35–48, doi: [10.21827/krisis.41.2.37174](https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.41.2.37174).

53 Pachirat.

54 Pachirat.

55 Abrell, “Sanctuary-Making as Rural Political Action”.

Sanctuaries teach us how to liberate our hearts among other animals. They are where we can learn to create community non-hierarchically with those who are very different from us, yet still crave the same sort of things: shelter, good food, close friends, safe sleep, and some play. Through nurturing belonging, offering contexts for self-determination, participation in decision-making, and reconfiguring spaces according to their inhabitants' desires, sanctuaries can become intentional communities, models for a world-to-come.<sup>56</sup> By practicing solidarity and creating cross-movement alliances, they can push towards a dream of futurity. To bring forth a world so free, that they are not needed in it.

*For the many animals in sanctuary,  
for those who have not yet reached it,  
and for those who will never reach it.*

*Always, for Pumba, Dorothy, Ursula, Bartolomeo, Carolina, Mercoledì, Crusca,  
Spino, Crosta.*

*In the hopes all might be, one day, liberated hearts.*



<sup>56</sup> Donaldson and Kymlicka.

## Afterthoughts and self-critique

After the last word settles, there's time to let it ferment.

Well, first the last word settles, and there are further edits. Then, when it is done, we record the voiceover, and there are, again, small edits. Then, it is finally done. And when we hear it again and again, we notice tiny things we didn't before, ideas that could have been said better, and, as time passes, sometimes even before Mina, the illustrator, finishes drawing the last scene, we learn something new, and change our minds, just a bit, about what we said. Not entirely, but there's a shift. So it is always when we publish something and we hope it will galvanize thoughts & emotions, it hits us, too, and changes us, too.

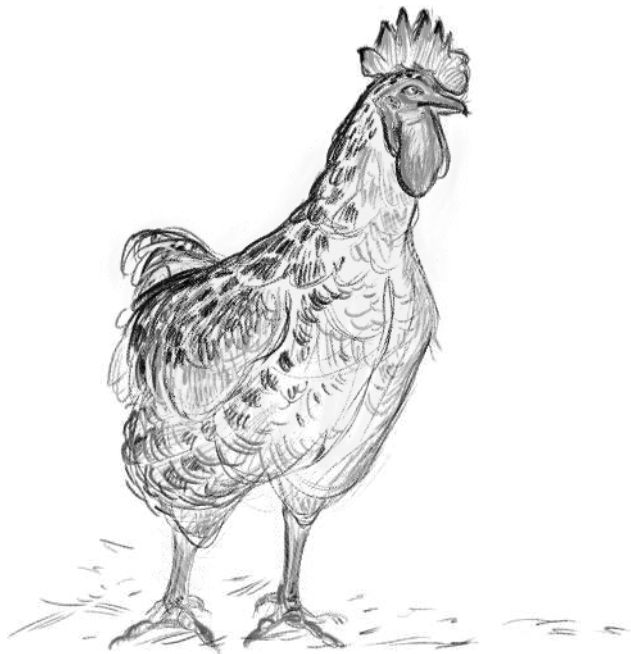
This animated essay is very dear to us for many reasons, but most importantly, for its subject. We have been following the work of animal sanctuaries for many years. One of us, M., has been independently researching the narratives of vegan sanctuary caregivers in Romania, how these places function, and what liberatory potential they might have. Another one of us, Aron, has been looking at the lives of street dogs and, adjacently, at dog shelters: how they help or hinder dog lives, imprisoning them. So from the very start, we've been deeply involved with this work, and we let the text flow guided by particular cases of nonhuman animal resistance and escape: Matilda the pig, and then Tilikum the orca, Tyke the elephant, Tatiana the tiger. And while the three wild animals were so central in the first part of the film, we had no space to explore the need for refuge and recovery of the animals exploited for entertainment, which is unfair. Instead, we focused on farmed animal sanctuaries (FAS) not only because they are so central to the vegan and animal rights movement, but because they hold so much promise, potential, and pitfalls within them. They are already politicized, taking animals which are only known as 'objects' and unmaking their property status, restituting subjectivity for them.

Establishing how FASes work was essential before we could delve into the Cuori Liberi case, which we followed as closely as we could from afar- as closely as one can from published texts and announcements on websites, blogs, social media, and anything written that we could find. Because of this, our narrative around what happened is limited, and we invite you to learn for yourself if you can. Despite this drawback, telling the story of Cuori Liberi from afar is valuable,

because it regards all movements for animal liberation. For us, the teachings can be summed up to three central issues: first, the safety of non-human animals as property is always fragile under the power of an anthropocentric state. Second, the lives of non-human animals who escaped or were saved from factory farming remain entangled with the animal industrial complex, as long as it exists. Third, liberal law won't be enough to protect any of us, because the police will always enforce the interests of the capital.

But this isn't hopeless. It is information. The mobilization at Cuori Liberi in Italy and the coordination of the activists who saved Matilda in the UK tell us that we can make a fuss about what we believe in. And that sometimes it will work. In some ways. Maybe not the ones we want, or expect to. But trouble we must make.

We believe that the conflicts and resolutions arising from sanctuary spaces are indispensable to total liberation because these spaces teach us how to do interspecies care work and how to live together. Or how not to, how it's not enough. Regardless, we put our thoughts and energy out here for you to carry it further, to argue and be changed by what you learn, what you disagree with or what you feel your heart soaring towards.



## **Further questions for discussions/workshops**

### **1. How can we recognize, highlight, and act in support of animals who resist and escape?**

- a. Are we able to discern when such resistance is undermined and misrepresented? Through what kind of discourses? How are they linked to human oppression?
- b. Which techniques and tactics do we have to enact our solidarity? As individuals, as groups?

