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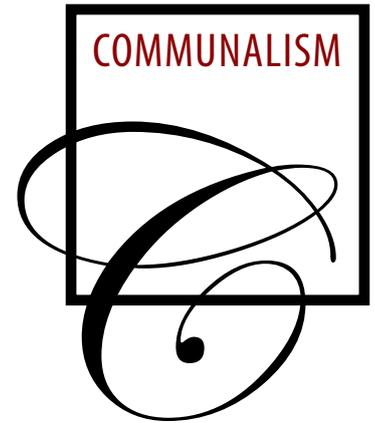
# COMMUNALISM

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A Social Ecology Journal

## Decentralization: The Lost Cause of the Ecology Movement?





# A Reinvigorated Cause

Our enormous cities today are conglomerations of concrete and steel that devour the world's natural resources and degrade and impoverish its people. In a sustainable society, common sense tells us, they cannot remain as they are. Just a few decades ago ecological activists were fighting for a vision of a decentralized society based on humanly scaled, ecologically friendly technologies and a participatory, grassroots democracy. As Brian Tokar highlights in "Utopia or Apocalypse," they advanced decentralization and fundamental social change. But the ecological agenda has since been abandoned in favor of environmental activism that is mainly concerned with lobbying national and international governments to gain piecemeal reforms.

In this first issue of *Communalism*, we are seeking to reinvigorate and build on this earlier vision. Inspired by radical social theorist Murray Bookchin, we argue that to create an ecological society, we need a new social ecological politics. We need to break up the megalopolis into humanly scaled communities, decentralizing our cities both physically and politically. We need to tailor urban life to its natural surroundings and apply ecological solutions locally and regionally. We need to establish local political processes where communities

and individuals can make decisions on the matters concerning their lives and society's relationship to nature. Ecological cities, as Janet Biehl argues, would be humanly scaled networks of self-managing communities that share and cooperate on economic, political, and cultural matters.

Contrary to common belief, a decentralized society would not be one in which we all move to the countryside, milk goats in the morning, and do handicrafts in the evening. On the contrary, as Jonathan Korsár shows in "Rebuilding Our Cities," a decentralized economy and energy system would be one in which people would still travel by rail, still work on their computers, and still enjoy all the cultural pleasures civilization has to offer.

As we embark on this endeavor, we are in need of theory, and it is the aim of *Communalism* to provide it. To push society in a progressive direction, we will provide analyses of the present crisis and offer a utopian vision of a better future. And so that a new democratic ecology movement can learn from the failures and successes of past movements, we will offer an understanding of their history.

It is our firm belief that the radical decentralist cause has new significance in the era of global capitalism. It is our aim to put it at the forefront of ecological struggles.

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*A map that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.*

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)



Photo: Adam Jones

## Contents

- 6 **Rebuilding Our Cities**  
Jonathan Korsár
- 11 **Neighbourhood Government**  
Mat Little
- 14 **Solving the Energy Crisis**  
Interview with David Morris, by Sveinung Legard
- 18 **9 Arguments for Democracy**  
Sveinung Legard
- 22 **Movements for Climate Action:  
Toward Utopia or Apocalypse?**  
Brian Tokar
- 35 **Art and Progress**  
Adam Krause
- 44 **Deep Ecology, Misanthropy, and  
the Genesis of the Bookchin Caricature**  
Andy Price
- 2 **Editorial**
- 4 **Comment**
- 5 **Challenges**
- 21 **Past Present Future**
- 62 **Reviews**
- 65 **Our Movement**
- 67 **Endnotes**



# COMMENT

**Janet Biehl** co-edited *Left Green Perspectives*. Her books include *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* and *Libertarian Municipalism*.

## Ecology of Freedom in the Democratic City

**In medieval Europe** restless serfs in their feudal domains would sometimes flee the onerous lifeways imposed by seigniorial masters and take refuge in a town or city. Built near ancient Roman ruins, these medieval towns allowed the refugees the freedom to build new lives. Just being in a city for a year protected a person from recapture by former masters. “City air makes free” (*Stadtluft macht frei*) became a watchword.

Today too, cities can be arenas of freedom from restrictive, more rural cultures and lifeways. But if breathing city air makes us free, nowadays it can also make us sick.

Industrial capitalism is destroying the environment at a breath-taking – or breath-destroying – pace. Pollution fouls not only air but water and food and even our body chemistry. People and animals perish from unexplained illnesses. We may not understand entirely why climate change is occurring so quickly, or exactly how technicians can alter the genes that are the basis of life, but one thing is clear: the cause of environmental destruction is a system, industrial capitalism, that is geared to making profits and that has no compunction about poisoning people and the natural world in pursuit of gain. By reducing the complexity of natural processes, by turning soil into sand, argued Murray Bookchin in his great 1982 book *The Ecology of Freedom*, the environmental damage caused by industrial capitalism is even reversing the course of natural evolution.

**What is to be done?** Some environmentalists argue that nation-states should pass laws to prevent capitalist enterprises from doing

excessive damage – laws to restrict carbon emissions and limit radiation to “safe” levels and prevent too much forest destruction. Since our survival as a species is threatened, we should certainly try to keep going as long as we can, by whatever means will work, however tepid. But no one should be deceived that such remedial legislation is going to solve the basic problem over the long term. Trading credits for carbon emissions, for example, is not going to prevent pollution. At best such reforms will simply be to extend the life span of a destructive system. We will not solve the ecological crisis, argued Bookchin in *The Ecology of Freedom*, until we address the basic cause and eliminate industrial capitalism once and for all.

That competitive system is wreaking destruction not only on the environment but on human social life. It is turning more and more areas of our lives into commodities, the better to buy and sell them on the marketplace. Commodification is transforming us from people into consumers, reducing our desires to what money can buy, making us selfish, making our better natures something that only “losers” take seriously. It is stripping our cultures of community and fellow-feeling, of solidarity and ethics, consigning community and mutual aid to distant memory. At the same time the nation-state ensures that we remain docile subjects, paying taxes, and casting the occasional vote to endow ruling regimes with legitimacy, so that they may more efficiently advance the interests of capitalist enterprises.

Thus the ecological crisis is inseparable from the social crisis; and their solutions are intertwined. Hence social ecology. To solve

the ecological crisis, argued Bookchin, we must put an end as well to all systems of rule, of exploitation, of domination, of hierarchy. For the very idea of dominating nature, as Bookchin showed, arose from the domination of human by human, of women by men, of the young by the old.

**What will replace capitalism** and the nation-state? Surely no progressive-minded person wants to see the return of Communist totalitarianism. No person who aims at a free, ecological society wants to see another Stalin. We need to find a way to eliminate capitalism that not only avoids dictatorship but creates freedom.

We need an alternative system, Bookchin argued, one that abolishes both Communist authoritarianism and Capitalist exploitation. A society that values community as well as the individual, fellow-feeling as well as the self, and ethics as well as the means of life. A society in which town and country are integrated, that exists in harmony with the natural world, and in which we cooperate with each other, in which sexism and racism and homophobia are tossed into the dustbin of history. An ecological society would be free of domination and exploitation, indeed of hierarchy. For as Bookchin showed, hierarchy is a problem far more ancient than class, and one that runs much deeper.

**A social ecological society** would be one that people, as active citizens rather than docile taxpayers, manage themselves through face-to-face democracy. In this libertarian polity of communal self-management, adult

## The Purpose of this Journal

With the launching of this journal, we have taken an important step in consolidating an international movement based on the ideas of social ecology. Social ecology, as developed by Murray Bookchin, provides a coherent framework to understand the world we live in and a politics to change it. The name *Communalism* describes our ideology and our aim to create a humanistic, ecological society, politically structured around confederations of democratized municipalities.

This journal, we hope, will provide a solid platform for these ideas. We aim to reach out to existing groups and individuals all over the world who are sympathetic to our ideas; at the same time, we hope this journal can be a tool for these groups and individuals to reach out to new audiences. The aim of this journal is therefore twofold. First, we will show the *relevance* of social ecology in understanding contemporary society and the crises we face. Each issue will have a clear focus, like this one on ecology and decentralization. With a clear, reconstructive focus, communalist analyses will be in a series of articles that deal with pressing issues, such as: democracy, migration, housing, racism, military conflicts, religion, technology, as well as queer and gender issues; indeed, on every thinkable challenge people face today. These articles, we hope, can be useful in showing the practicality of these ideas to new audiences. Above all, we seek to show that a new left-libertarian approach is needed, and that communalist politics has much to offer in this regard.

Second, we seek to *advance* the theory itself. By providing room for longer, theoretical essays we will bring to light important challenges facing our movement and our ideology; these essays will range from politics, activism, and organization to philosophy, history, and culture. These essays, we think, can be particularly useful for study groups willing to engage with our ideas. Therefore, to meet our ambitions, each issue has a number of shorter essays of a more practical and political focus, as well as the more in-depth theoretical contributions.

As the movement develops and the journal matures, we hope to become a stable platform for a variety of voices in and around the global social ecology movement. This journal is not in any way meant to be a substitute for local activism. On the contrary, we hope it can be a useful and inspirational supplement. Where study groups do not yet exist, we strongly encourage *you* to start one. We also hope you will help in distributing the journal.

In the years ahead, this journal can provide a much-needed international voice for left-libertarian radicalism. But our success depends on your participation, wherever you are. Help us build a new politics and a new movement!

citizens would make decisions about social life, including the economy. Every urban neighborhood and every rural town would create a popular assembly that meets as often as the people chose; the assemblies' decisions would have the force of law, because people would have taken the power into their own hands. As citizens, people would make decisions, not simply to benefit their selfish desires, but for the common good of their communities. So empowered, they would be free to make the decisions that would end the ecological destruction of our communities.

One might think that people wouldn't have enough time for such self-governance because they must spend large parts of their day at work. Bookchin would answer that we now have the technical means to do something unprecedented in human history: to have machines perform most toil. For millennia people's aspirations to freedom were suppressed by the need to spend their days engaged in drudgery. Today technology has made possible a dramatic reduction of the workday, if only we could agree to produce that which we need and little more, rather than wasteful consumer goods. Production for use, not for profit, would mean enough leisure time to gain control of our lives.

The overriding task, then, is to create an ecological democratic city, one that has ended ecological destruction because it has ended the domination of human by human. Gigantic cities would be broken up, so that our built environment would exist on a manageable, human scale. Manufacturing would be decentralized into smaller plants so that democratic communities could manage them, and basic industries municipalized. Energy sources would be renewable, like solar and wind, bringing the natural world back into urban consciousness.

Such a society may seem an abstract utopia, but such is the urgency of the ecological crisis, Bookchin argued, that utopia is no longer a fantasy. It is a concrete need. In such a way we could once again have a city that does not choke us, whose air once again would make us free. ●

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# REBUILDING OUR CITIES

**Text:** Jonathan Korsár

**Global warming will not be mitigated until we change the wasteful model of capitalist urbanization. Here is how we can transform our cities.**

If there is one number you should remember when talking about global warming, it is 350. According to the latest climate science research, we have to lower and stabilize the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere to no higher than 350 parts per million. Today we have passed the safety zone and arrived at 390 parts per million. Unless we rapidly return to 350 parts per million in this century, we risk reaching irreversible tipping points with consequences such as the melting of the Greenland ice sheet and major methane releases from melting permafrost, which in turn will reinforce global warming.

To seriously mitigate climate change will involve not only reducing global emissions to more or less zero relatively soon, but also taking CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere by large scale reforestation programs and improved management of forestry, agriculture, and industry. It will move us away from the dependency on oil and other fossil energy resources, not least because these will become scarce in the future anyway as a consequence of growing demand and declining supply. Even the chief economist at the International Energy Agency has stated that “the earlier we start, the better, because all of our economic and social system is based on oil, so to change from that will take a lot of time and a lot of money and we should take this issue very seriously.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, there are at least two factors compelling us to pursue far reaching societal changes. The atmospheric pool of CO<sub>2</sub> is overloaded, and the growing oil scarcity within the present global economy will hit our societies hard if we do not manage to radically lower our fossil fuel dependence soon.

The scope of these changes will have to be worldwide. Still, high income urban areas will have a special role to play in this transformation: First of all, they are responsible for most of the greenhouse gas emissions, and secondly, they exhaust natural resources in every area of this planet.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the actual economic and technological changes must be pursued at a city and regional level. The reason for this is simple: It is in the city where most of us live and where processed natural resources are both used and wasted.

## **REINVIGORATING CITY LIFE**

One of the most important things we will have to do to break with the present unsustainable development in developed capitalist societies is to rehabilitate city life itself. Although capitalist urbanization now places an enormous toll on the environment, this does not mean that cities are necessarily anti-ecological.

Quite to the contrary, cities have a range of potentialities of scale which might not only reduce our need for transport, but which also

may enable a more environmentally efficient use of water, nutrients, materials and energy. Examples of this include the integration of industrial processes with regional resources and local use of co-products, decentralized energy systems, environmentally benign water and waste management, and reduced needs for transportation due to the city’s potential walkability.

These potentially ecological features of city-life, however, are suppressed by capitalist urbanization. In today’s urban conglomerations, huge amounts of energy are being wasted on unnecessary transportation of people and things, and waste is produced in huge quantities because of poorly integrated productive processes which are scaled to match an exaggerated demand for consumer goods.

A reinvigoration of city life is thus premised on a wholehearted transformation of the present economic and physical outlook of our cities. New energy generation technologies must be applied, and cities must do away with fossil energy dependence, while they economize their energy and resource use in the built environment, transport and industry.

## **SELF-RELIANCE**

When drawing our map for this reinvigoration, it can be useful to think in terms of self-reliance. Self-reliant cities have a capacity to mitigate climate change because

they turn radically towards renewable and more regional resources. In high income countries, they alleviate the dependency on natural resources – often transported from the other side of the globe – which could be better utilized in lower income countries.

More self-reliant cities can also depend more on resources that are controllable by the cities themselves, in collaboration with their supportive regions as well as other cities and regions moving in the same direction. This involves a certain degree of regionalization, and allows cities to become more balanced economically and ecologically.

Moving in the direction of self-reliant cities should not be confused with rural dreams of self-sufficient life-styles. Indeed, attempts to maximize household self-sufficiency can to a certain extent be counterproductive in relation to the project of building ecological cities: It can enforce social divisions and exclude people who cannot afford the technologies necessary for such an endeavour.<sup>3</sup>

Building self-reliant cities is neither an attempt to go back to earlier times nor a less technologically advanced society. In fact, quite the opposite. A host of technological innovations is actually favouring self-reliant cities. Automation in manufacturing, miniaturization, efficient electrical motors, innovations in information and communications, as well as ecological

methods for building, sanitation and production have drastically increased the opportunities for a highly efficient and more decentralized economy. Today, we know how we could potentially do more with less. This is of course greatly enhancing the prospect of building self-reliant cities. The main problem is indeed the way today's economic system propels many new innovations to amplify

over-consumption instead of making room for more freedom in our cities.

Of special importance for the prospect of building self-reliant cities, is the development of technologies for utilizing renewable energy resources. This technology has advanced enormously in the last decades. Compare today's opportunities to turn to renewable energy, with that of the 1970s. When the



Photo: Anne Ogundipe

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decided to increase the oil price through an oil embargo in 1973, an energy crisis hit many high income countries without renewable energy and energy conservation measures being readily available. Today, even some conventional industries are working on renewable energy. Thus, technologies like wind power generators, photovoltaic solar cells, geothermal heat pumps, wave power installations and biofuel generation plants are to a large extent ready for mass production and application.<sup>4</sup>

#### DECENTRALIZING POWER

While applying renewable energy-technologies at a regional and city level, we can also decentralize power. Not only do we get electricity, heat or cooling from these efforts, but we also strengthen the self-reliance of cities. In many countries, energy generation and distribution was historically a municipal affair. The creation of energy generation capacity on the local level can therefore, to a certain extent, be seen as a return to basics. This time, however, we can do it with a different level of environmental performance as we have much cleaner technologies to apply.

Standing in the way of a decentralized energy system has not only been a lack of efficient technologies, but also the fact that most industrial countries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century established profit-driven energy monopolies. As a result, most urban areas in the world today, including high income areas, are dependent on very large, centralised power plants and long distance transmission of electricity.

The cities of the world are, in other words, dependent on a highly wasteful energy system. In many places as much as two thirds of the energy originally produced is wasted (as heat into the air) when transported over long distances. To a large extent, the problem is that energy generation generally takes place too far away from where by-products, such as heat, can be utilised. Moreover, the centralised energy systems we are presently dependent

on, also make cities vulnerable for major blackouts with potentially devastating effects on human well-being and safety.

Decentralized energy generation, in contrast, makes it possible to utilise the heat that today is being wasted. It also minimizes energy losses from distribution and transmission by locating generation close to where the energy is used. Decentralized energy not only increases efficiency, it also reduces the need for backup power: A system of many small generators does not suffer a major blackout if one generator fails.<sup>5</sup>

The reason why renewable energy lends itself to decentralization is that it exists more or less everywhere, and it comes in many different forms which may complement each other. Cogeneration plants – that is power plants where electricity and heat are generated at the same time, and sometimes cooling as well – can, for example, be powered by biomass, but also fed with heat from geothermal and hydrothermal resources or by solar thermal systems. Solar and also wind power can be erected in regions surrounding the city, but also in the city itself on rooftops and walls. As harnessing renewable energy close to where it is used increases the gain from those energy sources, it also more or less compensates for the lower capacity of smaller power plants.

Going in for decentralized energy allows many smaller production facilities and neighbourhoods to generate their own power. One of the major strengths of this is that it allows for generation technologies to be easily mass-produced and tailored to the ever-changing energy needs of cities.

Decentralized energy generation is a central step towards realizing the city's ecological potentiality. Everywhere cities of a reasonable density have the opportunity of putting the use of different forms of energy close to where the energy is generated, which makes possible the most efficient use of our natural resources. Cities also have the advantage of being concentrators of by-products – “waste” – that might be recycled or used as energy sources.

Furthermore, cities are spatial communities that can be intentionally designed and re-designed to maximize the use of the energy provided by the sun and wind.

#### A MORE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Getting energy services in the form of heat, cooling or electricity from renewable energy sources is only one of the economical challenges implicit in building self-reliant cities. Changing how we get our food and all the other stuff we need to live rounded and productive lives is another one. As already stressed, the shift towards self-reliance does not imply that we should get self-sufficient. Still it is important to grasp that it really implies that we get a much more substantial share of our food and our materials from more regional and renewable resources than today.

To a large extent we must turn towards a more plant-matter based economy. What this means is that different forms of biomass in self-reliant cities will be not only a major source for energy, food and clothes, but also for chemicals, inks, paints, plastics, building materials etcetera.

This also implies that we must radically reduce our consumption by maximizing the efficiency of materials and energy use in industry, and implementing new ways of sharing and pooling resources in our cities. Otherwise, we will not be able to make our local and renewable resources sufficient. The major challenge is to design systems which make it possible to use our natural resources to the fullest possible extent. In industry, by-products today considered as waste must be recycled whenever possible. In society in general, the assets now underused – such as space, tools or buildings – must in similar ways be used more intensively and cooperatively.

A central step will be to create a functional cooperation between cities and their hinterlands. That is, cities must relate more carefully to their supportive regions, and work more closely with their people. New forms of cooperation will indeed have to be established when farmers and countryside municipalities



To a large extent, the required transformation of our urban areas will not involve building new houses, but retrofitting old ones. Enhancing the existing built environments must be a major focus when we turn towards increased self-reliance. Photo: Aaron Gustafson

are to provide cities with a growing share of their energy and material sustenance.

#### **A FUNCTIONAL CITY NETWORK**

A crucial step towards more self-reliance and resource efficiency in cities is getting away from most of today's dependence on cars. Cities must reduce the need for travel by becoming pedestrian and more complete communities, where people can work and participate in a cultural, social life close to where they have their home.

Planners say today that 100 jobs and people per hectare is required for walking and cycling to be the dominant modes of transportation.<sup>6</sup> Somewhat less dense cities may very well be potential pedestrian cities in the future. Even so, it is quite obvious that if we attempt to build more self-reliant cities without today's car dependence, they have to be significantly denser than many communities are today in order to be pleasant places for people of varying walking capacities.

On the other hand it is of no less importance to design an efficient transport network for

both people and goods, enabling cities and regions to cooperate without depending on fossil fuels for transport. Even if this in some circumstances can mean maintaining some roads for lorry and car transport, it more often probably involves a good rail based communications network connecting cities as well as the city districts making up metropolitan areas. In the latter, transit options should probably, at least in the short run, be made faster than the freeways, as well as convenient and seamlessly connected in order to gain public support.

The challenge is of course to also find ways to lower city-countryside transportation needs so that they can be met without fossil fuels. It seems unlikely that the present volume of cars in the countryside can run on biofuels or electricity, even though some will of course do so. Perhaps we must consider making travelling from countryside to city more of a seasonal event, staying, for example, in the countryside for many months when the weather provides and when the need for land work is more pressing. And staying in

the city during other parts of the year when the countryside is a less hospitable place to be. In any case, transport issues are crucial to address in order to keep our society together as we are turning away from fossil energy.

#### **MAKING THE NECESSARY CHANGES**

What has been outlined above are attainable changes in the way our cities are organised, powered, built and managed. It is worth re-emphasizing that it is imperative, from a global perspective, to make these changes now, as we have to mitigate global warming and because people in the poorer parts of the world have the same right to development as anyone living in high income countries.

The steps outlined can be seen as parts of a minimum program to rebuild our cities along ecological lines. Still we should be cautious that many of the possible changes described also can be made part of a capitalist development that will not be able mitigate climate change. In fact, in a worst case scenario some of the steps described, taken out of the context of a wholehearted transition, can be

used as decorative measures in our current anti-ecological capitalist society.

The energy policy of the European Union for example is to support both renewable energy *and* further investments in coal and nuclear power. It aims furthermore at increasing efficiency of energy use *and* at the same time to increase energy use in order to increase the competitiveness of the European economy. In other words, the European Union wants to implement renewable energy and efficiency measures to enable an even more aggressive production and consumption of commodities.

The European Union is just one case in point. Governments all over the world, use more or less the same rationale for not even considering the necessary measure to lower and stabilize the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere at 350 parts per million or less.

Thus, the struggle for self-reliant cities must be a struggle for strengthening the power of the people to make sharp priorities concerning societal, technological and economic development. Indeed building self-reliant cities should be understood as an endeavour not only in sharp conflict with the dominant capitalist urban model but with capitalist society at large.

Radically expanding the popular capacity of democratic decision-making in economic matters will therefore be crucial for all progress towards this goal. Here are a few more examples of why:

A transition to a more plant or biomass based economy may very well lead to deadly conflicts, where the luxury of the privileged is posed in direct opposition to the basic needs of others. In 2007-8 this was exactly what happened when demand for biofuel was one of the factors driving up food prices, with devastating effects for the world's poor. This shows that if citizens are not informed and empowered to make the necessary choices, such conflicts are likely to arise.

Building pedestrian-friendly cities also involves essential choices. That is because it is not necessary to have 50 per cent of urban land devoted to motorized traffic if there are many fewer cars. The transition will open up these areas to something else: Sports, parks, energy generation, small scale industry or perhaps new housing. But how do we make the best choices

for how to use these areas? For this, we would need an informed citizenry with the capacity to cooperate democratically based on the needs of their neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

Going in for decentralized and renewable energy is yet another example. This would in many places involve big investments, but *how* big those investments should be depends on the needs. Will efficiency measures in the city be taken before building a new energy system? Again the level and quality of our transition depend on our collective capacity to make informed choices.

### SCALING UP THE AMBITIONS

Rebuilding our cities implies something of a municipal revolution. This is not only because the far reaching application of renewable and decentralized energy, the transition to a new more regional economy, the building of mixed and pedestrian cities and, the development of efficient transportation are challenges that need to be met at the municipal level. It is also because making so many changes in everyday life and the ways cities are managed demands a radically expanded participatory democracy in order to succeed.

Climate change is thus very much an issue of building, planning and managing the economic life of cities in a new way, something which involves a new kind of popular politics. To open the space for this politics, municipalities must overturn the logic of the market economy. Then they must attempt to build the institutions that make democratic and ecological choices possible. This involves breaking with the culture of administration in our municipalities that developed its rationality and hierarchical forms during an era of increasing energy use and centralisation.

Building self-reliant cities also necessitates a decisive break with the paradigm of incrementalism; the idea that change only can come through very small steps. Self-reliant cities must spring up like mushrooms in the years ahead. We must scale up our ambitions and collective efforts to meet the immense challenge of mitigating climate change. The battle for the future will be in our cities. Against the wasteful urban model and capitalistic society on the one side, stands the potentiality of self-reliant, radically democratic and free cities. ●

### NOTES:

1. Steve Connor, "Warning: Oil supplies are running out fast", *The Independent*, August 3, 2009.
2. For an ethically sound and politically useful framework to quantify the mitigation responsibility of high income countries or cities, see Paul Baer, Tom Athanasiou and Sivan Kartha, "A 350 ppm Emergency Pathway," A Greenhouse Development Rights brief (available at: <http://gdrights.org/2009/10/25/a-350-ppm-emergency-pathway/>).
3. Peter Newman et al, *Resilient Cities: Responding to Peak Oil and Climate Change* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2009), pp. 35-47.
4. For an assessment of the potential of renewable energy, see Sven Teske et. al., *Energy Revolution: A Sustainable World Energy Outlook* (Amsterdam/Brussels: Greenpeace International, European Renewable Energy Council [EREC] 2008).
5. For an overview of decentralized energy, see *Decentralised Power: An Energy Revolution for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Greenpeace UK 2005).
6. Newman, *Resilient Cities*, p. 95.

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The late 1960s saw an upsurge of popular democracy amid violent conflicts and anti-war protests. Milton Kotler brought to light a movement for local control across America, and believed that community self-rule could provide a democratic alternative to national representative government.

# NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNMENT

**Text:** Mat Little

The impulse for communities to manage themselves is, to communalists, a thread running throughout history. Obscured by the state's monopolisation of power, this political realm frequently has a subterranean existence, bubbling to the surface in challenges to the professional control of local affairs, before receding again. One recent, though barely remembered, upsurge of popular democracy was the US neighbourhood power movement of the late 1960s and '70s.

An early chronicler of the movement was Chicago-based organiser, Milton Kotler, whose manifesto *Neighborhood Government* appeared in 1969. Amid the violent conflicts and anti-war protests of the late 1960s, Kotler discovered "a movement for local control" across America. In the poorest parts of US cities, people were coming together to change their lives in a tangible, *political* sense. They were demanding the transfer of political authority to institutions they directly controlled, and were using that democratic power to pass their own laws and control

rents, prices, banks, taxation, schools, housing and welfare programmes.

## A HISTORY OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

Kotler located this movement for self-rule in the *neighbourhoods* of cities. The neighbourhood had a special meaning for him. It is not, as commonly assumed, just a place where people live and socialise. It is, buried deeply under the surface of central state control, a political unit. He defined the neighbourhood as "a political settlement of small territory and familiar association, whose absolute property is its capacity for deliberative democracy."

Kotler delved into American history to show how the neighbourhoods of many US cities were once independent self-governing territories before being annexed and then subjugated by larger entities around them. Originally, many US cities were directly democratic: political decisions were made by town meetings of citizens. In these town democracies there were factions but not

organised political parties. This popular democracy was gradually replaced in the nineteenth century by what he calls "aristocratic government" through elected representatives.

But this was not just an American phenomenon. Kotler claimed that the "fundamental character" of modern revolution has been local insurrection against the central power of the state. Like Murray Bookchin in *The Third Revolution*, he saw this movement for grassroots control in the Parisian sections of the French Revolution and the factory and neighbourhood soviets of the Russian Revolution; a flowering of decentralised democracy that was stamped out by centralising Girondists and Bolsheviks.

## EAST CENTRAL CITIZENS ORGANIZATION

In late 1960s America, in cities like New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans, that revolutionary tradition was being revived. Kotler recorded in detail the experience



Participatory budgeting experiments, like here in the Brazilian city of Recife, are examples of a nascent neighbourhood power. Photo: Sveinung Legard

of one attempt to develop neighbourhood democracy in Columbus, Ohio which began with the formation of the East Central Citizens Organization (ECCO) in 1965.

ECCO started as a local service provider in a neighbourhood of 6,500 residents with an unemployment rate far above the city's average. The participants decided to legally incorporate the neighbourhood, creating an organisation open to all local residents. They vested legislative power in an assembly, and elected an executive council to carry on the administration of decisions between meetings of the assembly. Political clubs in each of the four districts of the neighbourhood had the task of initiating discussions and new programmes which were put before the main assembly.

Within three years, the organisation was operating a public health service programme and a veterinary clinic, purchasing houses for rehabilitation, operating a credit union and was planning to open a supermarket. But ECCO did not just regard itself as a provider of necessary services to local people. It wanted "territorial jurisdiction over public activities." It controlled federal anti-poverty programmes in the neighbourhood and had de facto control over programmes for young people. It also had jurisdiction over the local library, appointing the librarian and selecting books. It hoped, in time, to be legally designated a political entity of the municipal government.

Kotler saw the significance of ECCO in its "liberation of practical political deliberation." "For the first time," he wrote, "residents legally

decide certain matters of community life. They are steadily practising the art of political decision-making and living with and learning from the consequences of their decisions. ECCO residents are now orators and officials, and practical political wisdom is developing in a community where earlier the only expressions were frustration and escape." This is the essence of philosopher Hannah Arendt's definition of political freedom – the right to be a participant in government.

#### THE TRANSFER OF POWER

Despite this transformation, Kotler regarded ECCO as only travelling a few steps towards genuine self-rule. He likened poor neighbourhoods to colonised countries. Everything sold inside the community is

owned outside. Everything earned flows to outside ownership. To redress this, neighbourhoods needed to regulate their own territorial economy. They needed the authority to tax businesses and citizens and to decide how that revenue is spent. Local people should control local production and be employed in local enterprises. "It's reasonable," he said, for neighbourhoods "to control prices, rents, licensing and banking."

Kotler claimed that were a community to constitute itself to wield such economic and political power, it would form a neighbourhood *government*. It is worth dwelling on what he meant. He was not referring to greater public participation in centrally planned political programmes. He was not talking about local people taking or being given, control over single institutions, such as schools – which would be in effect, if isolated from any collective democratic structure, a form of privatisation. And he did not have in mind the informal participation of ephemeral protest movements or free-floating assemblies brought together to deal with single issues. Self-rule meant, to him, the transfer of the legal authority of the state, to permanent, legally-constituted, directly democratic entities, open to all citizens and possessing their own formal constitutions and rules.

"Political power has two components," wrote Kotler, "prudent decision and forceful action." This definition view of government as potentially the directly democratic exercise of self-rule by a community – entirely separate to government by a state – has also been made by Bookchin. "A government – or better still, a polity – is an ensemble designed to deal with the problems of consociational life in an orderly and hopefully fair manner," he writes in *The Communalist Project*. "Every institutionalized association that constitutes a system for handling public affairs – with or without the presence of a state – is *necessarily* a government."

#### JUSTIFYING NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRACY

Neighbourhood government was posited by Kotler as the democratic alternative to

national representative government, which purports to be the apogee of democracy but isn't. "We have been told so often that our government is 'democratic' that we have failed to realise that is only representative," he wrote. "Once we elect our representatives, our voice in day to day political decision is lost." But in neighbourhood government, law-making power remains in the *demos*, the people.

In his book *Neighborhood Government* Kotler undertakes an extensive justification of this form of government against the familiar claims of its representative opponent. When faced with any experiment in direct democracy, the advocates of representative government usually claim that it is has no legitimacy because few people will actually participate. Kotler takes as an example ECCO, where attendance fluctuates from between 10 and 25 per cent of the membership. But even attendance at the low end of this range "is quite sufficient to bring all political positions of common concern and interest to the forum for deliberation," he says. "Even a 10 per cent quorum usually encompasses the widest existing range of political opinion and emotion." A local councillor by contract may be elected by as little as 10 per cent of the electorate, and will have ultimate power to decide on political matters for the whole community until the election comes around again.

Neighbourhood democracy is also more likely to serve the common interest than representative government where the interests of the wealthy intercede between the voters and the council or government they elect. "Law-making by an assembly of citizens will favour the many rather than few simply because wealth and special interest have a smaller voice in the assembly than in elected councils," Kotler wrote. But this does not mean that there will be no stratifications of power or divisions in assemblies. Factions and internal political groups will exist. Without them neighbourhood democracy would have no motion or direction, but they won't turn into political parties attempting to gain control of the state.

Kotler sought to distinguish the neighbourhood power movement from other political theories that used the local community as the springboard for political activism. Most notably, he rejected the approach of the father of community organising Saul Alinsky, whose Chicago-based Industrial Areas Foundation was later to train the current Commander in Chief of the United States. In Kotler's view, Alinsky saw the neighbourhood in instrumental, rather than political terms. Alinsky wanted to organise neighbourhood power to exert a continuous pressure on central government in order to extract political concessions in areas such as housing, jobs or wages. He never saw the potential of the neighbourhood as a place of community self-rule.

#### FUTURE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

The neighbourhood power movement spread to most major US cities during the 1970s, even reaching as far as Montreal. Kotler himself founded the National Association of Neighborhoods in 1974. The movement subsided after the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then disappeared completely. But as the Argentinean neighbourhood assemblies and experiments such as Marsh Farm in the UK show, the impulse for face to face democracy and self-rule – the political realm – keeps recurring.

There are limitations in Kotler's vision. He was hazy about how citizens' organisations in different neighbourhoods should federate together. He assumed that neighbourhoods merely need to control economic enterprises within their boundaries. There was – understandably for 1968 – no mention of ecology and he established an unnecessary conflict between the desire for social equality and political liberty, while summarily dismissing class struggle. But as a flesh and blood example of how citizens' assemblies can constitute themselves and begin to take political power and authority, the neighbourhood power movement he chronicled has valuable lessons for social ecologists and communalists. ●

# SOLVING THE ENERGY CRISIS

**Text:** Sveinung Legard

**– It is our feeling that until we put the pieces together where the consumer of energy is a producer of energy, we are not going to create a truly sustainable future, says David Morris, vice president of the thirty-five year old US-based Institute for Local Self Reliance.**

**Morris has been an advocate of a decentralized, renewable energy system and a fierce critic of centralized energy models. In this interview he provides the arguments for why the energy crisis will have to be solved at the local level and why energy generation should be democratized.**

***You have been very critical of large-scale, centralized, renewable energy facilities. Can you elaborate on this critique?***

– In the United States, political, business and environmental leaders are aggressively promoting a centralized renewable energy path. Even though renewable energy is found, and could be harnessed, everywhere, they argue that since the winds blow most fiercely in the middle of the country and the sun shines most in the southwestern parts of the country, wind turbines and solar installations should be located there. The electricity would be transported very long distances to consumers in major cities on the coasts. A similar dynamic is occurring in Europe where leaders are talking about northern Africa and the Middle East as the sites of massive solar installations, with the electricity generated at these facilities being transported by extra high voltage transmission lines to European, African or Middle Eastern cities.

From a national perspective of a nation, this makes sense. The cost of producing

electricity from wind turbines in North Dakota and from solar installations in Nevada is less than generating electricity from wind turbines in Illinois or solar installations in California. Indeed, North Dakota is capable of generating more than half of the renewable electricity consumed in the United States. Just a section of Nevada is enough to generate all the renewable electricity consumed in this country. So from the perspective of the federal government, the major obstacle is the lack of transmission capacity from these remote areas to population centers.

Many environmental leaders support this dynamic because the end result is replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy resources. We think that this support is short sighted. It reinforces a dynamic in which the people who make the decisions do not feel the impact of the decisions, in which the consumer of energy is located far away from where the energy is generated. It reinforces consumer passivity. Twenty-five years from now the relationship of people in Minneapolis or Oslo

to their energy system would be the same as it is today. It is just that the centralized electricity would be differently fueled and differently sourced.

But we believe that sustainability can only be achieved if we have the active participation of consumers. If consumers become producers, even if they are only producing a small amount of their energy needs, they think and act differently than if they are solely consumers. For one thing, they tend to maximize energy efficiency because each kWh or calorie that they don't consume means one more step toward energy independence. No one installs a geothermal heat pump without first minimizing the building's use of heat. No one installs a solar array without first investing in improving electricity efficiency.

Having a piece of the supply also changes the new producer/consumer's relationship to other energy sectors. For example, those with a solar roof might seriously consider buying an electric vehicle. Not only could they fuel the vehicle from their roof, but the



What should replace fossil fuel energy? David Morris believes a decentralized energy system is more efficient than large scale plantations. Photo: BK59

car could become a backup power plant if the utility network went dark. You begin to have a symbiotic relationship between your house and your vehicle.

Some time ago I wrote an article for a travel magazine on electric vehicles, and I went up and down California traveling in everything from a glorified golf cart to the new Tesla which accelerates from 0 to 60 miles per hour in 4 seconds. Every person whose car I drove had solar cells on their roof. Some first acquired an electric vehicle and then installed a home solar system. Others began with a solar system and then acquired an electric car. Once one homeowner or business has a solar panel and an electric vehicle, the homeowner or business across the street might say “Why don’t I do that?!” and then even more neighbors might say “Why don’t we do that?!” Then they go to city hall and insist that their electric vehicles improve the urban environment because they have no tailpipe emissions and are quiet, and begin demanding charging stations. So you have

a dynamic which is, if you will, very organic – literally a grassroots dynamic toward sustainability.

A national government, of course, could pass legislation mandating renewable energy or electric vehicles. But it takes some time before that changes the hearts and minds of the citizenry. Moreover, you have elections every few years, and the next federal government might undo what the previous government did. It is our feeling that until we put these pieces together – where the consumer is the producer and the producer is the consumer – we are not going to create a truly sustainable future.

*In a new foreword to your book, **Self Reliant Cities**, originally published in 1982 and now republished online by the Institute for Local Self Reliance, you write that the energy and climate crisis ultimately has to be solved at the local level. Why is that so?*

– There are several reasons why I say that. The first reason is that we live locally. Ninety

percent of the population in Europe, the US and other developed countries live in cities. Globally, the number of people living in cities, as opposed to the countryside, recently exceeded 50 percent. Cities are relatively dense places where interaction and communication is facilitated. Cities have large internal markets that can stimulate entrepreneurs and innovation. Cities in most countries have significant authority. They enact rules regarding land use. They can often borrow large amounts of money on long terms at low interest rates.

You cannot get from here to a sustainable society simply by having national governments, or international governments for that matter, enacting regulations. For example, in the United States the federal government provides a handsome incentive for solar energy. This incentive allows solar energy to become close to economical in many sections of the country. But having such an incentive does not mean that solar energy is simply going to expand rapidly.

A number of states, responding to their citizens' desire to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, have mandated that a certain percentage of their total electricity has to come from renewable energy. That is a step in the right direction. But how is that renewable electricity going to develop? Installing solar panels on roof-tops is a local issue. So is installing wind turbines in rural areas.

Ultimately, if we are to achieve a sustainable society we have to embrace new ways of doing things. In European countries and in China, innovations in renewable and sustainable energies (as well as reductions in greenhouse gases) are coming from cities. In fact, cities have begun to engage in a friendly competition with each other in terms of greenness, and they are sharing information on greening.

*Many would argue that municipalities and counties – at least in centralized European countries – do not have the power to solve energy questions. How do you respond to such an argument?*

– Yes, I think that it is more true in most European countries than in the United States. Certainly the UK has a unitary system of government. France has delegated certain authority to regions and cities but that is a work in progress. On the other hand, in England, a great deal of innovation is coming from the local level and it is also at the local level that you have opposition to national renewable energy mandates with regard to local wind farms. Here is another situation where the national government can dictate something but it must be implemented locally. So I would say that local is still very important even in these countries. Other countries like Germany and Spain give great deal of authority to regions.

Another important point to make is that there is clearly a difference in policy making between small countries and large countries. Norway, for example, has a population only slightly larger than that of metropolitan Chicago. But nevertheless, in Norway, cities like Kristiansand, Arendal, Bergen and others have significant and innovative sustainable programs.

*There exists a widespread notion that decentralized renewable energy sources are not sufficient to meet the needs of an advanced industrialized society – that we, in fact, need those large-scale, centralized, renewable energy plants. What is your opinion?*

– Yes, you need both centralized power plants and decentralized power plants. The question is what is the balance between the two? Right now we are overwhelmingly focused on centralization. For the residential sector and much of the commercial and institutional sector, decentralized production of heat and power can be the dominant form of energy supply. For energy intensive industries, they cannot. But even there, if we think first of how we can rely on decentralized sources of energy, we approach the issue differently. For example, a steel mill needs centralized power generation. However, a steel mill that relies on recycled steel uses significantly less energy per ton produced than one that makes steel from iron ore.

Renewable energy is also variable so we need to take into account systems that can store heat and power. And we will need fossil fueled distributed generation as backup and peaking plants. These will, and should overwhelmingly be natural gas fired, using biomethane whenever possible or in the case of heating, biomass.

If you take what is the current industrial structure as a given, then, yes, you are going to need centralized power plants. But a new kind of industrial structure will be desirable twenty years from now that may need fewer centralized power plants. For example, the fastest growing part of the economy right now is information intensive industry. This essentially runs on calories, on food.

*You talk about democratizing the energy system? For most people, democracy and energy seem like two entirely different phenomena. In your mind, what is the relationship between democracy and energy?*

– A democracy allows people to establish the rules that will govern their behavior and influence the structure of society. Democratization of energy happens when

people get the right to establish the rules of energy, and we firmly believe that as they establish these rules, they will do so in a way that enables the widest possible generation of energy.

In this country we talk about Thomas Jefferson and Jeffersonian democracy. Jefferson believed an effective democracy depends on the widest possible distribution of property. In his day, property meant farms, which generated much of the wealth of that era. Jefferson was actually very critical of cities because he thought that they were places where people did not have any property, did not own any means of production at all and were merely wage laborers. Today we think of property as consumer goods. But power plants generate the kind of basic wealth Jefferson was talking about. And this allows us to begin to engage in policy making from an informed, self-reliant perspective.

*It seems like this requires far-reaching changes in our society in terms of distribution of property and wealth...*

– Yes it does. The upheaval in the energy sector – our dependence on imported fuels from unstable and hostile parts of the planet, our concerns about centralized power plants, the decentralizing potential of renewable energy – all give us the opportunity to take the first major steps toward those far reaching changes. Sometimes the very first steps we take are themselves a reversal of a century of development. For example, my home state of Minnesota was the first state in the US to have what is called a net metering law. Before this law was passed, I could generate electricity on-site but if I wanted to export it to the utility, the utility required me to install a second electric meter and pay for it. Then the utility would charge me the retail price for all electricity I imported and pay me the wholesale price, or lower, for all energy I exported. Net metering requires a single meter that runs both backwards and forwards. This is a very simple change of rule, but it developed an entirely new dynamic because the former rules assumed a one way electricity system – where electricity



David Morris. Photo: Institute for Local Self-Reliance

## “ The energy crisis will ultimately be solved at the local level.

ran from a central power plant, owned by a vertically integrated company, to an ultimate customer. Net metering assumes a two way, more democratic energy system.

In Europe – France, Germany, Spain and the like – you have other rules called Feed-in tariffs. These have in part been developed to stimulate renewable energy, but also to encourage dispersed energy generation. Feed-in tariffs give a higher price for roof-top solar than for ground-mounted solar, and a higher price for small wind generators than for large wind generators.

In the United States, as I mentioned earlier, the federal government is saying that all the customers in the country should subsidize those who are building high voltage transmission lines, and that we need these because the wind energy is located in North Dakota and it has to be brought to Chicago and New York.

But it turns out that Illinois, where Chicago is located, has a lot of its own wind energy and other sources of renewable energy. The Institute for Local Self-Reliance recently issued a report called *Energy Self Reliant States*. It maps the renewable energy potential for each of the 50 US states. When I say potential, I do not mean the theoretical potential, but the existing commercial potential. The report

notes that two-thirds of the US states could be self-sufficient, not only self-reliant, in terms of electricity generation by relying on their internal resources, assuming sufficient storage was available. This data provides the empirical evidence that we don't need to and should not subsidize high voltage transmission lines.

*What I read from this report is that it is also more cost-effective to use local and regional resources. Then why is this not happening today? What are the forces working against a more decentralized, renewable energy system?*

– There are natural forces and artificial forces working against democratic energy systems. A natural force is the administrative economies of scale. An artificial obstacle is the rules we write to encourage renewable energy.

Again, let me give you an example from the context of the US. The federal government provides an incentive for wind energy investors. This is a tax credit but it can only be taken against what is called “passive income.” This is income generated from business, not income from wages or dividends. It is the kind of income generated by profitable corporations. This means that only the corporations with a great deal of tax liability will qualify for this incentive. Large corporations, in turn, want to make

investments of \$50 or \$100 million dollars to minimize the transaction costs. They are not interested in making investments of a million or half a million dollars. The result of this tax law is that you end up with absentee owned large wind farms.

It is possible to institute a different tax incentive where the tax credit is refundable. This would mean that everybody receives it on an equal basis. If there is a \$500 dollar tax credit and you put \$500 dollars into local wind generation, you get \$500 dollars back. From the federal government's perspective, the amount of lost revenue is the same. From the wind development perspective more money ends up in building wind turbines than with the passive income tax credit where the middleman takes a piece of the action.

Changing the present tax credit rule for wind energy would widen the number of investors from a few thousand, maybe only a few hundred, to about 50 million households who have enough money to invest in these things – if they knew they would be getting enough money back the next year, when they pay their taxes. If we change this rule, we would stop favoring centralized and absentee owned facilities and start facilitating decentralized and dispersed energy generation. ●

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# 9 ARGUMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY

**Text:** Sveinung Legard

**Global warming has made many environmentalists believe that democracy is too slow and complicated to solve the climate crisis. Some argue that what we need is wartime mobilization and a strong global leadership with excessive powers. This belief is deeply flawed and dangerous. The climate crisis needs to be solved by more, and not less, democracy.**

## 1 The climate crisis is of a systemic nature

The ecological crisis we find ourselves in is not the result of ill judgment or ignorance, neither on part of “world leaders” nor on part of the majority of the world’s population. It is a crisis of a systemic nature, stemming from the very way our economy works. It is the capitalist economic system, that is based on relentless expansion and growth, which is devouring the world’s natural resources.