### **2. What are the animal sanctuaries in your area? Are they vegan/antispeciesist? Are they politically on the left?**

- a. What challenges do they face? Find specific examples.
- b. How can/do they respond to these challenges?
- c. How can people from outside and the broader movement support them?
- d. How can we support animals within a sanctuary when we disagree with the politics/practices of the sanctuary managers?

### **3. How else can solidarity towards nonhuman animals be enacted upon, within, and outside sanctuary spaces? Make a list!**

- a. How are we in solidarity with farmed animals? Wild animals? Liminal/urban animals?
- b. Which groups of specific animals can we materially support, not just discursively? Eg. neighborhood dogs/cats/pigeons, animals in farms near us, etc.
- c. How aware are we of the nonhuman beings who live in our surroundings? And of their needs?

### **4. How to imagine worlds in which sanctuaries are not needed for non-human animals to be able to survive? What else is needed for these worlds to be possible? Be bold and daring in imagining otherwise.**

## Gratitude and mentions

Gratitude to Marco Reggio for the helpful comments on the Cuori Liberi case.

Thanks to Alice Olivari, Valentina Rubini & Francesca for allowing us to include their song in this animated essay.

Sanctuaries that are mentioned in the text or referenced visually in the animated essay: Surge Sanctuary (UK), Sepale (RO), Spirit Animals Sanctuary (RO), Nima Sanctuary (RO), Barn Sanctuary (US), VINE Sanctuary (US), Cuori Liberi (IT), Agripunk (IT). We also drew visual inspiration from Hartmut Kiewert's paintings.

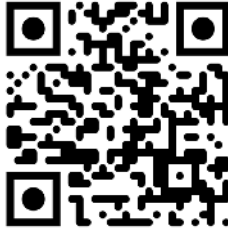
Finally, we are very thankful to those who continue to support us on Patreon & Ko-fi! Many thanks to Rani, Nino, Bibi & Paul for all the sweet messages and the coffee. Other special mentions: Irina Culic, Ana-Maria Herța, Anca Alexandra, Andrew Lee, Elina Moraitopoulou, Gabriela Oprea, Jordan, Marie-Leth Espensen, Matt H, Nick, Nóra Ugron, Philip Murphy, Shaina Sedai, Tudor.

If you can, please support our project! The work we do takes a very long time and is very difficult to sustain without financial help.



## More about just wondering...

You can find out more about our work at our website [justwondering.io](http://justwondering.io), follow us on Instagram ([@justwondering.io](https://www.instagram.com/justwondering.io)) & more importantly, on our YouTube channel ([@justwondering](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjwondering)) where you can find all our animated essays!



We have been making short animated essays for eight years, starting from scratch, from concept to final details, minute by minute, putting words to cloud documents, pen to tablet, hand to the mouse/keyboard, and writing/drawing/mastering/editing/producing videos to reflect on, to feel, and to imagine further. We draw inspiration from a broad array of activist movements on the left, critical theory, antispeciesism, vegan sociology, feminisms, critical animal studies, and critical posthumanism.

At times we have collaborated with other researchers/artists/activists/writers, either for writing or music, so check out our website to find out more

### **Selected work (available open-access on YouTube)**

Our animated film “we fly, we crawl, we swim- a short film about climate justice”

**Synopsis:** The search for justice is not an individual endeavor, it is a collective practice of world-making. Haunted by past extinctions, a human being starts wondering what climate justice might look like, and what its faces may be when other beings are involved in the questioning. A cat and many other non-human animals become present and part of the process, sharing their experiences and moving together towards multispecies justice. The questions the film poses are as real as you (or me) are.

**Length:** 23 minutes and 31 seconds

**Country of origin:** Romania



## **The “Dictionary of Thinkers and Concepts” playlist**

1. Everything is equally weird - on Graham Harman’s philosophy
2. Making kin beyond babies- after Donna Haraway
3. The end of endings- with Timothy Morton’s philosophy
4. A Litany for Survival in Pandemic Times- after Audre Lorde
5. Animal & Disability Liberation- with Sunaura Taylor
6. Critical Pedagogy Beyond Humanism- after Paulo Freire
7. Indigenous Knowledges and the Teachings of Plants- after Robin Wall Kimmerer
8. A political theory of animal rights- after Sue Donaldson & Will Kymlicka
9. Ways of thinking about animal issues- after Matthew Calarco
10. Animal ontology and philosophical ethology- after Roberto Marchesini

## **The “Videopoems for Palestine” playlist**

1. If I must die by Refaat Alareer. Videopoem for Palestine (I)
2. Travel Tickets by Samih al-Qasim. Videopoem for Palestine (II)
3. What a Gazan should do during an Israeli air strike by Mosab Abu Toha. Videopoem for Palestine (III)

## **The “collaborations” playlist (selections)**

1. Our streets: queer & Black bodies in movement and protest
2. Where are the pigs? African Swine Fever in Deadly Assemblages
3. The Roma woman, at the edge of the world
4. weirdos, crips and broken things: on the neurodiversity movement & futures beyond capitalism



**To follow our individual work, you can check our personal websites:**

[aronnor.ro/](http://aronnor.ro/)  
[mariamartelli.ro/](http://mariamartelli.ro/)  
[minamimosa.ro/](http://minamimosa.ro/)



This zine was designed by Mina Mimosa,  
and printed by the anarchist publishing collective Pagini Libere.





BECAUSE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE  
WAGES A WAR AGAINST ANIMALS,  
SANCTUARIES ARE MADE TO STAND  
AS FLICKERING BEACONS OF HOPE,  
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ANIMAL  
SANCTUARIES



just wondering...