The main aim of any capitalist enterprise is to increase the profits of its owners, and if it cannot expand and grow it will be eaten up by others in the marketplace. Therefore, in the capitalist economic system, environmental or human considerations are seen as obstacles to the accumulation of wealth.

It is capitalism in a specific form, where the relentless economic growth has been combined with the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas as the main source of energy, that is the force behind global warming.

It might seem as if it is the average citizen, you and I, who are the main problem. Who else are driving

polluting cars, buying plastic toys or eating food grown on the other side of the planet? But we ourselves are part of this economic system, and constantly assaulted by an immense commercial industry trying to make us into mindless consumers. Unless we change the basis of the way we produce and consume things, we will never be able to do anything about the harmful consumerism we are all caught up in.

## 2 Capitalism is the very opposite of democracy

This economic system is the very opposite of democracy. The most fundamental feature of capitalism is the concentration of human and natural resources in the hands of the few (giant corporations, financiers, and all owners of capital) and not in the hands of ordinary people. The only democracy existing in the marketplace is the democracy of those who possess the most amount of money.

Poor land workers, farmers and urban slum dwellers in the southern hemisphere, by far the most powerless in this economic system, are the same ones who are worst hit by the climate change

already occurring, and will be with the changes to come.

It is through this concentration of wealth *and* power that the capitalist economic system is able to persist. Ignorance, for example, is *not* the reason why gas, oil and coal companies continue their business as usual. It is because it is in their interest to do so, and because they have the power to do it. This is a fact that basically everyone knows.

Hence, the absence of democracy lies at the heart of our ecological crisis, and neither human nor environmental considerations will be easily taken into account as long as this concentration of economic power persists.

### **3 “Our” global leaders are part of the problem**

Limiting this blind economic expansionism has shown to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Despite the rising awareness of the consequences of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in the past decades, most industrialized countries have not even been able to bring down their annual rate of increase in CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. As more industrial production is moving to developing countries, the *de facto* amount of global warming pollution by rich countries is far higher than often shown in official statistics.

Instead of taking radical measures to seriously reduce greenhouse gas emissions, government leaders tend to prioritize the competitiveness of their countries before the health of our environment. This does not happen because we live in an age of stupidity, but rather because “our” global leaders are caught up in a stupid system. A system in which every country’s economy continuously has to grow or face the grim repercussions of falling behind in the international competition: Unemployment, growing poverty, capital flight and lack of foreign investments. Nor is the absence of action a result of a lack of necessary courage and stamina among government leaders. It is because the whole political system is entangled in the web of capital.

In fact, the recurring appeals by environmental movements to national and

international leaders to step up and rescue us from ecological disaster, is undermining *our* ability to do something about the situation. First of all, it enforces the feeling that we, the so-called “silent majority,” are passive bystanders who need to be saved by a strong leader – not that we, in fact, should take steps to govern our own leaders. Secondly, it diverts our attention from the systemic causes of our crisis, and makes us believe that as long as our leaders have the right knowledge and attitudes they will be willing to take the necessary steps to green our societies.

### **4 Decentralized solutions are efficient**

For “our” world leaders, the hope for a better future lies in large-scale, centralized energy plantations based on renewable resources such as gigantic solar arrays in the Southern US or Northern Africa, or wind mill parks in the North sea or North Dakota.

But a recent study by the *Institute for Local Self Reliance* shows that this is not the best solution. The study estimates that half of the US states could be energy self-sufficient by harnessing renewable energy within their borders, whereas all states could satisfy a considerable fraction of their energy needs in the same fashion. In addition, it reveals that using local renewable resources is even more cost-effective than large-scale, centralized installations!

Similarly, energy is more efficiently used when it is produced close to where it is consumed. It is now a conventional truth that massive amounts of energy is lost when transferred over long distances, and the potential for energy efficiency is enormous as long as it utilized locally.

A major problem with large scale centralized solutions is that they retain a vision of a high energy society, in which living, transportation and industrial production continues in pretty much the same fashion as today. That means the continuation of a highly wasteful and ecologically harmful society. There is nothing inherently wrong with large-scale renewable energy plantations, and the truth is probably

that we need a diversity of energy sources in the years to come. But we have to maintain that decentralized energy is effective enough to supply a large slump of our energy needs in an advanced industrial society, and that it is necessary to achieve an ecological and democratic society.

### **5 Ecological solutions demand democracy**

The changes in direction towards an ecological society will have to take place at the local and regional level; in communities, neighborhoods, municipalities, counties and so on. No national government agency or multinational corporation can initiate or carry out the immensely diverse and carefully tailored solutions which are necessary to achieve sustainability. Solutions like domestic or industrial recycling, construction of small-scale energy plants based on renewable energy, reshaping transportation patterns or growing suburban foods requires an active citizenry with intricate knowledge of the potentials and needs of their own localities – *not* government or company executives with standardized views on how people act or how they want them to be.

In short, it demands democracy.

There exists a widespread belief among social scientists that bureaucracy and top-down strategies – whether private or public – are highly incapable of accomplishing any *positive* change in society, because of their rigid models and the resistance people put up when being commanded from above. Participatory and bottom-up strategies on the other hand, are much more effective in evoking people’s knowledge and their sense of commitment to social change. As David Morris has put it, people who put up their own rooftop solar panels will most likely be more aware of ecological issues and therefore more interested in making other changes in their own lives and communities.

For environmentalists a few decades ago, our system of national and international government was an intrinsic part of the problem and they believed that the solution had to come

through the grassroots mobilization of ordinary citizens at the local as well as the international level. We must not be stupid enough to ignore the fact that most major advancements in environmental (as well as social) legislation, has been the result of grassroots pressure, and not from initiatives from the political class. We have every reason to believe that change will continue to come from below.

## 6 The climate crisis is a social crisis

Some argue that things like participation, distribution of wealth or liberation are secondary concerns in the face of the epic transformation of our natural environment caused by global warming. They forget, however, that aside from being a natural crisis, the climate crisis is also a social crisis. Global warming strengthens the inequalities in between people by worsening the consequences of class divisions, gender oppression and marginalization.

It is the world's poorest farmers, land-workers and urban slum dwellers who will face the worst effect of global warming. The rich will always be able to pay their way out of this crisis, something that is well illustrated by the current swine flue pandemic. Whereas people in groups at high risk from the H1N1 virus in poorer countries are unprotected from the pandemic, rich countries have been able to hover up stocks of vaccines from the pharmaceutical companies.

As diseases will spread more rapidly as a result of warmer climates, this is a scenario that will recur again and again until something is done about this social crisis. This crisis comes precisely from the absence of democracy: The total powerlessness caused by dispossession, domination and exploitation of the poor by the rich.

## 7 Democracy means global equality

The dreadful scenes in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina are an all too familiar site in countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines

or Bangladesh. But the dreadfulness of those scenes is further strengthened by the absurdity that those who are worst hit by the climate crisis are the ones who are least responsible for global warming. Not only are they left out of the material abundance of the capitalist economic system, but they also have to carry its heaviest burdens. This is the essential message of the climate justice movement: Those who are responsible for global warming also bear the responsibility to stop polluting and carry the costs of climate change.

What is happening today is the exact opposite. Those who are responsible for global warming are doing an absolute minimum to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, and do nothing to mitigate its consequences. Change will not happen until the poor and exploited of the world regain control of their lives, and the forces affecting them. Solving the climate crisis means a concerted effort between people of the northern and southern hemispheres, to achieve a global equality where power is equally shared. In short, solving the climate crisis demands global democracy.

## 8 We need popular control of economic resources

For the majority of the world's population "democracy" is a joke. Even with free elections the governments of their countries are under the sway of capital, and their representatives are totally out of popular control. This is true in both the South and the North. The rulers of this world are the ones who command through money. Surely enough, the havoc of capital can be eased by popular pressure and government intervention, but this does not change the essential power structure of our society.

Economic power, therefore, has to be radically dissipated in order to do something fundamental about the roots of our crisis. The relentless growth of the capitalist economy will not stop until reason and environmental and human concerns come to the fore when it is decided what and how to produce things. This implies popular control of the economic resources, where people directly participate

in making these decisions and putting them into practice, and it implies a confederal system of municipal democracy where power is flowing from the bottom-up. If the absence of democracy lies at the heart of our crisis, the presence of real democracy – the rule by the people in all important affairs – will have to lie at the heart of its solution.

## 9 We are not on a sinking ship!

Metaphors can be insidious, especially if they are used in the wrong way. Several environmentalists are using metaphors, such as being on a sinking ship or in a burning house, to justify their demands at the global leaders to rescue us from an imminent catastrophe. If we were on a sinking ship there would of course be no time for deliberation among the passengers on what would be the best course of action. We would rather need a captain with experience and knowledge of the boat, who would order us around to achieve the fastest possible evacuation.

The problem is not a sinking ship, and we do not have the choice of evacuation. A far better metaphor is that we are stuck in a very large building. We are gathered in groups around scattered bonfires. In the inner circle the group members who control the fire are sitting, and they continue to throw logs onto the flames. The smoke from the bonfires is slowly choking everyone in the building, and there is no room for escape. On the one hand we have to put out the flames to avoid being choked, and on the other hand we have to find new ways of keeping ourselves warm and full and having the light to socialize with each other.

There is no captain or master janitor to save us in this situation – no single person who knows all the rooms or the floors of the building. We ourselves have to cooperate with each other to stop the ones in the inner circle from keeping the fire alive, and we have to look around to invent new ways of creating heat and light without contaminating the air we are breathing. Otherwise we will have to face the grim consequences of our own inaction. ●

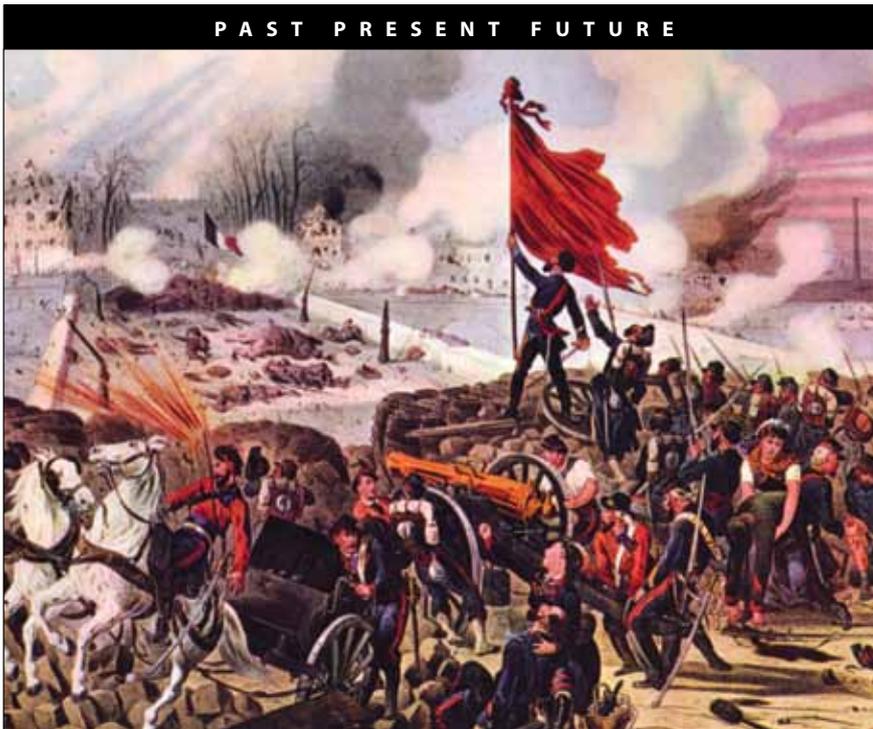


*I think it is very beautiful for the poor to accept their lot, to share it with the passion of Christ. I think the world is being much helped by the suffering of the poor people.*

*Mother Teresa* (aka Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, 1910–1997)

*Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich.*

*Napoleon Bonaparte* (1769–1821)



P A S T P R E S E N T F U T U R E

On May 28, 1871, after the Franco-Prussian war, the citizens of Paris proclaimed a Commune. This radical city government directly challenged the authority of the French state. Not only did Paris declare its independence, they even called upon all French municipalities to gather into a confederation. Despite similar uprisings in other cities like Lyon and Marseilles, these efforts failed. Soon Adolphe Thiers and the Versailles army gained the military initiative, and from April 2, Paris was surrounded and under constant bombardment.

On May 21, the Parisian defenses were breached. As government troops poured into the city, the Commune issued its last appeal: *“Enough of militarism! No more staff-officers with their gold-embroidered uniforms! Make way for the people, for the combatants bare-armed! The hour of the revolutionary war has struck! The people know nothing of learned maneuvers. But when they have a gun in their hands, a pavement under their feet, they fear not all the strategists of the monarchical school!”* This, of course, was a desperate act, and more of an epilogue than a climax.

As the Versailles troops gained control over the embattled city, they left some 30,000 dead in their wake. But the ultimate failure of the Parisian communards does not diminish the legacy and lessons they bequeathed us. The communards of 1871 pointed to a different Paris, a different Europe, and a different world.



**MOVIE :**

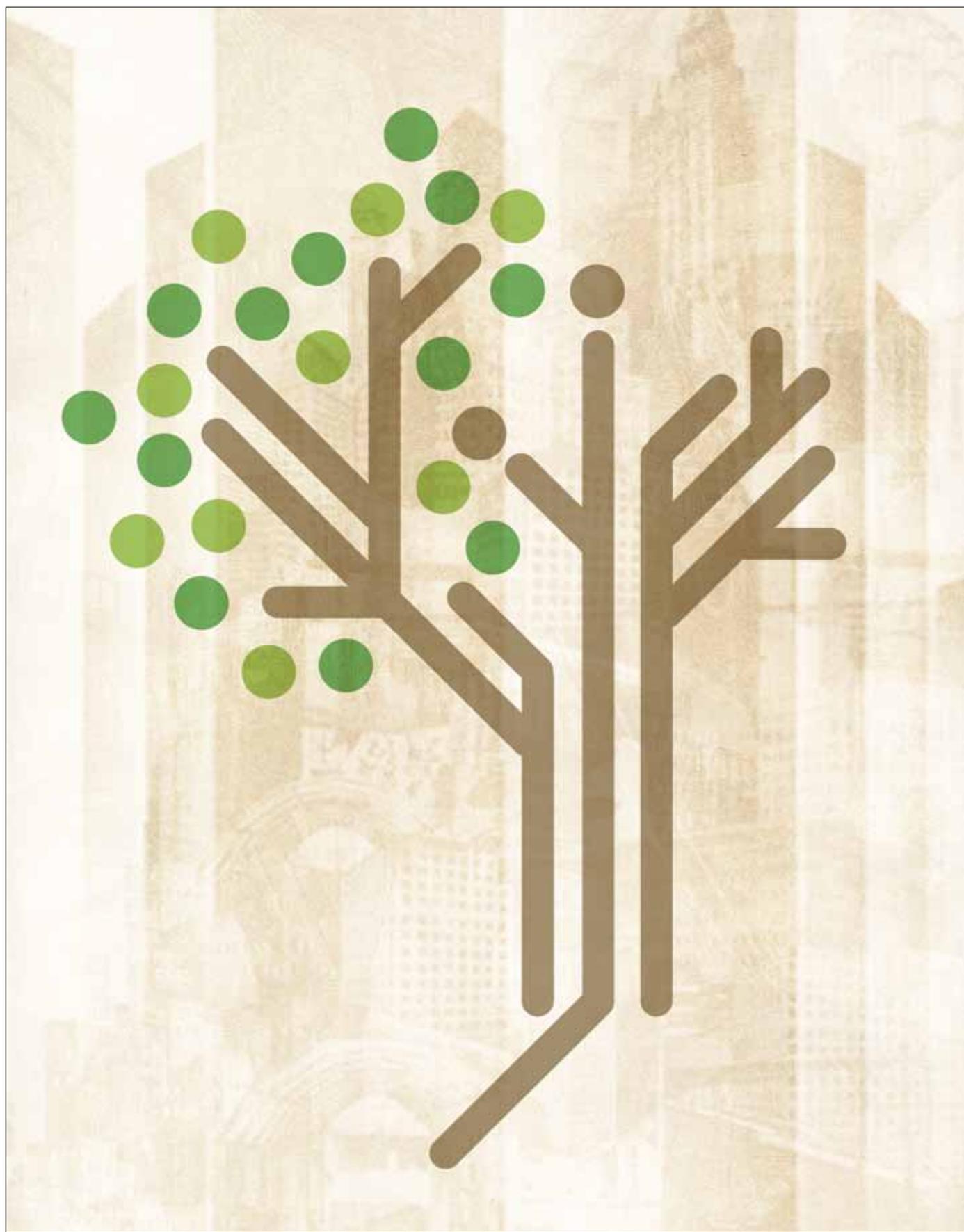
**I**would like to recommend Terry Gilliam’s 1985 movie *Brazil*. Here we meet Sam Lowry (Jonathan Pryce) as a civil servant at the Ministry of Information, typing his way through a lifetime of meaningless papers in a retro-futuristic totalitarian state. Dreams are his only escape from this dreary existence.

In this highly bureaucratic state, the government has installed extreme measures to track down terrorists. When a bug (literally) gets in the system, an innocent man is killed. This incident leads mild-mannered Sam Lowry to re-examine what he wants out of life, and he decides to fight the totalitarian system in his search for freedom – and the woman he loves.

*Brazil* is overwhelming and spectacular. Giant monoliths rise from the street; government offices are a network of computers, tubes, and narrow hallways. Apartment complexes are a maze of washed-out greys and numbers, all frighteningly uniform. The “terrorist explosions” actually bring colour into this dull world. A nightmare vision of the future, *Brazil* is also hysterically funny and incisive; the terrific, offbeat cast features Robert De Niro, Katherine Helmond, Michael Palin, Bob Hoskins, Jim Broadbent, Ian Holm and Kim Greist. In my view, it remains one of the most inventive, influential, and important films of the 1980s.



**Camilla Svendsen Skriung**  
Associate editor, *Communalism*



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BY BRIAN TOKAR

ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA ASTRUP

Movements for Climate Action:

# Toward Utopia or Apocalypse?

Will the climate crisis bring on a collapse of civilization, as forecast by popular dystopian thinkers, or is there potential for a positive ecological transition as projected by social ecologists? The further development of a movement for climate justice demands a reconstructive alternative to popular apocalyptic predictions.

**A**t least from a North American perspective, there is little doubt that we are living in apocalyptic times. From mega-selling Christian “end times” novels on the right, to the neo-primitivist nihilism that has swept so much of the anti-authoritarian left, people across the political spectrum seem to be anticipating the end of the world. Predictions of “peak oil” have inspired important efforts at community-centered renewal, but also encouraged the revival of gun-hoarding survivalism. Hollywood’s latest disaster epic elaborates the myth, falsely attributed to Mayan peoples, that the world will end in 2012.

A recent cable TV series featured detailed computer animations purporting to show exactly how the world’s most iconic structures would eventually crumble and collapse if people ceased to maintain essential infrastructure. And, of course, R.E.M.’s anthemic “It’s the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)” continues to be featured on pop radio playlists more than 20 years after its initial release.

The prevalence of apocalyptic images is not at all limited to popular culture. Disaster scenarios stemming from the accelerating global climate crisis look more severe with every

new study of the effects of the rising levels of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere. Steadily rising levels of drought, wildfires and floods have been recorded on all the earth's continents, and people in the tropics and subtropics already face difficulty growing enough food due to increasingly unstable weather patterns. Studies predict mass-scale migrations of people desperate to escape the worst consequences of widespread climate disruptions. And the likely failure of the UN climate talks in Copenhagen has raised the profile of several new studies forecasting the dire consequences of temperature increases that may exceed 10 °C in the arctic and in parts of Africa.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the utopian ecological visions that inspired earlier generations of social ecologists – and environmental activists more broadly – almost seem quaint and out-of-date. The images of autonomous, self-reliant, solar-powered cities and towns that illuminated the first large wave of anti-nuclear activism in the 1970s and eighties sometimes seem more distant than ever. Despite an unprecedented flowering of local food systems, natural building, permaculture design, and other important innovations that first emerged from that earlier wave of activism, today's advocates of local self-reliance and ecological lifestyles rarely seem engaged in the political struggles necessary to sustain their visions for the longer-term.

For social ecologists seeking to further the forward-looking, reconstructive dimensions of an ecological worldview, this presents a serious dilemma. From the 1960s onward, Murray Bookchin, the founding theorist of social ecology, proposed that the critical, holistic outlook of ecological science was logically and historically linked to a radically transformative vision for society. A fundamental rethinking of human societies' relationship to the natural world, he proposed, is made imperative by the understandings that emerge from ecological science, and these understandings also embody the potential for a revolutionary transformation of both our philosophical assumptions and our political and social institutions. Can this approach to ecology, politics and history be renewed for our time? What kinds of movements have the potential to express these possibilities? Can we meaningfully address the simultaneous threats of climate chaos and potential social breakdown while renewing and further developing the revolutionary outlook of social ecology?

## Ecology and Capitalism

From the 1960s until his passing in 2006, Murray Bookchin insisted that the ecological crisis was a fundamental threat to capitalism, due to the system's built-in necessity to continuously expand its scope and its spheres of control. In a 2001 reflection on the origins of social ecology, Bookchin wrote:

I was trying to provide a viable substitute for Marx's defunct economic imperative, namely an *ecological imperative* that,

if thought out ... would show that *capitalism stood in an irreconcilable contradiction with the natural world...* In short, precisely because capitalism was, *by definition*, a competitive and commodity-based economy, it would be compelled to turn the complex into the simple and give rise to a planet that was incompatible environmentally with advanced life forms. The growth of capitalism was incompatible with the evolution of biotic complexity *as such* – and certainly, with the development of human life and the evolution of human society.<sup>2</sup>

For a couple of decades, however, it appeared to many that capitalism had found a way to accommodate non-human nature and perhaps to “green” itself. This notion can be traced to the period leading up to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Earth Day. By the spring of 1990, many of the largest, most notoriously polluting corporations had begun to incorporate environmental messages into their advertising. By reducing waste, partially restoring damaged ecosystems, investing in renewable energy, and generally promoting an environmental ethic, the oil, chemical, and other highly polluting industries would become “stewards” of the environment. The 1990s, we were told, would usher in a “sustainable,” even a “natural” capitalism, whereby production and consumption would continue to grow, and companies like Exxon and Monsanto would join with a new generation of “green” entrepreneurs to solve our environmental problems.

As awareness of the climate crisis rose rapidly with the cost of energy during 2006–7, the “green consumerism” that was promoted as a conscientious lifestyle choice in the 1990s became an all-encompassing mass culture phenomenon. Mainstream lifestyle and even fashion magazines featured special “green” issues, and the *New York Times* reported that 35 million Americans were regularly seeking out (often high-priced) “earth-friendly” products, “from organic beeswax lipstick from the west Zambian rain forest to Toyota Priuses.”<sup>3</sup> But the *Times* acknowledged rising criticism of the trend as well, quoting the one-time “green business” evangelist Paul Hawken as saying, “Green consumerism is an oxymoronic phrase,” and acknowledging that green living may indeed require buying less. With rising awareness of the cost of manufacturing new “green” products, even the iconic Prius has come under criticism for the high energy costs embedded in its manufacture.

The more forward-looking capitalists have had to admit in recent years that an increasingly chaotic natural and social environment will necessarily limit business opportunities. Some critics have suggested that this is one reason for the increasing hegemony of the financial sector:

In its disciplinary zeal, capitalism has so undermined the ecological conditions of so many people that a state of global ungovernability has developed, further forcing investors to escape

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into the mediated world of finance where they hope to make hefty returns without bodily confronting the people they need to exploit. But this exodus has merely deferred the crisis, since “ecological” struggles are being fought all over the planet and are forcing an inevitable increase in the cost of future constant capital.<sup>4</sup>

The result is an increasingly parasitic form of capitalism, featuring widening discrepancies in wealth, both worldwide and within most countries, and the outsourcing of most production to the countries and regions where labor costs and environmental enforcement are at the lowest possible levels. As the profitability of socially useful production has fallen precipitously, we have seen the emergence of a casino-like “shadow” economy, in which a rising share of society’s material resources are squandered by elites in the pursuit of meaningless but lucrative profits from ever-more exotic financial manipulations.<sup>5</sup>

Simultaneously, capital is advancing a number of highly promoted, but thoroughly false solutions to the climate crisis. These vary from relatively trivial lifestyle suggestions, like changing light bulbs, to disastrous technical fixes such as reviving nuclear power, pumping sun-blocking particulates into the atmosphere, and processing the world’s grain supplies into automotive fuels. Different sectors of industrial and finance capital favor different variations on the general theme, but the overarching message is that solutions to global warming are at hand, and everyone should simply go on consuming. More hopeful innovations in solar and wind technology, “smart” power grids, and even energy saving technologies are promoted by some “green” capitalists as well, but these technologies continue to be marginalized by the prevailing financial and political system, raising serious questions about how such alternatives could be implemented. A comprehensive understanding of capitalism’s false solutions to the climate crisis is an essential prerequisite for moving forward in a thoughtful and proactive way.

### **False Solutions**

Capitalist false solutions to the climate crisis fall into two broad categories. First are a series of technological interventions. They aim to either increase energy supplies while reducing reliance on fossil fuels, or to intervene on a massive physical scale to counter the warming effects of increasing carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere. The former are certainly a necessary step, though attempting to transform our energy systems without changing the way economic decisions are made will likely prove to be a futile pursuit. The latter, broadly described by the term “geoengineering,” threatens to create a host of new environmental problems in the pursuit of a world-scale techno-fix to the climate crisis.<sup>6</sup>

The other broad category of capitalist false solutions relies on the tools of the so-called “free market” as a substitute for direct

**Disaster scenarios stemming from the accelerating global climate crisis look more severe with every new study of the effects of the rising levels of greenhouse gases in the earth’s atmosphere. Steadily rising levels of drought, wildfires and floods have been recorded on all the earth’s continents, and people in the tropics and subtropics already face difficulty growing enough food due to increasingly unstable weather patterns.**

### **NOTES**

- 1 See, for example, Juliet Eilperin, “New Analysis Brings Dire Forecast Of 6.3-Degree Temperature Increase,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2009; David Adam, “Met Office warns of catastrophic global warming in our lifetimes,” *The Guardian*, September 28, 2009. On the justice implications of the climate crisis, see Brian Tokar, “Toward a Movement for Peace and Climate Justice,” in *In the Middle of a Whirlwind: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, Summer 2008 (available at <http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com>).
- 2 Murray Bookchin, “Reflections: An Overview of the Roots of Social Ecology,” *Harbinger*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (October 2002), emphasis in original.
- 3 Alex Williams, “Buying Into the Green Movement,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2007.
- 4 Midnight Notes Collective, *Promissory Notes: From Crisis to Commons* (April 2009), p. 5.
- 5 For an insightful discussion of the capitalist trend toward financialization, see John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, “Monopoly Finance Capital and the Paradox of Accumulation,” *Monthly Review*, Vol. 61, No. 5 (October 2009).
- 6 See, for example, the report *The Emperor’s New Climate: Geoengineering as 21st Century Fairytale* (Ottawa: ETC Group, 2009).

interventions against pollution. These include the creation of new markets in tradable carbon dioxide emissions allowances (now termed “cap-and-trade”), and the use of carbon offsets, i.e. investments in nominally low-carbon technologies elsewhere, as a substitute for reducing an individual or a corporation’s own emissions profile.

Among the technological false solutions, efforts to expand the use of nuclear power are by far the most insidious. Nuclear power has been subsidized for over fifty years by various governments – amounting to over a hundred billion dollars in the US alone – yet it still presents intractable technical and environmental problems. Any expansion of nuclear power would expose countless more communities to the legacy of cancer that critical scientists such as Ernest Sternglass have documented, and mainly indigenous communities to the even more severe consequences of uranium mining and milling. Scientists still have no clue what to do with ever-increasing quantities of nuclear waste that remain highly radioactive for millennia. Efforts to export the nominally most successful example of nuclear development, i.e., the French model, have utterly failed, as demonstrated by the French legacy of nuclear contamination, as well as years of delays, quality-assurance problems, and cost overruns at the French nuclear construction project in Finland.<sup>7</sup>

Recent studies of the implications of an expanded nuclear industry have also revealed some new problems. First it appears that supplies of the relatively accessible, high-grade uranium ore that has thus far helped reduce the nuclear fuel cycle’s greenhouse gas emissions are quite limited. If the nuclear industry ever begins to approach its goal of doubling or tripling world nuclear generating capacity – necessary to displace a significant portion of the predicted *growth* in carbon dioxide emissions – they will quickly deplete known reserves of high-grade uranium, and soon have to rely upon fuel sources that require far more energy to mine and purify.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the economics of nuclear power rule it out as a significant aid in alleviating the climate crisis. In one recent study, energy economist (and *Natural Capitalism* co-author) Amory Lovins compared the current cost of nuclear power to a variety of other sources, both in terms of their power output and their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions savings. He concluded that from 2 to 10 times as much carbon dioxide can be withheld from the atmosphere with comparable investments in wind power, cogeneration (simultaneously extracting electricity and heat from the burning of natural gas), and energy efficiency.<sup>9</sup> Such findings, however, are far from adequate to sway either industrialists or politicians who are ideologically committed to the nuclear path. Well known environmental advocates, including the British scientist James Lovelock and *Whole Earth Catalog* founder Stewart Brand, reap the apparently unending adoration of the mainstream press for their “born-again” advocacy for nuclear power, while US Senator John

Kerry has offered generous new subsidies to the nuclear industry in an effort to win Republican Senators’ support for his cap-and-trade-centered climate bill.<sup>10</sup>

Claims that the coal industry will soon clean up its act and cease contributing to the climate crisis are equally fanciful. While politicians endlessly repeat the promise of “clean coal,” and the World Bank has recently announced a new carbon capture trust fund for developing countries, scientists actually engaged in efforts to capture and sequester CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from coal plants admit that the technology is decades away, at best. Many are doubtful that huge quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> can be permanently stored underground, and project that attempting to do so will increase the energy consumed by coal-burning plants as much as 40 percent.<sup>11</sup> Still, the myth of “cleaner” coal is aggressively promoted in the US and around the world, partly to justify the continued construction of a new generation of coal-burning plants, which are misleadingly described as “capture-ready.”

The consequences of efforts to minimize conventional pollution from coal plants were dramatized by a massive spill of hundreds of millions of gallons of toxic coal ash last year, following the breach of a large dam in the US state of Tennessee. The incident covered the valleys below with up to six feet of sludge, which is essentially the byproduct of scrubbers installed to make coal burning somewhat cleaner; contaminants that were once spewed into the air are now contaminating waterways instead. A recent investigation by *New York Times* revealed that more than 300 coal plants have violated US water pollution rules in the past five years, only 10 percent of which were fined or sanctioned in any way.<sup>12</sup> Activists in regions of the Appalachian Mountains that have relied on coal mining for over a century are now rising up against the practice of “mountaintop removal” mining, in which mountaintops are literally blasted off to reveal the coal seams below.

So-called “biofuels” present a more ambiguous story. On a hobbyist or farm scale, people are running cars and tractors on everything from waste oil from restaurants to homegrown oil from sunflowers. But industrial-scale biofuels present a very different picture; activists in the global South use the more appropriate term, “agrofuels,” as these are first and foremost products of global agribusiness. Running American cars on ethanol fermented from corn, and European vehicles on diesel fuel pressed from soybeans and other food crops, has contributed to the worldwide food shortages that brought starvation and food riots to at least 35 countries in 2007–8.<sup>13</sup> The amount of corn needed to produce the ethanol for one large SUV tank contains enough calories to feed a hungry person for a year.<sup>14</sup>

Even if the entire US corn crop were to be used for fuel, it would only displace about 12 percent of domestic gasoline use, according to University of Minnesota researchers.<sup>15</sup> The current push for agrofuels has consumed a growing share of US corn – as much as

30 percent in 2009 – and encouraged growers of less energy and chemical-intensive crops such as wheat and soybeans to transfer more of their acreage to growing corn. Land in the Brazilian Amazon and other fragile regions is being plowed under to grow soybeans for export, while Brazil's uniquely biodiverse coastal grasslands are appropriated to grow sugarcane, today's most efficient source of ethanol. Two studies released in 2008 show that deforestation and other changes in land use that go along with agrofuel development clearly make these fuels net contributors to global warming.<sup>16</sup>

Commercial supplies of biodiesel often come from soybean or canola fields in the US Midwest, Canada, or the Amazon, where these crops are genetically engineered to withstand large doses of chemical herbicides. Increasingly, biodiesel originates from the vast monoculture oil palm plantations that have in recent years displaced more than 80 percent of the native rainforests of Indonesia and Malaysia. As the global food crisis has escalated, agrofuel proponents have asserted that using food crops for fuel is only a temporary solution, and that soon we will run all of our cars on fuel extracted from grasses and trees; this dangerous myth is exacerbating global conversion of forests to timber plantations, and helping to drive a new wave of subsidies to the US biotechnology industry to develop fast-growing genetically engineered trees.<sup>17</sup>

## Trading Pollution

Perhaps the most brazen expression of capitalist ideology in the climate debate is the notion that the capitalist market itself can be a tool for reducing global emissions of greenhouse gases. When Al Gore – then US Vice President – addressed the UN climate conference in Kyoto in 1997, he offered that the US would sign on to what soon became the Kyoto Protocol under two conditions: that mandated reductions in emissions be far less ambitious than originally proposed, and that any reductions be implemented through the market-based trading of “rights to pollute” among various companies and between countries. Under this “cap-and-trade” model, companies that fail to meet their quota for emission reductions can readily purchase the difference from another permit holder that was able to reduce its emissions faster. While economists claim that this scheme induces companies to implement the most cost-effective changes as soon as possible, experience shows that carbon markets are at least as prone to fraud and manipulation as any other financial markets. Over a dozen years after the Kyoto Protocol was signed, most industrialized countries are still struggling to bring down their annual rate of increase in global warming pollution.<sup>18</sup>

The intellectual roots of carbon trading go back to the early 1960s, when corporate managers were just beginning to consider the consequences of pollution and resource depletion. Chicago School economist R. H. Coase published a key paper in 1960,

## > NOTES

- 7 Linda Gunter, “The French Nuclear Industry Is Bad Enough in France; Let's Not Expand It to the U.S.,” *AlterNet*, March 23, 2009 (available at <http://www.alternet.org/story/132852>).
- 8 See, for example, Jan Willem Storm van Leeuwen and Philip Smith, *Nuclear Power: The Energy Balance* (available at <http://www.stormsmith.nl>).
- 9 Amory B. Lovins and Imran Sheikh, “The Nuclear Illusion” (available at <http://community.livejournal.com/greenparty/342794.html>).
- 10 John Kerry and Lindsey Graham, “Yes We Can (Pass Climate Change Legislation),” *New York Times*, October 11, 2009; Darren Samuelsohn, “Senate Dems Opening to Nuclear as Path to GOP Support for Climate Bill” (available at <http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2009/10/07/07climatewire-senate-dems-opening-to-nuclear-as-path-to-go-28815.html>).
- 11 See, for example, Emily Rochon, *et al.*, *False Hope: Why Carbon Capture and Storage won't Save the Climate*, (Amsterdam: Greenpeace International, 2008).
- 12 Charles Duhigg, “Cleansing the Air at the Expense of Waterways,” *New York Times*, October 13, 2009.
- 13 For comprehensive analyses of the global food crisis and various activist responses, see “The Crisis in Agriculture and Food: Conflict, Resistance, & Renewal,” a special issue of *Monthly Review* (July/August 2009).
- 14 Lester R. Brown, “Supermarkets and Service Stations Now Competing for Grain,” *Earth Policy Institute Update*, July 13, 2006 (available at <http://www.earth-policy.org/Updates/2006/Update55.htm>); C. Ford Runge and Benjamin Senauer, “How Biofuels Could Starve the Poor,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (May/June 2007), pp. 41–53.
- 15 Jason Hill, *et al.*, “Environmental, economic, and energetic costs and benefits of biodiesel and ethanol biofuels,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 103 no. 30 (July 2006), pp. 11206–11210.
- 16 Joseph Fargione, *et al.*, “Land Clearing and the Biofuel Carbon Debt,” *Science* Vol. 319 (February 2008), pp. 1235–1238, and Timothy Searchinger, *et al.*, “Use of U.S. Croplands for Biofuels Increases Greenhouse Gases Through Emissions from Land-Use Change,” *Science* Vol. 319 (February 2008), pp. 1238–1240.
- 17 See Rachel Smolker, *et al.*, “The True Cost of Agrofuels: Impacts on food, forests, peoples and the climate,” (Global Forest Coalition, 2008), especially Chapter 6 (available at <http://www.globalforestcoalition.org/img/userpics/File/publications/Truecostagrofuels.pdf>). For continuing updates see <http://www.nogetrees.org>.
- 18 See, for example, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, “Global CO2 emissions: annual increase halves in 2008” (available at <http://www.pbl.nl/en/publications/2009/Global-CO2-emissions-annual-increase-halves-in-2008.html>).

where he proposed a direct equivalence between the harm caused by pollution and the economic loss to polluting industries if they are compelled to curtail production. “The right to do something which has a harmful effect,” argued Coase, “is also a factor of production.”<sup>19</sup> He proposed that steps to regulate production be evaluated on par with the market transactions that those regulations aim to alter, arguing that economics should determine the optimal allocation of resources needed to best satisfy all parties to any dispute.

Drawing partly on Coase’s work, the Canadian economist J.H. Dales carried the discussion two steps further. First, he argued that charging for pollution, via a disposal fee or tax, is more efficient than either regulation or subsidizing alternative technologies. Then, as an extension of this argument, Dales proposed a “market in pollution rights” as an administratively simpler and less costly means of implementing pollution charges. “The pollution rights scheme, it seems clear, would require far less policing than any of the others we have discussed,” Dales suggested – a proposition thoroughly at odds with the world’s experience since Kyoto.<sup>20</sup> In 1972, California Institute of Technology economist David Montgomery presented a detailed mathematical model, purporting to show that a market in licenses to pollute indeed reaches a point of equilibrium at which desired levels of environmental quality are achieved at the lowest possible cost.<sup>21</sup>

By the mid-1970s, the new US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was actively experimenting with pollution trading, initially through brokered deals, in which Agency would allow companies to offset pollution from new industrial facilities by reducing existing emissions elsewhere or negotiating with another company to do so. But it appears that the real breakthrough was a 1979 Harvard Law Review article by US Supreme Court Justice (then a law professor) Stephen Breyer. Breyer’s article introduced a broader array of policymakers to the concept of “marketable rights to pollute.”<sup>22</sup>

By the late 1980s, Harvard economist Robert Stavins, associated with the uniquely corporate-friendly Environmental Defense Fund, was collaborating with environmentalists, academics, government officials, and representatives of corporations such as Chevron and Monsanto to propose new environmental initiatives to the incoming administration of George Bush, Sr., initiatives that featured market incentives as a supplement to regulation. Seeking to distinguish himself from Ronald Reagan, his rabidly anti-environmental White House predecessor, Bush soon announced a plan based on tradable permits to reduce the sulfur dioxide emissions from power plants that were causing acid rain throughout the eastern US.<sup>23</sup> The US has indeed reduced acid rain since 1990, but more slowly than other countries, and mainly as a result of pollution controls mandated by state-level regulators. Trading may have helped reduce the cost of some companies’ compliance with the rules, but also likely contributed to limiting the spread of important new technologies.<sup>24</sup>

That didn’t stop the Environmental Defense Fund’s senior economist, Daniel Dudek, from proposing that the limited trading of acid rain emissions in the US was an appropriate “scale model” for a much more ambitious plan to trade global emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Al Gore first endorsed the idea in his best-selling 1992 book, *Earth in the Balance*, and Richard Sandor, then the director of the Chicago Board of Trade, North America’s largest commodities market, co-authored a study for UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) that endorsed international emissions trading. Sandor went on to found the Chicago Climate Exchange, which today engages nearly 400 international companies and public agencies in a wholly voluntary carbon market.

While the US never adopted the Kyoto Protocol, the rest of the world has had to live with the consequences of Gore’s intervention in Kyoto, which created what the British columnist George Monbiot has aptly termed “an exuberant market in fake emissions cuts.”<sup>25</sup> The European Union’s Emissions Trading System, for example, has produced huge new subsidies for highly polluting corporations, without demonstrable reductions in pollution. While European countries are also supporting energy conservation and renewable energy technologies with public funds, in the US we are told that solar and wind technologies need to prove their viability in the so-called “free market” – in marked contrast to ever-increasing subsidies for nuclear power and agrofuels.

Carbon offsets are the other key aspect of the “market” approach to global warming. These investments in nominally emissions-reducing projects in other parts of the world are now a central feature of carbon markets, and an even greater obstacle to real solutions. They are aptly compared to the “indulgences” that sinners used to buy from the Catholic church during the Middle Ages. Larry Lohmann of the UK’s CornerHouse research group has demonstrated in detail how carbon offsets are encouraging the conversion of native forests into monoculture tree plantations, lengthening the lifespan of polluting industrial facilities and toxic landfills in Asia and Africa in exchange for only incremental changes in their operations, and ultimately perpetuating the very inequalities that we need to eliminate in order to create a more just and sustainable world.<sup>26</sup> Even if they can occasionally help support beneficial projects, offsets postpone investments in necessary emissions reductions at home, and represent a gaping hole in any mandated “cap” in carbon dioxide emissions. They are a means for polluting industries to continue business as usual at home while contributing, marginally at best, to emission reductions elsewhere.

Capitalist techno-fixes, trading and offsets will simply not bring us any closer to the zero-emissions future that we know is both necessary and achievable. Nevertheless, markets in greenhouse gas emissions allowances continue to be a central feature of proposed climate legislation in the US and worldwide.<sup>27</sup> This conflict compels

us to revisit an earlier time in the evolution of popular movements around energy and climate issues, and re-evaluate the lessons that past movements may have to teach us today.

### A Utopian Movement?

The last time a popular movement compelled significant changes in environmental and energy policies was during the late 1970s. In the aftermath of the OPEC oil embargo, imposed during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the nuclear and utility industries adopted a plan to construct more than 300 nuclear power plants in the United States by the year 2000. Utility and state officials identified rural communities across the US as potential sites for new nuclear facilities, and the popular response was swift and unanticipated. A militant grassroots antinuclear movement united back-to-the-landers and traditional rural dwellers with seasoned urban activists, as well as a new generation of environmentalists who only partially experienced the ferment of the 1960s.

In April of 1977, over 1400 people were arrested trying to nonviolently occupy a nuclear construction site in the coastal town of Seabrook, New Hampshire. That event helped inspire the emergence of decentralized, grassroots antinuclear alliances all across the country, committed to nonviolent direct action, bottom-up forms of internal organization, and a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between technological and social changes. Not only did these groups adopt an uncompromising call for “No Nukes,” but many promoted a vision of an entirely new social order, rooted in decentralized, solar-powered communities empowered to decide both their energy future and their political future. If the nuclear state almost inevitably leads to a police state – due to the massive security apparatus necessary to protect hundreds of nuclear plants and radioactive waste dumps all over the country – activists proposed that a solar-based energy system could be the underpinning for a radically decentralized and directly democratic model for society.

This movement was so successful in raising the hazards of nuclear power as a matter of urgent public concern that nuclear projects all across the US began to be cancelled. When the nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania partially melted down in March of 1979, it spelled the end of the nuclear expansion. While politicians in Washington today are doing everything possible to underwrite a revival of nuclear power, it is still the case that no new nuclear plants have been licensed or built in the United States since Three Mile Island. The antinuclear movement of the late 1970s helped spawn the first wave of significant development of solar and wind technologies, aided by substantial but temporary tax benefits for solar installations, and helped launch a visionary “green cities” movement that captured the imaginations of architects, planners and ordinary citizens.

**The antinuclear groups of the 1970s not only adopted an uncompromising call for “No Nukes!” Many also promoted a vision of an entirely new social order, rooted in decentralized, solar-powered communities empowered to decide both their energy future and their political future.**

### > NOTES

- 19 R.H. Coase, “The Problem of Social Cost,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 3 (October 1960), p. 44.
- 20 J.H. Dales, *Pollution, Property & Prices* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 97.
- 21 W. David Montgomery, “Markets in Licenses and Efficient Pollution Control Programs,” *Journal of Economic Theory*, Vol. 5 (1972), pp. 395–418.
- 22 Stephen Breyer, “Analyzing regulatory failure, mismatches, less restrictive alternatives and reform,” *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (January 1979), pp. 547–609.
- 23 For a more complete treatment of the origins of the US Acid Rain Program, see Brian Tokar, *Earth For Sale: Reclaiming Ecology in the Age of Corporate Greenwash* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), pp. 33–45.
- 24 See, for example, Gar Lipow, “Emissions trading: A mixed record, with plenty of failures” (available at <http://www.grist.org/article/emissions-trading-a-mixed-record-with-plenty-of-failures>).
- 25 George Monbiot, “We’ve been suckered again by the US. So far the Bali deal is worse than Kyoto,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2007.
- 26 Larry Lohmann, *Carbon Trading: A Critical Conversation on Climate Change, Privatization and Power* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2006).
- 27 For a critical overview of current US climate legislation, see Brian Tokar, “Toward Climate Justice: Can we turn back from the abyss?,” *Z Magazine*, September 2009 (available at <http://www.zcommunications.org/zmag/viewArticle/22377>). Continuing updates are at <http://climatesos.org>.



Photo: Steve Punter

**Derrick Jensen is one of the most prolific and popular anti-authoritarian writers today. He insists that a rational transition to an ecologically sustainable society is impossible, and that ecological activists must help bring on the collapse of Western civilization.**

The 1970s and early '80s were relatively hopeful times, and utopian thinking was far more widespread than it is today. This was prior to the “Reagan revolution” in US politics and the rise of neoliberalism worldwide. The right had not yet begun its crusade to depict the former Soviet Union as the apotheosis of utopian social engineering gone awry. Many antinuclear activists looked to the emerging outlook of social ecology and the writings of social ecologist Murray Bookchin as a source of theoretical grounding for a revolutionary ecological politics. Social ecology challenged activists by overturning prevailing views about the evolution of social and cultural relationships to non-human nature and examining the roots of domination in the earliest emergence of human social hierarchies.<sup>28</sup> For the activists of that period, Bookchin’s insistence that environmental problems are fundamentally social and political in origin encouraged forward-looking responses to ecological concerns and reconstructive visions of a fundamentally transformed society. Social ecology’s emphasis on popular power and direct democracy continued to inspire activists during the emergence of the global justice movement in the 1990s.

While radically reconstructive social visions are relatively scarce in today’s political climate, dissatisfaction with the status quo reaches widely among many sectors of the population. The more people consume, and the deeper they fall into debt, the less satisfied they seem to be with the world of business-as-usual. Though elite discourse and the corporate media continue to be confined by a narrowly circumscribed status-quo, there is also the potential for a new opening, reaching far beyond the confines of what is now deemed politically “acceptable.”

Activists hesitant to question the underlying assumptions of capitalism tend to focus on their own mix of techno-fixes. While these are generally far more benign than the false solutions proposed by the coal, nuclear and agrofuel industries, they won’t likely proceed very far in the absence of broader, systemic changes. Not that such proposals aren’t often compelling in their own terms. For example, the acclaimed advocate Van Jones, who advised Barack Obama on green jobs policies before he fell victim to a vicious right wing witch-hunt, writes:

Hundreds of thousands of green-collar jobs will be weatherizing and energy-retrofitting every building in the United States. Buildings with leaky windows, ill-fitting doors, poor insulation and old appliances can gobble up 30 percent more energy... Drafty buildings create broke, chilly people – and an overheated planet.

Clearly, steps to address these problems will offer an important benefit for those most in need, and is a necessary step toward a greener future. But can such near-term measures be sufficient? Since the 1970s, Amory Lovins has been a tireless advocate for dramatically increased energy efficiency throughout the US and

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global economies. He has demonstrated in exhaustive detail how we can feasibly reduce energy consumption by 60 - 80 percent, and how many of the necessary measures would result in an unambiguous economic gain. Lovins' pitch is unapologetically aimed at believers in the "free market," and at those whose primary concern is market profitability, yet adoption of his proposals has been spotty at best.

The problem, of course, is that capitalism aims to maximize profits, not efficiency. Indeed, economists since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have suggested that improvements in the efficiency of resource consumption will most often increase demand and further economic expansion under capitalism.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, while efficiency improvements often reduce the costs of production, corporations will generally accept the perhaps higher expense of sustaining existing methods that have proven to keep profits growing. The *New York Times* reported last year that corporations are hesitant to invest in measures to save energy and make their operations more efficient unless they can demonstrate a two year payback – a constraint that is rarely imposed on other investments.<sup>30</sup> Corporations almost invariably prefer to lay off workers, outsource production, or move factories overseas than to invest in environmentally meaningful improvements. Lovins' focus on efficiency runs counter to the inclinations of a business world aggressively oriented toward growth, capital mobility and accumulation. While important innovations in solar technology, for example, are announced almost daily, its acceptance in the capitalist marketplace is still decades behind other, far more speculative and hazardous alternatives.

## Hope and Despair

If technological fixes are insufficient to usher in an age of renewable technologies, is the situation hopeless? Is a nihilistic, end-of-civilization response the only viable alternative? Are we limited to a future of defensive battles against an increasingly authoritarian world of scarcity and climate chaos? Or can the prefigurative dimensions of earlier, more hopeful radical ecological movements be renewed in our time?

Dystopian outlooks are clearly in the ascendancy in today's anti-authoritarian left. "Anarchists and their allies are now required to project themselves into a future of growing instability and deterioration," writes Israeli activist and scholar Uri Gordon. He acknowledges the current flowering of permaculture and other sustainable technologies as a central aspect of today's experiments toward "community self-sufficiency," but views these as "rear guard" actions, best aimed to "encourage and protect the autonomy and grassroots orientation of emergent resistances" in a fundamentally deteriorating social and political climate.<sup>31</sup>

Derrick Jensen, one of the most prolific and popular anti-authoritarian writers today, insists that a rational transition to an

ecologically sustainable society is impossible, and that the only sensible role for ecologically aware activists is to help bring on the collapse of Western civilization. Hope itself, for Jensen, is "a curse and a bane," an acceptance of powerlessness, and ultimately "what keeps us chained to the system." Well before Barack Obama adopted a vaguely defined "Hope" as a theme of his presidential campaign, Jensen argued that hope "serves the needs of those in power as surely as belief in a distant heaven; that hope is really nothing more than a secular way of keeping us in line."<sup>32</sup>

This view is considerably at odds with decades of historical scholarship and activist praxis. Radical hopelessness may be sufficient to help motivate young people to confront authorities when necessary at events like the G20 summit in Pittsburgh and the UN climate conference in Copenhagen, but it seems unlikely to be able to sustain the lifetimes of radical thought and action that are necessary if we are to create a different world. As social movement historian Richard Flacks has shown, most people are only willing to disrupt the patterns of their daily lives to engage in the project he terms "making history" when social grievances become personal, and when they have a tangible sense that a better way is possible. This, for Flacks, is among the historic roles of democratic popular movements, to further the idea "that people are capable of and ought to be making their own history, that the making of history ought to be integrated with everyday life, that [prevailing] social arrangements ... can and must be replaced by frameworks that permit routine access and participation by all in the decisions that affect their lives."<sup>33</sup>

Flacks' expansive view of democracy resonates well with social ecology's long-range, community-centered vision. Bookchin's reconstructive outlook is rooted in direct democracy, in confederations of empowered communities challenging the hegemony of the state and capital, and in restoring a sense of reciprocity to economic relationships, which are ultimately subordinated to the needs of the community. He viewed these as essential steps toward restoring harmony to human relations, and to the reharmonization of our communities with non-human nature.

Further, in his 1970s and eighties' anthropological studies, Bookchin sought to draw out a number of ethical principles common to preliterate, or "organic" societies, that could further illuminate the path toward such a reharmonization. These include anthropologist Paul Radin's concept of the irreducible minimum – the idea that communities are responsible for satisfying their members' most basic human needs, and an expanded view of social complementarity, through which communities accept responsibility to compensate for differences among individuals, helping assure that differences in skill or ability in particular areas will not serve to rationalize the emergence of new forms of hierarchy.

**From the Zapatistas of southeastern Mexico, who have inspired global justice activists worldwide since the 1990s, to the landless workers of the MST in Brazil, and the scores of self-identified peasant organizations in some eighty countries that constitute the global network Via Campesina, a wide array of contemporary people's movements in the global South are challenging stereotypes and transcending the limits of the possible. These grassroots efforts to reclaim the means of life, while articulating far-reaching demands for a different world, represent a starkly different relationship to both the present and the future than is offered by relatively affluent activists and writers in the global North whose most insistent contribution is to contemplate the end of civilization.**

Rather than prescribing blueprints for a future society, Bookchin sought to educe principles from the broad scope of human history that he saw as expressing potentialities for further human development. His outlook on social change is resonant with the best of the utopian tradition, as described in a recent essay by Randall Amster, who describes utopia as

a dynamic *process* and not a static *place* ... attaining a harmonious exchange with nature and an open, participatory process among community members are central features of these [utopian] endeavors; that resistance to dominant cultures of repression and authoritarianism is a common impetus for anarcho-utopian undertakings; and that communities embodying these principles are properly viewed as ongoing experiments and not finished products.<sup>34</sup>

While people of different material circumstances and cultural backgrounds would surely emphasize differing needs and inclinations in their search for a better society, such a long-range utopian outlook can help us comprehend the fullest scope of human possibilities.

This view clearly has far more to offer than a bleak “end of civilization” outlook, both for people in Northern countries facing increasingly chaotic weather, as well as to the majority of people around the world who are experiencing more direct consequences of climate disruptions. It is the hope for a better society, along with the determination and support necessary to intervene to challenge current inequities, that has inspired movements of land-based peoples around the world to refuse to accept an oppressive status quo and act to take the future into their hands.

### **Toward Climate Justice and a Greener World**

From the Zapatistas of southeastern Mexico, who have inspired global justice activists worldwide since the 1990s, to the landless workers of the MST in Brazil, and the scores of self-identified peasant organizations in some eighty countries that constitute the global network Via Campesina, a wide array of contemporary people's movements in the global South are challenging stereotypes and transcending the limits of the possible. These grassroots efforts to reclaim the means of life, while articulating far-reaching demands for a different world, represent a starkly different relationship to both the present and the future than is offered by relatively affluent activists and writers in the global North whose most insistent contribution is to contemplate the end of civilization.

The actions of mainly indigenous, land-based people around the world are also a central inspiration for the emerging climate justice movement. The outlook of climate justice reflects the growing understanding that those most affected by accelerating climate-related disasters around the world are generally the least responsible for causing disruptions to the climate. The call for

climate justice is uniting activists from both the North and the South, with a commitment to highlight the voices of these most affected communities. Many are simultaneously impacted by accelerating climate chaos and by the emerging false solutions to climate change, including carbon trading and offsets, the destruction of forests to create agrofuel plantations, large-scale hydroelectric projects, and the entire nuclear fuel cycle. Climate justice movements are also challenging the expanding scope of commodification and privatization, whether of land, waterways, or the atmosphere itself.

For example a recent statement by the European Climate Justice Action network, which coordinated plans for direct action around the UN climate summit in Copenhagen, was drafted by representatives from more than 20 countries, including several from the global South. “We cannot trust the market with our future, nor put our faith in unsafe, unproven and unsustainable technologies,” the declaration read. “Contrary to those who put their faith in ‘green capitalism,’ we know that it is impossible to have infinite growth on a finite planet.” The statement called for leaving fossil fuels in the ground, popular and community control over production, reducing the North’s overconsumption, respecting indigenous and forest peoples’ rights and, notably, reparations for the ecological and climate debts owed by the richest countries to those who are most affected by resource extraction and climate-related disasters. The worldwide confederation of peasant movements, Via Campesina, also joined the call for actions at the 2009 UN summit, challenging the status of carbon as a newly privatized commodity and arguing that the UN climate convention “has failed to radically question the current models of consumption and production based on the illusion of continuous growth.”<sup>35</sup>

In the US, the call for climate justice is uniting indigenous communities, who are resisting increased mining of coal and uranium throughout North America, with long-time residents of southern Appalachia, who are regularly risking arrest to block the devastating “mountaintop removal” coal mining practices that have already destroyed over 500 mountains in their region. At the same time as they are challenging the most devastating mining practices, some people in coal-dependent communities are demanding a restorative economic model that relieves the stranglehold of the coal companies over their communities, protects people’s health, and facilitates the phase-out of the most environmentally-destructive form of energy production.

Meanwhile, hundreds of cities and towns in the US have defied the federal government’s 20 years of inaction on the climate crisis and committed to substantial, publicly-aided CO<sub>2</sub> reductions of their own. At the local level, people across the country are working to regenerate local food systems, develop locally controlled, renewable energy sources and, sometimes, to build solidarity with kindred movements around the world. Campaigns to create urban gardens

## > NOTES

- 28 See Brian Tokar, “On Bookchin’s Social Ecology and its Contributions to Social Movements,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, Volume 19, No. 2 (March 2008).
- 29 John Bellamy Foster, “The Jeavons Paradox: Environment and Technology Under Capitalism,” in *The Ecological Revolution: Making Peace with the Planet* (New York: Monthly Review Books, 2009), pp. 121–128.
- 30 Matthew L. Wald, “Efficiency, Not Just Alternatives, Is Promoted as an Energy Saver,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2007.
- 31 Uri Gordon, “Dark Tidings: Anarchist Politics in the Age of Collapse,” in Randall Amster, et al. (eds.), *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 32 Derrick Jensen, “Beyond Hope,” *Orion Magazine*, May/June 2006.
- 33 Richard Flacks, *Making History: The American Left and the American Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 7.
- 34 Randall Amster, “Anarchy, Utopia, and the State of Things to Come,” in Amster, et al. (eds.), *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*. Emphasis in original; several embedded references have been deleted here.
- 35 “Via Campesina Call to Mobilise for a Cool Planet: Don’t trade off Peasant’s agriculture for rights to pollute,” July 2009 (available at [http://www.viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=745&Itemid=1](http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=745&Itemid=1)).
- 36 For evidence that factory farming may be raising agriculture’s contribution to global warming to as much as 50 percent, see Robert Goodland and Jeff Anhang, “Livestock and Climate Change,” *WorldWatch*, November/December 2009.
- 37 For an articulate political critique of the emerging “transition towns” movement, see Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler, *The Rocky Road to a Real Transition* (Leeds: Trapeze Collective, April 2008).
- 38 “Worldwide poll: Vast majority say capitalism not working,” November 9, 2009 (available at <http://rawstory.com/2009/11/survey-capitalism-not-working/>).

and farmers' markets are among the most successful and well-organized efforts toward community-centered solutions to the climate crisis. In recent years, they have been joined in many areas by nonprofit networks aiming to more systematically raise the availability of healthy, local food for urban dwellers, especially those dependent on public assistance. The local foods movement in the US, once dominated by those affluent enough to seek out gourmet products, is learning from Slow Food activists in Europe that it is necessary to directly support farmers and food producers, and to aim to meet the needs of all members of their communities. As the food system is responsible for at least a quarter and possibly half of all greenhouse gas emissions, such efforts are far more than symbolic in their importance.<sup>36</sup>

Community-based efforts to reduce energy consumption and move toward carbon-free energy systems have seen some important successes as well. More than two hundred cities and towns throughout the English-speaking world have signed on as "transition towns," initiating local efforts to address the dual crises of climate chaos and peak oil. While this movement has a disturbing tendency to focus on personal rather than political transformation, and has been critiqued for shying away from important local controversies in some areas, the effort is filling an important vacuum in social organization, and creating public spaces that more forward-looking and politically engaged efforts may be able to fill as the tangible effects of various crises strike closer to home.<sup>37</sup>

## Looking Forward

Still, many chronically vexing questions remain. Can the potential for a more thoroughgoing transformation of society actually be realized? Is it possible for now-isolated local efforts to come together in a holistic manner and fulfill the generations-old left-libertarian dream of a "movement of movements," organized from the ground up to radically change the world? Can we envision a genuine synthesis of oppositional and alternative-building efforts able to challenge systems of deeply entrenched power, and transcend the dual challenges of political burn-out and co-optation of counter-institutions? Can a new movement for social and ecological renewal emerge from the individual and community levels toward the radical re-envisioning of entire regions and a genuinely transformed social and political order?

In these often cynical times, with ever-increasing disparities in wealth and media-drenched cultures of conspicuous consumption in the North, together with increased dislocation and looming climate crises in the South, it is sometimes difficult to imagine what a genuinely transformative movement would look like. In the US, right wing demagogues appear to be far more effective than progressive forces in channeling the resentments that have emerged from the continuing economic meltdown toward serving their narrow political agendas. But it is clear that when people have the opportunity to act on their deepest aspirations for a stronger sense of community, for the health of their families and neighbors, and for a more hopeful future, people's better instincts often triumph over parochial interests. This is a reliable feature of daily life, and one that also illuminates the entire history of popular social movements. It offers an important kernel of hope for the kind of movement that can perhaps reinvigorate the long-range reconstructive potential of a social ecological outlook.

In September, the popular American documentary filmmaker Michael Moore released his latest film, focusing on the broad implications of the current economic crisis. Among other themes, the film highlights the often subterranean resistance by people across the US to the wave of home foreclosures that has swept the country over the past year. The film ends on a striking note. "Capitalism is an evil, and you cannot regulate evil," Moore states above a backdrop of present-day Wall Street. "You have to eliminate it and replace it with something that is good for all people and that something is democracy."

A recent poll commissioned by the BBC confirmed that people in a dozen key countries now agree that capitalism has serious endemic problems, and that we may need a fundamentally different economic system. Only in Pakistan and the US did more than 20 percent of those interviewed express confidence in the present status quo.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps this is the kind of sensibility that will reopen a broader popular discussion of the potential for a different kind of society. Perhaps we don't yet need to resign ourselves to apocalyptic visions of the end of the world. Perhaps the climate crisis, along with the continuing meltdown of the neoliberal economic order of recent decades, can indeed help us envision a transition toward a more harmonious, more humane and ecological way of life. ●

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BY ADAM KRAUSE

# Art and Progress

Recent art history is marked by a conflict between modernist narratives of artistic progress and postmodernist rejections of such narratives. Can we transcend both the modernist and the post-modernist notions of progress? Can there be non-commodified art? Does art have a future?

**T**he modernist account of art is marked by the belief that art history has a narrative with a quasi-teleological thrust. To the modernist, art *progresses*. Not coincidentally, one of the defining features of postmodernism which makes it so *post* modernism is its rejection of progress. This rejection occurs for a number of often overlapping reasons that will be discussed below. But unfortunately for anyone who was rooting for the long-term viability of postmodernism as a body of thought, modernism's version of progress is inherently problematic to begin with, thereby rendering postmodernism's rejection of that same progress equally problematic.

Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno put forward two of the most recognized and influential accounts of modernism in the arts. Although Greenberg focused on visual art while Adorno focused on music and literature, there are still similarities in their respective accounts of modernism, in particular in their focus on progress in the arts. As Andreas Huyssen writes in *After The Great Divide*,

While there are major differences between the two men, both in temperament and in the scope of their analyses, they both share a notion of the inevitability of the evolution of modern art. To put it bluntly, they believe in progress – if not in society, then certainly in art.<sup>1</sup>

And it is this modernist belief in artistic progress that represents one of the main divergences between the modern and the postmodern.

Those who place us in the postmodern era declare the modernist notion of progress useless for several reasons. Some reject the “master narratives” of modernism espoused by the likes of Greenberg and Adorno as elitist and Eurocentric. Greenberg drew a line of constant innovation from Manet to the New York school of abstract expressionism. Adorno saw Beethoven starting a procession of progression leading directly to Schoenberg’s serialism. In either case, great men create great art that transcends mass culture and moves forever forward into ever greater feats of innovation. Postmodernists who criticize this version of progress as elitist or Eurocentric are largely correct in their criticism. The postmodernist Frederic Jameson speaks of the “prophetic elitism and authoritarianism of the modern movement.”<sup>2</sup> Greenberg and Adorno’s belief that art history can be effectively discussed while focusing solely on developments in western culture as practiced by a handful of individuals, and simultaneously ignoring the activities of the rest of the globe or anyone else who does not serve their narrative, is both a smug oversimplification and frighteningly elitist. Other postmodernists, such as Arthur Danto, seem to accept the modernist account of progress as conceptually and ethically sound, but declare the line of progress it describes as having reached its end, thus rendering further progress impossible. In short, the modernist account of art history and the nature of progress is inherently problematic. Postmodernists who use this flawed account of progress in order to reject the very notion of progress, or to declare progress impossible, base their entire discussion of the possibility of progress on a very questionable definition of the word.

Moreover, postmodernists all too quickly accept the modernist contention that the great modern artists were able to stand outside of the capitalist marketplace with their work, thus maintaining a kind of purity allowing them the luxury to experiment and progress. This was apparently due to modernism being “high” art rather than “low.” But in the postmodern era, this distinction is declared gone. The space between high and low has collapsed. Therefore, it is concluded, it is now impossible to create work outside of the capitalist marketplace or with the same level of purity as modern artists. But, as will be shown later, the modernist claim to have ever stood outside of the marketplace is a questionable contention. In fact, it was not until the advent of the free market that artists were able to free themselves from the church and state and survive on art created, well, for the free market. It was the rise of the bourgeoisie as high art’s target market that gave modern artists the luxury to experiment. In reality, an artist’s ability to transcend the marketplace is due to factors that have nothing to do with the often quite specious and usually quite useless distinction between “high” and “low.”

Since the modernist claims about progress in the arts are mistaken, the postmodernist counterclaim that these (never-existent)

circumstances are gone needs to be abandoned. The modernists got progress wrong to begin with, and the postmodernists adopted these errors as their own. But the modernist version is not the only possible form of progress. The concept can be reframed to be more inclusive and less reductive. Later in this essay, one possible reframing of progress, an ecological version, will be sketched out and some examples of how art can stand outside the marketplace will be discussed (and whether that art is “high” or “low” has nothing to do with it). But until then, we have to deal with the thorny business of modernism, postmodernism, and the death of progress. Its resurrection will come later.

### Enter The Unwashed Masses

Clement Greenberg provided the prosecution with plenty of evidence for the case of modernism’s elitism. In his 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” he blames the rise in literacy for the debasement of art. Allowing the commoners and riff-raff the knowledge needed to take in cultural commodities sullied and desecrated art’s good name by providing kitsch with an audience. Greenberg defines kitsch as “popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies etc., etc.”<sup>3</sup> He further elaborates: “Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations, kitsch changes according to style, but remains the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.”<sup>4</sup>

Avant-Garde art, of which modernism is an example,<sup>5</sup> is a representative of “true culture.” Greenberg dates the beginning of modern art to 1850s France with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting. He claims that with the masses devouring mass-produced culture, aesthetic standards declined. Because of this, artists had to push forward (and progress) in order to maintain these slipping aesthetic standards. To quote Greenberg: “So I come at last to what I offer as an embracing and perdurable definition of Modernism: that it consists in the continuing endeavor to stem the decline of aesthetic standards threatened by the relative democratization of culture under industrialism; that the overriding and innermost logic of Modernism is to maintain the levels of the past in the face of an opposition that hadn’t been present in the past.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the notion of progress that is central to modernism, Greenberg places, strangely enough, in a form of conservatism, in a need to maintain high art’s high standards against the unwashed masses pounding at the gates of culture, comic books in hand. In order to stay ahead of the democratization and debasement of culture, it proved necessary to push forwards with art’s historically necessary formal innovations at an accelerated pace. As he writes, “over the past hundred and thirty years and more the best new painting and sculpture (and the best new poetry) have in their time

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proven a challenge and a trial to the art lover – a challenge and a trial as they hadn't been used to.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, because of the modern artist's need to arrive at new formal innovations quickly in order to stay ahead of culture's debasement, audiences were often left perplexed. But, he points out, “with only a relatively small lapse of time the innovations of modernism begin to look less and less radical,” and “they almost settle into place eventually as part of the continuum of high Western art along with Shakespeare's verse and Rembrandt's drawings.”<sup>78</sup> That is, these once perplexing formal innovations were simply the formal innovations that would have occurred anyway as artists followed the logic of art history, but because of the accelerated pace at which these innovations occurred, it took some time before audiences were ready to understand them as a natural part of art's trajectory.

### The End of Art

Arthur Danto, in *Beyond the Brillo Box*, accepts the general modernist notion that art history has a narrative, that is, that it *progresses*. But Danto claims that this narrative has drawn to a close. Art has reached its end. There can be no more formal innovations. There can only be the art produced after the end of art. Danto places this terminus, somewhat arbitrarily it would seem, with Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* of 1965. These were plywood boxes screened with an exact reproduction of the actual Brillo boxes in which one might find an actual Brillo pad.

So thanks to these Brillo Boxes, art history has drawn to a close. But, Danto writes, “What the end of art means is not, of course, that there will be no more works of art.” He explains: “What has come to an end, rather, is a certain narrative, under the terms of which making art was understood to be carrying forward the history of discovery and making breakthroughs.”<sup>79</sup> Danto accepts the basic tenets of modernist art criticism as exemplified by someone like Clement Greenberg. We can probably (at the very least) safely impute to Danto Greenberg's notion that art has (or rather, had) a narrative. It moves forward through a process of experiment, discovery, and formal breakthrough. Important work is that which is historically necessary for the continuation of the narrative. But Danto declares the process done. Art has reached its end.

To better explain his contention, Danto refers back to a 1828 lecture Hegel delivered on the philosophy of art. Hegel held that art would reach an historical end and turn into something else, namely, philosophy. All these artistic changes and innovations, Hegel claimed, are simply art trying to define itself, to mark out its own boundaries. But once art has determined its boundaries, that is, once the exact nature of art has become known, then art can no longer have a history because it cannot develop any further. All that can be made is art about the nature of art.

**Postmodernists all too quickly accept the modernist contention that the great modern artists were able to stand outside of the capitalist marketplace with their work, thus maintaining a kind of purity allowing them the luxury to experiment and progress. This was apparently due to modernism being “high” art rather than “low.” In the postmodern era, this distinction is declared gone. The space between high and low has collapsed.**

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- 1 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 56.
- 2 Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 2.
- 3 Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 11.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 5 For Greenberg. Someone like Andreas Huyssen makes a distinction between the two.
- 6 Clement Greenberg, *Late Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 30–31.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 9 Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 10.



Thanks to these Brillo Boxes, art history has drawn to a close. Photo: Richard Winchell

This, Danto argues, is exactly what occurred on that fateful day in 1965 when Andy Warhol displayed his *Brillo Boxes* and effectively ended art history. All an artist can do now is dabble in styles from the past. As Danto writes, “One can in truth be an avant-garde artist, but, unlike Dada in 1919, this is now just a style rather than a historical moment.”<sup>10</sup>

### Art and Historical Context

But should anyone even accept the modernist version of art history? It is riddled with difficulties and troublesome generalizations. For instance, it is frighteningly reductive and exclusionary in its quest to tell a single story about the history of art. The modernist account of painting focuses on a movement towards a two-dimensional picture plane that does nothing to hide its two-dimensionality. In the Renaissance, artists applied blobs of colored pigments to canvas in such a way that the blobs of pigment resembled three-

dimensional space. But with modernism, Manet and his ilk began applying blobs of pigment in such a way that the blobs were clearly just blobs of pigment. An object from the world was still represented, but it was clear to everyone that the painting was, well, a painting. As the modern era progressed, representation receded even further into the background and paint began to be applied in such a way that a finished painting was eventually just a canvas with paint on it, and not a picture of anything at all. The paint was simply paint, and the canvas did not try to fool anyone into thinking it had any more dimensions than it actually did. This reached its apotheosis (according to Clement Greenberg) with abstract expressionism. Greenberg describes his conception of the history of painting in his peculiarly titled essay “Abstract, Representational, and So Forth.”

From Giotto to Courbet, the painter’s first task had been to hollow out an illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. One

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looked through this surface as through a proscenium onto a stage. Modernism has rendered this stage shallower and shallower until now its backdrop has become the same as its curtain, which has now become all that the painter has left to work on ... The picture has now become an entity belonging to the same order of space as our bodies; it is no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. Pictorial space has lost its “inside” and become all “outside.” The spectator can no longer escape into it from the space in which he himself stands.<sup>11</sup>

This narrative is very orderly. But why should the history of art be orderly? This narrative pushes off to the perimeter anyone who does not fit into its tidy boundaries. Were you focused on the two-dimensionality of the picture plane? No? Well, that’s too bad. You’ll be relegated to a footnote. What about you? Are you from the West? No? You’re from Asia? I’m sorry. Your art just isn’t part of the history of art. We’ll have to put it in the “World” section of our textbook.

Anything that reduces the history of a phenomenon as complex and varied as all of humanity’s paintings to a single narrative with a single goal ought to be distrusted. Actually, more than distrusted – it should be thrown out as an absurdity. But this absurd narrative is exactly what Danto uses as his basic framework. *Beyond the Brillo Box* is loaded with fascinating passages and beautifully constructed arguments. The problem lies in the fact that all of these fascinating passages and beautiful arguments are based on an inherently flawed narrative of art history. Danto accepts the shaky premises of the modernists, brings these shaky premises to an equally shaky conclusion, and then throws up his hands because he’s out of ideas. Near the end of his introduction to *Beyond the Brillo Box*, he writes that “the master narrative of Western art is losing its grip and nothing has taken its place. My thought is that nothing can.”<sup>12</sup> This displays a troubling lack of imagination on the part of a writer as talented as Danto. Art history does not need a master narrative. It has thousands upon thousands of interlinking and interconnected narratives. It simply cannot have a single teleological thrust.

Danto constantly stresses the importance of understanding a work’s historical context in order to fully understand it as art. As he writes, “To interpret a work is to be committed to a historical explanation of the work.”<sup>13</sup> Danto is correct. We require extensive archeological, anthropological and art historical explanations in order to make sense (for instance) of the cave paintings of Lascaux. Such was not the case for the inhabitants of Lascaux when the works were created. For them, the cave paintings spoke to the questions and concerns of their own historical milieu. Similarly, Warhol’s works embodied meanings that “belonged to the common culture of the time.” His subject matter was “instantly recognizable to whoever lived the life of the common culture. The art redeemed the signs that meant enormously much to everyone, as defining their daily lives. Warmth, nourishment, orderliness, and predictability

are profound human values which the stacked cans of Campbell’s soup exemplify.”<sup>14</sup> Centuries from now, Warhol’s works, much like the Lascaux caves, will require anthropological and art historical explanations in order to be fully appreciated. Danto is correct that what makes an object art and another not art (that is, the art object’s ability to embody and signify meaning) is historically determined. A blank canvas in the 1860s was just a blank canvas. By the 1960s, a blank canvas could be hung in a gallery and make a profound statement about the nature of art. Danto’s mistake is taking the fact that each individual artwork’s meaning is historically determined, and often historically determined by its relationship to other works in the history of art, to further impute that art as a whole has a single narrative that follows a logical path to a single terminus. Although art changes over time, and although many works are historically connected, this does not imply that there is one single thread running through all of art history.

Danto’s overall contention that there can be no more formal innovations in art, only genre exercises that refer back to the bygone days of genres, complicates his contention that art’s meaning is historically dependent. These two contentions together imply that the future cultural context for artworks, objects that will mean “enormously much to everyone, as defining their daily lives”<sup>15</sup> will be adequately served by mere dabblings in art historical styles from other historical contexts. In other words, if Danto’s prediction about *art’s* future is true, then the future in which this art will be created will be a very grey, dull place indeed. There will be nothing new under the sun, just old ideas rehashed. And this will somehow be sufficient. Danto apparently holds the artists of the future in very low regard, as he assumes that they will be (proverbially) treading water, and will not be able to speak to the new concerns of their age in new ways. Only hollow genre exercises will be possible.

## The Commodification of Everything

We are living in the era after the *Brillo Boxes*. Besides art having reached its supposed terminus, the modernist distinction between high art and mass culture has been erased. The images on the Brillo Boxes in the grocery store are the same as the ones in the museum. The form and content of high art and low art are now identical.

This distinction (between high and low) is a distinctly modernist one. Clement Greenberg drew a line between avant-garde and kitsch. Theodor Adorno made a similar distinction between high art and mass culture (that will be discussed below). This modernist distinction, though based on questionable premises, became a basic presupposition in postmodern thought, feeding into the distinctly postmodern claim that cultural resistance has been rendered impossible by the fall of high art into the marketplace (or the ascendance of the marketplace into high art).

Theodor Adorno was a member of the Frankfurt School, a group of like-minded thinkers who came together at the Institute for Social

Research at the University of Frankfurt in the 1930s. This group included, among others, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. Adorno saw “mass culture,” basically synonymous with Greenberg’s kitsch, as a means for mollifying the masses and fostering docility by providing readily-available, but mindless, cultural products. In his essay “Perennial Fashion – Jazz,” Adorno discusses and dismisses jazz as exactly this sort of mindless mass culture.

The ban on changing the basic beat during the course of the music is itself sufficient to constrict composition to the point where what it demands is not aesthetic awareness of style but rather psychological regression. The limitations placed on metre, harmony and form are no less stifling. Considered as a whole, the perennial sameness of jazz consists not in a basic organization of the material in which the imagination can roam freely and without inhibition, as within an articulate language, but rather in the utilization of certain well-defined tricks, formulas and clichés to the exclusion of everything else.<sup>16</sup>

Adorno then turns to what this lack of formal freedom says about the possibility of cultural criticism through mass culture.

The more totally the culture industry roots out all deviations, thus cutting the medium off from its intrinsic possibilities of development, the more the whole blaring dynamic business reaches a standstill. Just as no piece of jazz can, in a musical sense, be said to have a history, just as all its components can be moved about at will, just as no single measure follows from the logic of the musical progression – so the perennial fashion becomes a likeness of a planned congealed society, not so different from the nightmare vision of Huxley’s *Brave New World*.<sup>17</sup>

In Adorno’s conception, high art, of which modernism is an example, is not prey to the same weaknesses as mass culture. It is not tied to business and does not need to satisfy popular tastes. It is therefore free to progress by its own logic.

This basic distinction between high and low developed by modernists like Greenberg and Adorno has been taken up by postmodern thinkers and used to demonstrate that cultural resistance has been rendered futile in the postmodern age. The “whole blaring dynamic business has reached a standstill.” Progress is impossible. All art has been subsumed by the massive being of world capitalism, and as such, no art is in any position to mount any kind of critique on the prevailing economic order. In a particularly bleak passage in his exceptionally bleak *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson states:

No theory of cultural politics current on the Left today has been able to do without one notion or another of a certain minimal

aesthetic distance, of the possibility of positioning the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital, from which to assault this last. What the burden of our preceding demonstration suggests, however, is that distance in general (including “critical distance” in particular) has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism.<sup>18</sup>

This ties in to his point that a fundamental feature of modernism was “hostility to the market itself” and that this hostility has been inverted into an embrace in the postmodern era.<sup>19</sup> Modernists like Adorno believed in a distinction between high art and mass culture, and felt that it was possible for high art to stand apart from the mass market and comment from outside. But now, Jameson claims, high has become low and low has become high. All that exists is the market, and the only place where anything can ever happen is the marketplace. The “minimal aesthetic distance” required for criticism is gone.

There are several problems here. First, Jameson readily succumbs to a fatalistic form of historical determinism that leaves no room for human agency. There is no compelling reason ever given as to *why* the historical circumstances of the postmodern era are so all-encompassing that literally *no one* is in a position to step outside of the marketplace and create a non-commodifiable work or comment upon commodity culture. But more importantly, Jameson all-too-readily accepts the modernist stance that high art is the only realm in which non-commodifiable arts and acts can be made. Having accepted this questionable initial premise, Jameson concludes that the collapse of the high/low distinction has made it impossible for art to be anything other than just another part of market capitalism. And with this comes a loss of “critical distance” and progress in the arts, as any imaginable act will always be subsumed under the “massive Being of capital,” leaving the arts stalled in place, bent to the mighty will of the market.

There are, again, mistaken assumptions in the modernist beliefs about art and progress. And it is these mistaken assumptions that postmodernist commentators invariably use in their rejection of the possibility of progress in general. Jameson accepts Adorno and Greenberg’s distinction between mass culture and modernism as historically accurate. He echoes Greenberg’s claim that modernism was a reaction to the rise of mass culture when he writes that modernism’s function consisted “at least in part in the securing of a realm of authentic experience over the surrounding environment of middle- and low-brow culture. Indeed it can be argued that the emergence of high modernism is itself contemporaneous with the first great expansion of a recognizably mass culture.”<sup>20</sup>

### After Modernism and Mass Culture

Both the modernists and postmodernists observe the simultaneous rise of modernism and mass culture in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and

posit the former to be a reaction to the latter. Just as simple an explanation and more likely the case is this: modernism and mass culture arose nearly contemporaneously due to the advent of industrial capitalism. A new class, the bourgeoisie, arose with the money to spend on expensive cultural commodities, thus creating an art market independent of the church or the state, thereby allowing artists to create the works of their own choosing and place them in the marketplace. At the same time, a growing mass of urban workers emerged who created a demand for mass culture and popular entertainment. Both new classes thus created new demands for new cultural products.

Jameson claims that the distinction between modernism and mass culture “no longer seems functional.”<sup>21</sup> But it is questionable whether or not it was ever accurate in the first place: The distinction was never as tidy and simple as Jameson, Adorno, and Greenberg would have you suppose. There is a sliding scale for an artwork’s highness or lowness that existed long before postmodernism. There is no clear, unambiguous formal element that can render a work high or low. Even Greenberg admits as much when he states that “Kitsch is deceptive. It has many different levels, and some of them are high enough to be dangerous to the naïve seeker of true light.”<sup>22</sup> He also speaks of “puzzling borderline cases” like the novelists “Simenon, in France, and Steinbeck in this country.”<sup>23</sup>

Pablo Picasso, whose membership in the modernist canon cannot be disputed, utilized imagery from the supposedly “low” and “primitive” art of African tribal masks near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. “He was convinced not only that the art of his childhood – along with the religious, ethical, and sexual beliefs embodied in it – was no longer viable, but that it was incumbent on him to provide new alternatives.”<sup>24</sup> At the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro he witnessed an exhibition of African art. “At that moment,” he said later, “I realized what painting was all about.”<sup>25</sup> This was not a simple case of Picasso “quoting” these works. He felt that there were images and values in African art worth appropriating into his own life and art. Modernism, at a fairly early stage, and in the person of one of its key figures, thus crossed the great divide between high and low, or in this case, between high art and folk art, in a complex way that calls into question the modernist supposition that such a distinction is in any way useful or true.

Bernard Gendron, in *Popular Music and the Avant-Garde: Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, makes a strong case that the dividing line between high and low culture was not first crossed by postmodernism, nor was all of the borrowing a case of mass culture appropriating high art’s innovations. He writes that “We need only recall the Jazz Age of the 1920s when the avant-gardes of Paris and Berlin were enthusiastically consuming jazz and attempting to assimilate its aesthetic into

**The idea that art as a whole has a single narrative that follows a logical path to a single terminus is mistaken. This narrative pushes off to the perimeter anyone who does not fit into its tidy boundaries. Were you focused on the two-dimensionality of the picture plane? No? Well, that’s too bad. You’ll be relegated to a footnote. What about you? Are you from the West? No? You’re from Asia? I’m sorry. Your art just isn’t part of the history of art. We’ll have to put it in the “World” section of our textbook.**

## > NOTES

10 Ibid.

11 Greenberg, *Late Writings*, p. 61.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 42.

14 Ibid., p. 41.

15 Ibid.

16 Theodor Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), p. 123.

17 Ibid., pp. 124–125.

18 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 48.

19 Ibid., p. 305.

20 Ibid., p. 63.

21 Ibid., p. 64.

22 Greenberg, *Collected Essays and Criticism*, p. 13.

23 Ibid.

24 William Rubin (ed.), *Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), p. 242.

25 Ibid.

their own practices,<sup>26</sup> or the cabarets of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century France that presented high and low art on the same stage and often combined these two supposedly separate fields of cultural practice.<sup>27</sup> Because of these often ignored, but impossible to deny, exchanges between high and low, Gendron declares “the original postmodern theory of high/low” as “altogether in tatters.”<sup>28</sup>

But Jameson holds to this tattered, questionable distinction in spite of its dubious veracity. He uses the loss of the probably-never-existent-high/low distinction as proof that art has lost its ability to stand outside of capital and stage an attack. Both the modernists and postmodernists have based their beliefs about high art, low art, and the possibility of firing an artistically-based sortie against the prevailing order on a series of falsely-drawn generalizations that in no way describe the complexity and fluidity inherent in the relationship between various realms of artistic practice. Greenberg and Adorno tried to put an absolute divide between actually overlapping artistic practices. Jameson takes this artificial divide and uses it to draw a similarly artificial conclusion about the possibility of progress and cultural resistance.

### The Future of Art

The debate about the possibility of progress needs to be reframed. The modernist assumptions are flawed, and the postmodernist rejections are based on these same flawed assumptions. Progress does not need to be authoritarian, elitist, or focused on one small thread of western culture. High art is not the only means for taking an artistic stand outside of commodity culture (and it never really was).

Progress should be redefined in ecological terms. The bifurcation of the world into many distinct narratives that the postmodernists bemoan as a loss of “master narratives” (and progress) is a form of progress in itself. In ecology, monocultures are unhealthy ecosystems. The healthiest and most advanced ecosystems are those teeming with different organisms leading separate but interrelated lives. There is not one single goal toward which nature, when healthy, heads. Instead, there are thousands upon thousands of interlinked goals all occurring simultaneously. Similarly, true artistic progress comes from thousands upon thousands of artistic narratives interlinking and interacting. There could be greater unity through such variety, as the greater variety makes a richer and more complex whole.<sup>29</sup> And such a rich and complex whole can only be the end result of progress.

Art history should not be viewed as a narrative. Instead, art should be seen as an ecosystem. It grows, changes, and evolves over time, but not in a neat, orderly way. Rather, there is a tangled mess of interactions and symbiotic relationships that change over time, leading to growth, change, and yes, progress. Art should be seen as akin to an old-growth forest, which has an incredible variety of species, whose various interactions create a more hospitable environment for one another. To push this metaphor to the

breaking point, we could say that the modernist version of artistic progress is as true to nature as a tree farm.

### Non-Commodified Art

It is also quite possible for some of the art in this complex whole to stand outside commodity culture, thereby allowing for a form of socio-political progress to occur through the arts as artists position themselves at the “minimal aesthetic distance” required to stage an “assault” on the prevailing economic order. Art that works towards this end can resist easy commodification by focusing on more experiential works. And most importantly, these works do not need to be “high” art in order to stand “outside the massive Being of capital.” A few examples will help illustrate this point.

In 1967, Max Neuhaus created *Drive In Music*. Seven radio transmitters were placed along a roadway in Buffalo, New York, each emitting a different sound. By tuning in to the radio frequency at which the transmissions occurred, one could drive through the installation and hear the sounds blend in and out of one another in continuously shifting ways. The experience of the piece was impacted by point of entrance, speed, weather, and direction. *Drive In Music* was both more public and more personal than most conventional artworks. It was situated in a public space, and was easily accessed by anyone with a portable radio. But the experience of this public work was done on each individual’s time and terms, and experienced in relation to the way in which that individual interacted with it. It was site specific to a road in Buffalo, New York. Were it put elsewhere, it would change in fundamental ways. Moreover, with its shifting and amorphous nature, the piece is best appreciated on a personal and experiential level, a level that cannot be easily reproduced and commodified.

The Fluxus movement offers a similarly experiential direction for art that, like *Drive In Music*, is not easily commodified. Jackson Mac Low says of Fluxus, “Most of us wanted to make art that turned people’s attention to the actual phenomena of the world rather than to the thoughts and emotions of the artists.”<sup>30</sup> Dick Higgins, one of the central figures in the history of Fluxus, in his essay “A Child’s History of Fluxus,” describes the basic ideas that led to the formation of Fluxus:

Long long ago, back when the world was young – that is sometime around the year 1958 – a lot of artists and composers and other people who wanted to do beautiful things began to look at the world around them in a new way (for them).

They said: “Hey! – coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancy pants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music.”<sup>31</sup>

In other words, Fluxus celebrates and elevates the everyday. Owen Smith, in his *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, points out: For Fluxus, “art was to be transferred to the praxis of life.”<sup>32</sup> Hannah Higgins, in *Fluxus Experience*, claims, “Fluxus encourages us to look at, listen to, and to feel the environment, to learn from that experience and to remain open to new perceptions.”<sup>33</sup> In his *Fluxus Manifesto* from 1963, George Maciunas claims that the goal of Fluxus is to “Promote living art, anti-art, promote *Non Art Reality* to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes, and professionals.”<sup>34</sup>

The artists associated with the Fluxus movement developed “event scores,” brief descriptions of either mundane acts reframed as performances, or absurdist actions performed at Fluxus events. Dick Higgins’ *Danger Music Number Fifteen* instructs the performer to “Work with butter and eggs for a time.”<sup>35</sup> Larry Miller’s *Playmate* (a personal favorite), states, “Teeter totter with your own weight in carrots.”<sup>36</sup> Allison Knowles’ *Street Piece* suggests “Make something in the street and give it away.”<sup>37</sup> In each case, a simple event that could be performed by anyone is declared art. By reframing these events, the artist invites the viewer or performer (or both in one person) to experience these small, difficult to commodify acts as art. As Hannah Higgins writes in *Fluxus Experience*, “Far from being cynical and alienating, the Fluxus experience, in its matter-of-factness, situates people radically within their corporeal, sensory worlds.”<sup>38</sup> And this corporeal, sensory experience cannot be easily subsumed by the marketplace.

In both *Drive In Music* and the Fluxus event scores, the distinction between high and low art is irrelevant. By focusing on the experiential elements of art, Neuhaus and the Fluxus artists stand outside the traditional dichotomy between high and low, a dichotomy based largely on whether a piece is suited for the mass market or the museum. The works described above belong in neither place. The distinction between high and low art is inapplicable to Neuhaus and Fluxus. But despite Jameson’s claim that the loss of this (arguably never-existent) distinction causes all art and culture to become a piece of market capitalism, Neuhaus and the Fluxus artists demonstrate that fleeting and experiential moments can be incorporated into art. Such art resists easy commodification and supplies a vantage point from which to stand “outside the massive Being of capital” without actually being so-called “high” art.

The postmodern rejection of artistic progress is based on flawed premises taken from modernism. This displays an incredible lack of imagination on the part of the postmodernists. By redefining progress in ecological terms, reintroducing human agency, and focusing on the fleeting and experiential we see that progress can still exist in the arts. Ultimately, the postmodern rejection of progress is just as mistaken as the modernist acceptance of it. ●

## > NOTES

- 26 Bernard Gendron, *Popular Music and the Avant-Garde: Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 2.
- 27 Ibid, p. 29.
- 28 Ibid, p. 3.
- 29 Just why humans seem to have a tendency to work against complex systems and towards uniformity is a very perplexing (and troubling) question indeed. One attempt to deal with this question is provided by Murray Bookchin. In *The Ecology of Freedom*, for instance, he links the emergence of “a hierarchical mentality that ranked the most minuscule phenomena into mutually antagonistic pyramids erected around notions of ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’” to the decline in an earlier “organic sensibility” that sees unity in diversity. See Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, California: Cheshire Books, 1982), pp. 7–8.
- 30 Emmett Williams and Ann Noël (eds.), *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931–1978* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 91.
- 31 Dick Higgins, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of Intermedia* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 87.
- 32 Owen Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), p. 245.
- 33 Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 207.
- 34 Williams and Noël, *Mr. Fluxus*, p. 116.
- 35 Ken Friedman, Owen Smith and Laura Sawchyn (eds.), *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Performance Research e-Publication, available at <http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/fluxusworkbook.pdf>), p. 51.
- 36 Ibid, p. 83.
- 37 Ibid, p. 69.
- 38 Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, p. 67.

In a project spanning the second half of the twentieth century, Murray Bookchin would elucidate one of the first theoretical and practical responses to the ecological crisis of our time. As such, there is much his social ecology has to offer us in building and sustaining an ecological movement that can adequately face this crisis. However, Bookchin's contribution has been obscured by a crude caricature that has surrounded his work ever since the deep ecology debates of the late 1980s. What explains the emergence of this caricature? And importantly, what were the real issues at stake in Bookchin's exchange with the deep ecologists?

**BY ANDY PRICE**

**ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADRIAN STORM**

In the June of 1987, Murray Bookchin was invited to give the keynote address at the Inaugural Gathering of American Greens at Amherst College, Massachusetts. This invitation reflected Bookchin's reputation at the time as an important and prominent thinker in the ecology movement. Indeed, after writing on ecological issues since the early 1950s, Bookchin's thinking had culminated in his 1982 major work, *The Ecology of Freedom*, and at the time of its publication, the success of his overall theoretical project seemed both assured and uncontroversial. As the *Ecologist* argued, in *The Ecology of Freedom* Bookchin had produced "the most coherent expression of an ecological philosophy yet formulated,"<sup>1</sup> imparting to Bookchin, as another contemporaneous commentator put it, "an importance to the ecology movement that it would be difficult to over-estimate."<sup>2</sup>

However, at Amherst, Bookchin's prominent standing in the ecology movement was about to change, and change dramatically. Bookchin would deliver as his address a talk entitled "Social Ecology versus 'Deep Ecology,'" based on an article he would publish simultaneously in *Green Perspectives*.<sup>3</sup> This article was a strident and wide-reaching critique of the (at the time) increasingly influential movement of deep ecology. In it, Bookchin would proclaim deep ecology a form of "eco-brutalism" that finds parallels with the "ecofascism" of German Nazism, resulting in a philosophy that was "a black hole of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas."<sup>4</sup> Deep ecology, Bookchin argued, represented a challenge to the ecological movement as a whole: Bookchin warned of a growing schism in the ecology movement. "It is time to honestly face the fact," he wrote, "that there are differences within

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# Deep Ecology, Misanthropy, and the Genesis of the Bookchin Caricature

the so-called ecology movement of the present time which are as serious as those between the environmentalism and ecologism of the early seventies.” Alongside the “deeply concerned naturalists, communitarians, social radicals and feminists” who work in the ecology movement, there was now emerging an ecology movement of “barely disguised racists” and “outright social reactionaries.”<sup>5</sup> This forthright critique sent shockwaves through not only the Gathering at Amherst, but eventually, through the entire ecology movement itself. From this point on, Bookchin would be cast in an entirely new light. No longer was his thirty year project to formulate an ecological philosophy taken on its own terms, examined for its merits and demerits, and discussed in sober, theoretical exchanges. Rather, Bookchin was accused of all sorts of sinister motivations, political machinations, and perhaps

most bizarrely, a series of strange personal failings raging from a burning envy of deep ecology to what one thinker would later define as a kind of “Grumpy Old Man” syndrome.<sup>6</sup> From 1987 onwards, what I have elsewhere referred to as the Bookchin caricature<sup>7</sup> was set in stone: later critics would argue that rather than offering critical commentary on the movements of the 1980s and 1990s, Bookchin’s subsequent works were a series of “attacks” on movements he saw as a threat to his own social ecology. However, and somewhat inexplicably, beyond what Bookchin would himself admit was his “polemical intoxication” in reaction to the absurdity of deep ecology that emerged in parts of “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology’”<sup>8</sup> – a polemical intoxication that, as will be shown, can be seen to be justified – there is nothing in Bookchin’s 1987 critique of deep ecology that provides the ground

**In enshrining the right of every life form to live and blossom, Arne Naess called for a “biospherical egalitarianism,” where the “inherent value” of all life would be acknowledged. Not only was the intrinsic value of all beings to be drawn out in defiance of whether or not they were useful to humanity: they were valuable even if harmful to humanity. “Nature is worth defending” wrote Naess, “whatever the fate of humans.”**

for such a caricature. In fact, not only was the critique a thorough analysis of some of the fundamental failings of deep ecology, it was also an extensive yet accessible précis of Bookchin’s own ecological philosophy. Unfortunately, this important critique and the concurrent elucidation of his own work were lost in what was, quite frankly, a bizarre and highly problematic reaction from within deep ecology to Bookchin’s 1987 critique: here, the key thinkers and activists within deep ecology failed to address any of the serious issues raised by Bookchin and instead shifted the focus onto Bookchin himself.

### **Revisiting the Debate**

It is to Bookchin’s 1987 critique and the reaction to it that we return to here to offer a more sober analysis than has been afforded to it previously. It is argued that this re-examination is important for two key reasons. First, re-examining this exchange allows us to focus more closely on precisely from where, why, and how the Bookchin caricature emerged: to examine in detail the actual *genesis* of the Bookchin caricature. Where did this strange phenomenon come from? What caused such a blurring of comment on Bookchin’s philosophy and politics with personal accusations and polemics? Providing the answers to these questions is useful as it allows us to not only explain the emergence of this problematic body of literature but also to finally be able to critically dismiss it from commentary on Bookchin and his theoretical and political legacy.

Second, and just as importantly, it is argued that in revisiting this exchange and exposing, perhaps for the first time, exactly just how problematic the reaction to Bookchin was in 1987, this allows us to see the highly problematic nature of deep ecology *as such*. And important this is: for, to the newcomer to the ecology movement, or to those in today’s ecology movement interested in its history, the theoretical and philosophical failings of deep ecology and the inherent misanthropy they led to were never given their fullest airing, never fully exposed. Moreover, these fundamental theoretical and philosophical failings in deep ecology are in a very real sense as important today as they were in 1987, thus in further need of re-examination.

That is to say, Bookchin’s objections to deep ecology struck at the time, and strike today, right at the heart of what it means to create and sustain a rational, and radical, ecological philosophy, a philosophy that in turn can inform a radical and rational practical ecological and social movement. In 1987, Bookchin brought sharply into focus the danger of unthinking adherence to popular notions of humanity’s impact on the world of life, of humanity’s role as primary generator of the ecological crisis; brought sharply into focus the inherent misanthropy contained in such notions, and pointed to the unsavoury conclusions they can lead to. More than twenty years later, with a much worsened ecological situation and a burgeoning of human numbers (and

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more importantly, a burgeoning demand for Western levels of consumption), the ecology movement needs to ensure that this tight focus is retained. Revisiting Bookchin's 1987 objections to deep ecology helps us to do this.

To achieve this re-examination then, we begin below by tracing the philosophical and political bases of deep ecology: that to which Bookchin would object so strongly in 1987. We then turn to Bookchin's objections in full. These first two sections allow us to identify the fundamental problems of deep ecology and establish in the process that Bookchin's critique was both timely and necessary. Finally, we then turn to the reaction to Bookchin's critique that would so badly obscure the issues that Bookchin raised, and show how this reaction played a crucial role in creating the caricature that would surround Bookchin for the remainder of his life.

## Deep Ecology

In the 1960s, the green shoots of environmental concern had begun to spring through the widening cracks of the industrialised developed world. Indeed, by the end of the decade, there could be discerned a nascent social movement, based on these very concerns. As the 1960s slipped into the 1970s, a distinct movement of *ecology* had emerged from within this wider movement. Ecology, as defined by Bookchin and others at the time, was distinct from environmentalism by way of its radicalism: ecology was not interested in the more mainstream, reformist, *environmentalism*, which looked to work within existing social structures to ameliorate environmental degradation. Rather, ecology was concerned with the system itself: ecology called for the wholesale replacement of the destructive social system of advanced industrial statism as the only way to reverse this degradation.

However, in 1973, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess would take the distinction of ecology further: there was, for Naess, within the ecology movement *itself*, both a "shallow" and a "deep" version of ecological thought and action. For Naess, the shallow version had failed to shift its thinking sufficiently enough to overcome what by now had shifted from environmental degradation into a full-blown ecological crisis. Deep ecology, for Naess, offered a much "deeper" theoretical version of ecology as a way to overcome this crisis. It did this by offering an ecological viewpoint that was premised on "a rejection of the man-in-environment image [of ecology] in favour of a relational, total field image."<sup>9</sup> This "total field image," in short, was premised on a rejection of humanity as the marker of value in the human and nonhuman world: in this image, Naess argued, the deep ecologist views the world of life not as a human being at the centre, but as one part of a wider community, stemming principally from "an awareness of the *equal right of all things to live and blossom into their own unique forms of self-realization.*"<sup>10</sup>

In enshrining the right of every life form to live and blossom, Naess called for a kind of "biospherical egalitarianism – in principle."<sup>11</sup>

Here, the "inherent value" of all life would be acknowledged, as would the reduction of human interference, irrespective of the use of these life-forms to humanity. As he would later write, "every living being has a *right to live*," and "nature does not belong to man."<sup>12</sup> Further, not only was the intrinsic value of all beings to be drawn out in defiance of whether or not they were useful to humanity: they were valuable even if harmful to humanity. "Nature is worth defending" wrote Naess, "*whatever the fate of humans.*"<sup>13</sup>

What Naess's theorising about nature and humanity and the equal value of all living beings attempted to do was to reverse the "man-in-environment image" of nature: to rid ecological thinking of the *anthropocentrism* – of the human-centeredness – of its previous shallow interpretations. Under this rubric, the natural world had forever been viewed by humanity – even by those, like Bookchin, who had been working within more "shallow" versions of ecology – as a store cupboard, there to satisfy human needs and, accordingly, all other life-forms were evaluated in relation to this need. That is, all value in the natural world is relational only to human value, is subordinate and weighed against human need. What Naess proposed is an ecological philosophy that shifted this view of the natural world toward a *biocentric* interpretation. Here, as noted, value in the natural world was uncoupled from human need, and all living beings were said to have their own "inherent value" or "intrinsic worth."<sup>14</sup>

This central conceptual framework would be more fully elucidated over the decade that followed Naess's original formulation of deep ecology. By 1984, as Warwick Fox argued, the shallow and deep distinction in ecology had been "developed by a number of thinkers ... to the point where we might reasonably refer to an intellectual 'deep ecology movement.'"<sup>15</sup> Fox then goes on to try and define what that deep ecology movement is and what makes it different from shallow ecology, giving further clarification to Naess's formulation, specifically to the distinction between anthropocentrism and biocentrism.

According to Fox, for the deep ecology movement, shallow ecology was obsolete in the sense that it "views humans as separate from their environment." This anthropocentric view, moreover, sees "humans as the source of all value and ascribes only instrumental (or use) value to the nonhuman world." Deep ecology in contrast "strives to be *non-anthropocentric* by viewing humans as just one constituency among others in the biotic community, just one particular strand in the web of life, just one kind of knot in the biospherical net."<sup>16</sup>

This outlook, for Fox, "dissolves not only the notion of humans as separate from their environment but the very notion of the world as composed of discrete, compact, separate 'things.'" More concretely, Fox continues that "The intrinsic value of the nonhuman members of the biotic community is recognised" in deep ecology, as is "the right of these members to pursue their own evolutionary destinies."

Anything short of this standpoint, for Fox, is an “arrogant conceit,” and deep ecologists “are concerned to move heaven and earth in this universe in order to effect a ‘paradigm shift’ of comparable significance to that associated with Copernicus.”<sup>17</sup>

Deep ecology would be given its full theoretical elucidation, however, in an anthology of essays written by the two US academics, Bill Devall and George Sessions. *Deep Ecology*<sup>18</sup> – published in 1985 and dedicated by the authors to Naess – would in fact become the leading text of the movement, and would clarify the central principles first worked out in the early 1970s. For Devall and Sessions, there are two “ultimate norms” of deep ecology. The first is “self-realization,” which holds that in attempting to transcend the “modern Western *self*” that is the isolated ego, not only is a recognition of our humanity required through an identification with other human beings, but also a “further maturity and growth is required, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world.”<sup>19</sup> This further maturity and growth for Devall and Sessions is the realisation of a larger, capitalised “Self” – the self that is aware of the nonhuman as well as the human – and the work of the deep ecologist is to foster this self-realisation, to foster “the realization of the ‘self-in-Self’ where ‘Self’ stands for organic wholeness.” They explain that,

This process of the full unfolding of the self can also be summarized by the phrase, “No one is saved until we are all saved,” where the phrase “one” includes not only me, an individual human, but all humans, whales, grizzly bears, whole rainforest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

The second ultimate norm, stemming from and reinforcing the first, is the “intuition of biocentric equality.” This, Devall and Sessions’ reworking of biospherical egalitarianism, is “intimately related to the all inclusive Self-realisation in the sense that if we harm the rest of Nature then we harm ourselves.”<sup>21</sup> These two, intertwining ultimate norms, form the bedrock of deep ecological thinking, as Devall and Sessions summarise:

The intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger Self-realization. This basic intuition is that all organisms and entities in the ecosystem, as parts of the integrated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth.<sup>22</sup>

Devall and Sessions then offer a fuller grounding of the basics of deep ecology, stemming from these two ultimate norms, when they tell us that in 1984, “George Sessions and Arne Naess summarised fifteen years of thinking on the principles of deep ecology” by drawing up eight “basic principles” that would form

the movement’s theoretical “platform.” In these eight principles, Sessions and Naess would state clearly the principle of inherent worth: “The well being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life,” they wrote, “have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.”<sup>23</sup> However, Naess and Sessions most controversial basic principle was their fourth: “The flourishing of human life and cultures,” they argued, “is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life *requires such a decrease*.”<sup>24</sup> Here, the question of population becomes a central one in deep ecology, and Devall-Sessions-Naess warned that although “the stabilization and reduction of the human population will take time ... the extreme seriousness of our current situation must be realised.” Moreover, “the longer we wait” in dealing with the population problem, “the more drastic will be the measures needed.”<sup>25</sup>

### Dave Foreman and Earth First!

If Fox was correct in arguing that by the mid-1980s it was possible to point to an “intellectual deep ecology movement,” then the same could be said equally of the emergence of a *political* deep ecology movement – a movement, as we shall see, that was premised *explicitly* on deep ecology’s philosophical foundations. One of the most prominent activist groups to emerge in this political movement was the radical environmental group, Earth First!. Formed in 1979, Earth First! was committed throughout the 1980s to taking direct action against ecological degradation; as their slogan read, “No Compromise in Defence of Mother Earth!”<sup>26</sup> One of the group’s co-founders was Dave Foreman. Foreman would be a particular force within Earth First! as editor of the group’s journal (*Earth First!*) from 1982 to 1988. In these pages, he would outline the principles of the group, which by the mid-1980s had established the link between their own political action and the philosophy of deep ecology.

In a 1987 article in *Earth First!*, Foreman wrote that “some of the things that define Earth First!” included not only “a recognition that there are far too many human beings on Earth (Malthus was Right),” thus expressing the platform principles of deep ecology noted above, but also quite specifically that being a member of Earth First! involves “an enthusiastic embracing of the philosophy of biocentrism or deep ecology.” Moreover, reflecting the principle of biocentric equality and the intrinsic worth of the natural world, Foreman would write that being in Earth First! also meant “a refusal to use human beings as the measure of which to value others.”<sup>27</sup>

However, the link between deep ecology and Earth First! had in fact been established a year earlier in the now notorious interview Foreman gave to the Australian journal, *Simply Living*.<sup>28</sup> Foreman was interviewed here by Bill Devall who, as noted above, one of

the three leading philosophers of deep ecology (and, it should be noted, who is also described in the piece as “an Earth First!er himself” that is, a member of Earth First!). At the outset of the interview, Devall asks Foreman what “is the relationship between deep ecology and Earth First!?” and in response, Foreman states categorically that “deep ecology is the philosophy of Earth First!. They are pretty much the same thing.”<sup>29</sup>

That Earth First! and its journal were closely linked to deep ecology, then – indeed, that they were expressions of the philosophy of deep ecology – was apparent by 1987. Furthermore, in the interview with Devall, Foreman would go on to illustrate the problematic conclusions that stemmed logically from deep ecology’s philosophical premises. When asked by Devall what he would like to see happen to bring about the “best of all possible worlds,” ecologically speaking, in the American West over the next twenty years, he argues that there would need to be “an effort to balance the population to the level that can actually be supported. It would be a hell of a lot less than we have now ... a move toward population reduction is a primary step.”<sup>30</sup>

Devall then notes that “most environmental groups have avoided talking about population or immigration” and then asks: “do you think population is an important issue?” Foreman replies that it is “extremely important,” and describes how previously in his journal he had argued for the problematic policy of “forced sterilisation after three children.” Continuing in a similar vein, Foreman then tells Devall of his deep ecological approach to the Ethiopian famine of 1986:

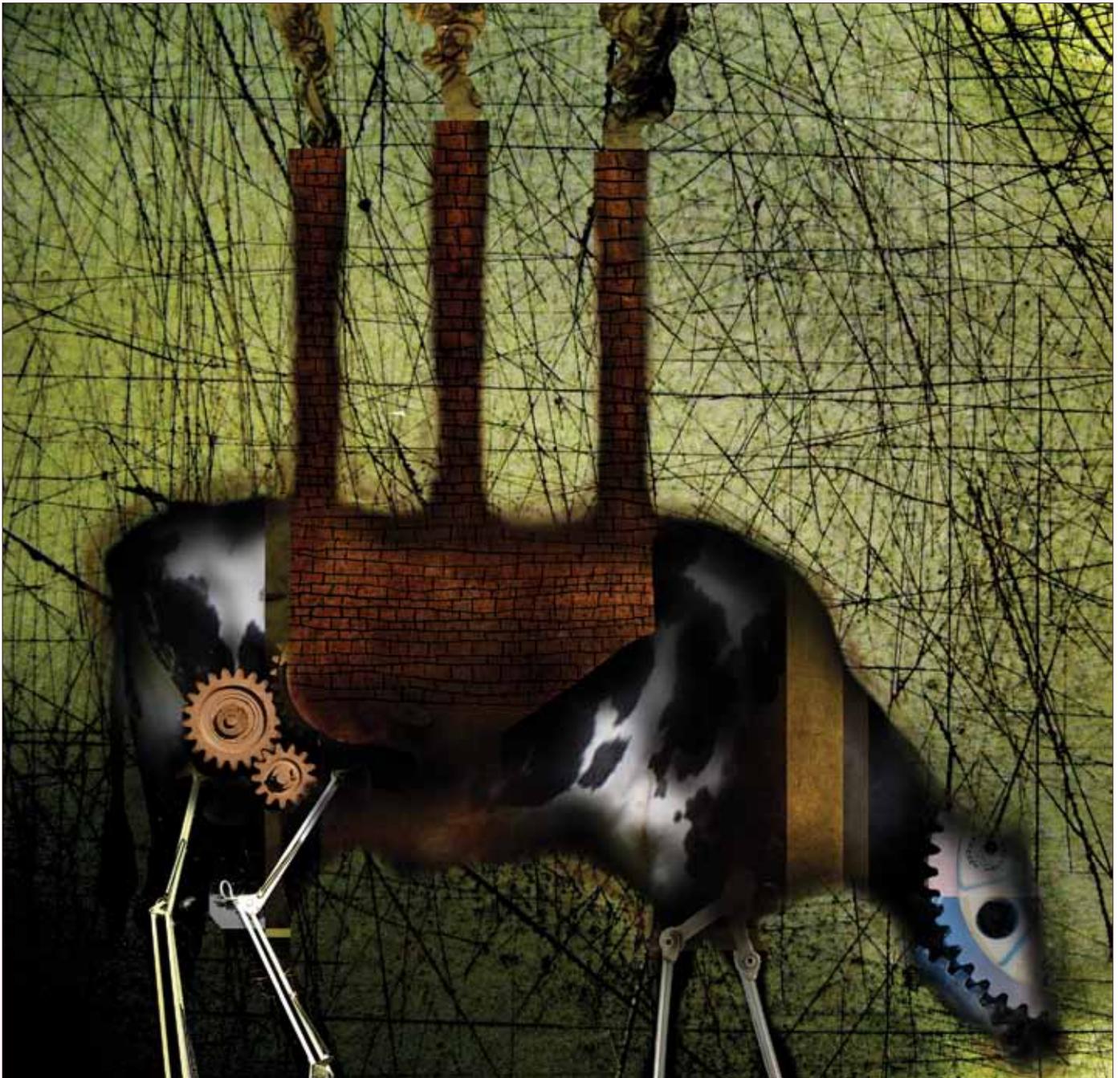
When I tell people how the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid – *the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve there*, they think that this is monstrous. But the alternative is that you go in and save these half-dead children who will never live a whole life. Their development will be stunted.<sup>31</sup>

Moving closer to home, Foreman then clarified what particular section of the “population problem” in the US he had in mind when thinking about addressing the issue: “letting the USA be an overflow valve for problems in Latin America,” he argued, “is not solving a thing. It’s just putting more pressure on the resources we have in the USA. It is just causing more destruction of our wilderness, more poisoning of water and air, and it isn’t helping the problems of Latin America” – that is, in addressing the population problem, immigration was a central concern (a point, in fact, that Devall had raised in his question).<sup>32</sup>

Further, Foreman also outlined what he saw as the political action necessary in alleviating the ecological crisis *beyond* a reduction in population. This was “monkeywrenching,” the term invented by the writer and activist Edward Abbey (of whom more

## NOTES

- 1 Pat Murtagh, “Hierarchy and Freedom,” *The Ecologist*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1983, p. 46.
- 2 See A. Jones, “Towards a Moral Economy,” *The Ecologist*, Vol. 18, Nos 2/3, 1988, pp. 105–7.
- 3 Murray Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology’: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement,” *Green Perspectives*, Nos. 4–5 (Summer 1987), pp. 1–23.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.
- 6 Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism: A Farewell to the Anarchism That Was* (Columbia: CAL Press, 1997), p. 27.
- 7 Andy Price, “Communalism or Caricature: Patterns of Bookchin Critique,” *Anarchist Studies*, 16, no. 1 (2008), pp. 76–82. See also my “Closing Down the Debate or Just Getting Started? On Personal Recollection and Theoretical Insight” *Communalism* 15 (August 2008), pp. 1–8.
- 8 Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology,’” p. 14. “With so much absurdity to unscramble” in deep ecology, Bookchin wrote here, “one can indeed get heady, almost dizzy, with a sense of polemical intoxication.” Again, whether these polemics were justified is a point to which we return below.
- 9 Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary,” *Inquiry*, 16, 1973, p. 95.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Arne Naess, “Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes,” in Michael Tobias (ed.), *Deep Ecology*, (San Marcos: Avant Press, 1984), p. 268, emphasis added.
- 13 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 267–8.
- 15 Warwick Fox, “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?” *The Ecologist*, Vol. 14 (1984), Nos. 5–6, p. 194.
- 16 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- 18 Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, (Utah: Gibson Smith, 1985).
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 67.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 70.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 70, emphasis added.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 72.
- 26 And still reads, it should be added. Earth First! do still exist. See *Earth First! Worldwide*: <http://www.earthfirst.org/> (Accessed November 2009).
- 27 Dave Foreman, “Around the Campfire,” *Earth First!*, June 21, 1987, p. 2.
- 28 Bill Devall, “A Spanner in the Woods: Dave Foreman talks with Simply Living,” *Simply Living*, Vol. 2, No. 12, 1986, pp. 2–4.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 2, emphasis in original.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*



below), a strategy of direct action to stop the chainsaws of the logging companies, to stop the bulldozers of the mining companies. It would involve destroying industrial machinery, inserting steel rods into trees scheduled for felling that would destroy the logger's chainsaw on contact. Foreman tells us that all that is required for monkeywrenching "is an *individual* who competently goes out and does something, who just steps outside the system, who takes responsibility, *who says I can't change the system but I can defend this piece of land.*"<sup>33</sup>

Though this tactic is described by Devall in the interview as redolent of nineteenth century anarchism, Forman concedes perhaps one key difference: "changing the system," bringing revolution, and changing the world is not at the forefront of the monkeywrencher's mind:

You can go out and destroy a road. You can go out and trash a bulldozer. You can go out and take out a tractor. Maybe that's not going to stop everything. Maybe it's not going to change the world,

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but it's going to buy that *place*, those *creatures*, some time. And maybe that's the best that can be done.<sup>34</sup>

### The influence of Edward Abbey

That *Earth First!* were heavily influenced by the writer Edward Abbey is obvious not only through their wholesale adoption of his tactics for direct action (drawn from his 1975 novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*) but also the uniformity of the views on population. In 1986, Abbey had written that “there are many good reasons” to stop immigration into the US from Latin America, but the “one seldom mentioned ... is cultural.”<sup>35</sup> The US, Abbey argued, “with its traditions and ideals, however imperfectly realised, is a product of northern European civilisation,” and its culture must be protected from further immigration. He continues: “If we allow our country – our country – to become Latinized, in whole or in part, we shall see it tend toward a culture more and more like that of Mexico.”<sup>36</sup>

Abbey would later write that “it might be wise for us American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and *culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people*.”<sup>37</sup> Again here, it was immigration from the south that was his main concern: in contrast to Latin Americans, the North Americans “prefer democratic government,” and “still hope for an open, spacious, uncrowded, and beautiful – yes, beautiful! – society.” The “uninvited millions” from the south “bring with them an alien mode of life,” an impoverished people with an impoverished culture unfit for life in the US: “the squalor, cruelty and corruption of Latin America is plain for all to see” he wrote, and then asked “How many of us, truthfully, would *prefer* to be submerged in the Caribbean-Latin version of civilisation?”<sup>38</sup>

Abbey calls explicitly for the closing of “our national borders to any further mass immigration, from any source.” Perhaps most problematically, Abbey sees the arbiter and executioner of this policy as the US military. “The means are available [to close national borders],” Abbey contends, “it is a simple technical-military problem. Even our Pentagon should be able to handle it.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, he argues that if the US were to choose not to close the borders, and not to leave these other nations to it and continues to meddle in their affairs, then perhaps the best thing the US could do is “stop every *campesino* at our Southern Border, give him a handgun, a good rifle, and a case of ammunition, and send him home. He will know what to do with our gifts and good wishes.”<sup>40</sup>

### The “Miss Ann Thropy” of Christopher Manes

Elsewhere in *Earth First!*, the commitment to the deep ecology principle of the need for population reduction would be taken to the furthest extremes. As the world was beginning to appreciate the deadly nature and full extent of the AIDS pandemic, the writer Christopher Manes, under the pseudonym “Miss Ann Thropy,” wrote that as “hysteria sweeps over the governments of the world” he

will offer “an ecological perspective” on AIDS.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, this ecological perspective is to be offered in light of the commitment of deep ecologists to the idea that modern, industrialised society “must give way to a hunter-gatherer way of life, which is the only economy compatible with a healthy land.”

For Manes, an “enormous decline in human population” is required for such a social shift, and “is the only real hope for the continuation of diverse ecosystems on this planet.” This decline, Manes continues, is in fact inevitable: “through nuclear war or mass starvation due to desertification or some other environmental cataclysm, human overpopulation *will* succumb to ecological limits.” However, this is not enough for Manes, as the world which would follow such a cataclysm would be barren, “devoid of otters and redwoods, Blue Whales and butterflies, tigers and orchids” – that is, the natural world would be affected equally seriously in nuclear war as the human world. For the author then, population must be dealt with in a way that preserves the nonhuman world yet decimates the human, and it is here where AIDS is “environmentally significant.”

This “significance” for Manes stems from three key characteristics of AIDS: first, it affects only humans; second, it has a long incubation period; third, it is spread sexually. The first of these is the most important for Manes as “AIDS has the potential to significantly reduce human population without harming other life-forms.” The second two characteristics make AIDS “relevant to the global population problem” as the long incubation period means that the disease is not so virulent that it will “kill off the hosts on which they depend,” allowing “infection of others, and hence survival of the virus, before death” and because sexual activity “is *the* most difficult human behaviour to control.” Taken together, these three characteristics mean “the AIDS epidemic will probably spread world wide, especially to cities where people are concentrated.”

From this, the author writes of AIDS that “Barring a cure, the possible benefits of this to the environment are staggering.” “If, like the Black Death in Europe, AIDS affected one-third of the world’s population,” he continues, “it would cause an immediate respite for endangered wildlife on the planet,” and moreover, “just as the Plague contributed to the demise of feudalism, AIDS has the potential to end industrialism, which is the main force behind the environmental crisis.” For all of these reasons, Manes concludes that “if radical environmentalists were to invent a disease to bring human population back to ecological sanity, it would probably be something like AIDS.”

### The Bookchin Challenge

Undoubtedly, then, by the mid-1980s, deep ecology had produced some highly problematic tendencies and trends. It was to these trends within deep ecology that Bookchin addressed his 1987 critique. As noted at the outset, his critique was strident and

polemical. However, from the preceding discussion, it is difficult to see how one could offer a critique of such sentiments and *not* be strident and polemical. As Bookchin himself would later write of his Amherst critique: “I may have seemed very disputatious in dealing harshly with these tendencies in the ecology movement but I think my zealotry is justified ... I cannot be ‘mellow’ on this point.”<sup>42</sup> Remaining polite and non-polemical were not his primary concerns, and nor should they have been, when dealing with such dangerous and reactionary views masquerading as radical ecological thought. The kinds of misanthropic notions on population control and immigration discussed above required, and still require today, to be challenged as forcefully as possible.

But more than this, there is much more to Bookchin’s critique than his polemics. In a sense, it was very easy for Bookchin to point to the racism and reaction in the comments of Foreman and others. However, Bookchin’s critique went much further: Bookchin was explicit that his critique was not aimed primarily at these statements but more fundamentally at the theoretical and philosophical foundations of deep ecology itself that had *led directly* to the misanthropy of Foreman and Manes. As noted above, the link between deep ecology and Earth First! were explicit. But Bookchin pointed also to the fact that in the moment Foreman described the process of leaving Africans to starve in the hope of “nature seeking its balance” in the interview with Bill Devall – again, one of the leading academics of deep ecology – Devall remained silent. Indeed, none of the intellectual founders of deep ecology spoke out to condemn such statements.

For Bookchin, this silence stemmed from the fact that the statements from Foreman, Manes, and others, were not aberrations; they were not the wayward musings from the outposts of deep ecology, but in fact the logical conclusions of the central theoretical and philosophical principles of the movement itself. This was the central thrust of his entire critique: to prove that the theoretical “platform” of deep ecology was fundamentally reactionary, making it possible for the emergence of the “utterly vicious” notions proffered by Foreman and others.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as we now turn to examine, Bookchin would spend the vast majority of his critique attempting to explain the terminal contradictions of deep ecology and the danger they represented for both an ecological outlook as a whole and for the ability of the movement to respond to the ecological crisis.

At the outset of “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology,’” Bookchin argued that it was time for those in the ecology movement to define what ecology meant. “The question that now faces us,” he wrote, “is: What do we really mean by an ecological approach? What are a coherent ecological philosophy, ethics and movement?” For Bookchin, there was now a choice for the ecology movement, between “a vague, formless, often self-contradictory, and invertebrate thing called deep ecology and a long-developing,

coherent, and socially oriented body of ideas that can best be called social ecology.” Moreover, this was not only “a quarrel with regard to theory, sensibility, and ethics” but rather has “far-reaching practical and political consequences” concerning “not only the way we view nature, or humanity, or even ecology, but how we propose to change society and by what means.”<sup>44</sup>

For Bookchin then, as noted, it was the very bases of the philosophy of deep ecology that contained the seeds of its terminal contradictions. To briefly re-cap, in the deep ecology schematic, the generative cause of the ecological crisis can ultimately be reduced to one thing: the impact on the world as a whole of an anthropocentric, overly-populous humanity. Ergo, the reversal of the ecological crisis is predicated on the reversal of this “population problem” through not only a reduction of human numbers, but also by humanity learning to live in accord with the rest of nature through the new principle of “biocentrism.”

Here, as we have seen, humanity would learn to respect the right of all life-forms to live and blossom through a “biospherical egalitarianism,” in which humanity would eventually come to recognise itself as just “one constituency among others in the biotic community, just one particular strand in the web of life, just one kind of knot in the biospherical net.”<sup>45</sup> This process, as discussed above, is the expression of the two ultimate norms of deep ecology: the move toward “self-realisation on the larger Self,” where the larger Self is the organic whole of both humanity and nature, and the commitment to non-interference in nature by humanity in a state of “biocentric equality.”<sup>46</sup>

For Bookchin, however, the conceptual framework that rested on these two norms represented a “deadening abstraction” of humanity from its evolutionary history and its place in the natural world. The process of human “self-realisation” in the larger “Self” of the natural world tells us nothing about humanity’s evolution from the natural world, according to Bookchin – tells us nothing about how humanity came to *be* so ecologically destructive. Nor does it say anything specific about humanity’s *future* role. To define this ultimate “self-realisation,” the “growth and maturity” of humanity – this seemingly final intellectual, spiritual and political resting point – as the attainment of an undefined “organic whole,” as Devall and Sessions argued, is, for Bookchin, to erase “all the rich and meaningful distinctions that exist not only between animal and plant communities but above all between nonhuman and human communities.”<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, as Bookchin argued at Amherst, “a ‘Self’ so cosmic that it has to be capitalized is no real self at all.” Rather, it is “a category as vague, faceless, and depersonalized as the very patriarchal image of ‘man’ that dissolves our uniqueness and rationality.”<sup>48</sup> If this is to be the philosophical and political striving of the ecology movement, if this is the way it conceives of itself and the action it takes is to be toward the instigation of a political and social settlement that

is based on a biospheric egalitarianism, “broadly defined as a universal ‘whole,’” then for Bookchin “a unique function that natural evolution has conferred on human society dissolves into a cosmic night that lacks differentiation, variety, and a wide array of functions.”<sup>49</sup>

Further, Bookchin argued, in this deadening abstraction of humanity into a humanity “that accurses the natural world,” and of the realisation of individual selfhood into a process that “must be transformed into a cosmic ‘Selfhood’” *nonhuman* nature too “is not spared a kind of static, prepositional logic.” That is to say, under the deep ecology rubric, once humanity is abstracted from nature-as-a-whole as a destructive element, defined as separate from the natural world, the natural world *itself* becomes separate and abstracted. It thus “becomes a kind of scenic view, a spectacle to be admired around the campfire,” a static image, revered as a place humanity must somehow attempt to return submissively to. However, for Bookchin, this obscures the important fact that nature is not static, but is rather “an *evolutionary development that is cumulative and includes the human species.*”<sup>50</sup>

After raising these conceptual objections to deep ecology, Bookchin outlined his own view of humanity and nature, and elaborated on the “unique function” that natural evolution has produced in humanity. Like every other living species in the natural world, Bookchin contends, human beings adapt the natural environment that surrounds them, and in this sense, the communities they form are no different from any other animal community. However, human societies are “consciously formed communities.” That is, in contrast to other animal communities, they “are not instinctively formed or genetically programmed.” That is to say, humanity’s adaptation of their environment is (or more properly, *could be*) *conscious*, a unique evolutionary step. Indeed, Bookchin continues, human societies consist of “an enormous variety of institutions, cultures that can be handed down from generation to generation” and “technologies that can be redesigned, innovated, or abandoned.” What makes them “particularly unique” is the fact that “they can be radically changed by their members – and in ways that can be made to benefit the natural world as well as the human species.”<sup>51</sup>

For Bookchin, this distinctly human development, the evolution of consciously formed communities, means that human communities cannot, as the deep ecologists argued, be conceived of as solely one part of a larger “organic whole,” or a larger “Self.” Rather, humanity’s social evolution is distinct as a “*second nature*,” a new evolutionary pathway in natural evolution, distinct from nonhuman “*first nature*.” However, as we have seen, Bookchin did not deny that human society remains a product of natural evolution, “no less than beehives or anthills.” To the contrary, for Bookchin, the very things that make humanity a distinct evolutionary path – “a brain that can think in a richly conceptual

## > NOTES

33 Ibid., emphasis added.

34 Ibid., emphases in original.

35 Edward Abbey, “Letter to the editor,” in *The Bloomsbury Review*, April–May 1986, p. 4.

36 Ibid., emphasis in original.

37 Edward Abbey, *One Life at a Time, Please* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), p. 43, emphasis added.

38 Ibid., emphasis in original.

39 Ibid., p. 44.

40 Ibid. In an *Earth First!* article titled “Is Sanctuary the Answer?” (November 1, pp. 21–2), Foreman would explicitly endorse Abbey’s problematic position on immigration. Telling the reader that he feared that “good-hearted liberal solutions [to the problems of Latin America] only perpetuate the evils that they seek to overcome,” he argues that immigration into the US from Latin America should be halted immediately. “The would-be immigrants would go back to unfortunate and, in some cases, bloody fates,” Foreman continues, but in the long run, not only would this would build anger and pressure in their own countries and (in an unspecified time scale) eventually lead them to a revolution of their own social conditions, but also it would stop the “unruly” immigrants from tainting the social conditions of the United States. Re-stating the unquestionably brutal “let them sort out their own problems” approach outlined by Abbey, Foreman concludes that “in the long run, the most humane solution is the one advanced by Edward Abbey: send every illegal alien home with a rifle and a thousand rounds.”

41 Miss Ann Thropy (pseudonym for Christopher Manes), “Population and AIDS,” *Earth First!* May 1, 1987. All the following quotes in this section are taken from this article, p. 32, emphasis in original.

42 Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, *Defending the Earth: A Debate Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman*, (Montréal: Black Rose Books 1991), p. 99.

43 Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology,’” pp. 4–5.

44 Ibid., pp. 2, 3.

45 Fox, p. 194.

46 Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 67.

47 Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology,’” p. 9.

48 Ibid., p. 11.

49 Ibid., p. 9.

50 Ibid., p. 13, emphasis added.

51 Ibid., p. 9.

52 Ibid.

manner and produce a highly symbolic form of communication,” rendering humanity highly adaptive – are themselves *products of natural evolution*. As Bookchin summarised:

Taken together, second nature, the human species that forms it, and the richly conceptual form of thinking and communication so distinctive to it, emerges out of natural evolution no less than any other life-form and nonhuman community. This second nature is uniquely different from first nature [however] in that it can act thinkingly, purposefully, wilfully, and depending upon the society we examine, creatively in the best ecological sense or destructively in the worst ecological sense.<sup>52</sup>

For Bookchin then, despite deep ecology’s claims to be working towards an “organic whole” or a “oneness,” in which each life-form is valued equally, at its base, this philosophy abstracts humanity from the natural world and natural evolution, and in the process, deifies the natural world into a static, “scenic view.” As a result, all of the processes, connections, and indeed the operating procedures of the natural world that produced the human species are lost, rendered unimportant in our understanding of nature as a whole, and the evolution of society in particular. That is to say, an understanding of the unfolding of natural evolution as a whole is rendered unimportant in deep ecology, as is (perhaps more importantly) the most advanced expression of this process as a whole: human society. As Bookchin argued, “a cardinal feature of this product of natural evolution called society is its capacity to intervene in first nature – to alter it ... in ways that may be eminently creative or destructive.”<sup>53</sup>

In short, for Bookchin, this capacity to intervene in nature stems from the processes of the natural world itself, from the processes of a constantly moving, constantly evolving first nature, the natural world as-a-whole. These natural processes represent a move towards increasing complexity for Bookchin, an increasing complexity that eventually produces nature-as-a-whole’s most complex (current) form: human society. However and perhaps most importantly, this conceding of the advanced complexity of humanity was for Bookchin in no way to privilege humanity, but was rather to impart to it a distinct ecological responsibility: its capacity to intervene and its capacity to understand this intervention and understand its own ecological impact endows humanity with a potentiality to ameliorate its current ecological destructiveness.

Therefore, like the deep ecologists, Bookchin places humanity *right at the heart* of nature-as a-whole, as inextricably bound-up and interdependent on the rest of nature as the rest of nature is on humanity. Yet Bookchin does this whilst still permitting that humanity is distinct from nature-as-a-whole and thus has significant agency in consciously responding to ecological crisis.

**What is it exactly about society that makes it so destructive? Is it “humanity”? Is it human beings? “Let’s face it,” Bookchin argued, “when you say a black kid in Harlem is as much to blame for the ecological crisis as the President of Exxon,” which blaming humanity *as such* surely does, “you are letting one off the hook and slandering the other.”**

**Deep ecology – in its absence of an analysis of the profound natural and social developments that saw society grade out of nature, and later hierarchy, domination, classes and the state grade out of society – essentially evades the social roots of the ecological crisis.**

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Later, Bookchin would summarise most succinctly this central philosophical conception of humanity's relationship to the natural world: "the natural world and the social," he wrote in 1993, "are interlinked by evolution into *one nature that consists of two differentiations*: first, or biotic nature, and second or social nature."<sup>54</sup>

Of course, for Bookchin, all of this is lost in deep ecology. But more than this, not only does deep ecology deny this conception of humanity as part-of-yet-distinct-from nature and all of the potential human agency that stems from it, it also denies an examination of evolutionary history in explaining why deep ecology is a necessary philosophy in the first place: although the entirety of the deep ecology project is an attempt to reduce the destructive nature of human society through an appeal to a biocentric equality, wherein humanity is prohibited from interfering in the natural world, there is no explanation as to why such a philosophy is needed. That is to say, there is *nothing* in deep ecology to explain why humanity in its current form is so ecologically destructive. All there is, for Bookchin, by way of an explanation of ecological degradation in deep ecology is the accusation of a humanity that is "anthropocentric," that values the world solely in terms of its own needs. The result is a view of humanity as the self-centred, overly populous *cause* of the ecological crisis.

This view, Bookchin argued, is a gross simplification not only of humanity's emergence out of nature as a distinct social phenomenon – the phenomenon of "one nature, two differentiations" – but also a gross simplification of society itself and the causes of the ecological crisis. That is, what is it *exactly* about society that makes it so destructive? Which particular sections of society and, just as importantly, which particular social relationships, render it (in the present) a pest in its own environment? In deep ecology, these developments are nowhere given sufficient analysis. Rather, the ecological crisis is presented as a matter of an idealised, near-perfect realm of nature being confronted by "a vague species called humanity."<sup>55</sup>

For Bookchin, this is to collapse the many different facets of human society into a naturally exploitative species, "as though people of color were equatable with whites, women with men, the Third World with the First, the poor with the rich, and the exploited with their exploiters" in terms of their impact on the world of life. That is, there are detailed and important reasons for society's negative ecological destructiveness, reasons of class and gender, of domination and exploitation *within* society that render society so problematic. As Bookchin asked of Foreman's comments on the famine in Ethiopia and Latin American immigration into the US, "what does it mean for nature to 'seek its own balance' in East Africa, where agribusiness, colonialism, and exploitation have ravaged a once culturally and ecologically stable area. Or who is this all-American 'our' that owns 'the resources we have in the USA?'"<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, Bookchin continued, "is it the ordinary people who

are driven by sheer need to cut timber, mine ores, and operate nuclear power plants?" Or rather, is it the "giant corporations that are not only wrecking the good old USA but have produced the main problems these days in Latin America that send largely Indian folk across the Rio Grande?" These fundamental and far reaching differences across humanity have to be acknowledged (and ultimately disposed of) for Bookchin in dealing with ecological problems, rather than all of humanity being embraced in "a realm of universal guilt."<sup>57</sup> As Bookchin would perhaps most vividly express in a later exchange with Foreman, what, or who, is this species "from which the natural world has to be protected?" Bookchin continues:

Is it "humanity"? Is it the human "species," *per se*? Is it people, as such? Or is it our particular society, our particular civilisation, with its hierarchical social relations which pit men against women, privileged whites against people of colour, elites against masses, employers against workers, the First World against the Third World, and ultimately, a cancer like, "grow or die" industrial capitalist economic system against the natural world and other life forms?<sup>58</sup>

To circumvent these questions in the simplistic dualism that posits humanity *as such* as destructive of the natural world and sees resolution of this problematic relationship as being achieved through a world where population must be drastically reduced coupled with a stance of non-interference in nature denigrates the roles and responsibilities, the guilt and innocence across these key social differentiations. "Let's face it," Bookchin argued, "when you say a black kid in Harlem is as much to blame for the ecological crisis as the President of Exxon," which blaming humanity *as such* surely does, "you are letting one off the hook and slandering the other."<sup>59</sup> In short then, for Bookchin, not only does such a viewpoint contain no history "of the emergence of society out of nature" as noted above, it also,

presents no explanation of – indeed, it reveals no interest in – the emergence of hierarchy out of society, of classes out of hierarchy, of the State out of classes – in short, the highly graded social as well as ideological development that gets to the roots of the ecological problem in the social domination of women by men and of men by other men, ultimately giving rise to the notion of dominating nature in the first place.<sup>60</sup>

As such, deep ecology – in its absence of an analysis of the profound natural and social developments that saw society grade out of nature, and later hierarchy, domination, classes and the state grade out of society – "essentially *evade[s] the social roots of the ecological crisis*."<sup>61</sup> For Bookchin, the ecological crisis that the deep ecologists professed

to address in their philosophy – the ecologically destructive nature of humanity in its current form – is nowhere explained. Although the deep ecologists concede (indeed, *base their philosophy on*) the fact that human society is the cause of the ecological crisis, they never take the next logical step, a step that formed the cornerstone of Bookchin's own theoretical approach: the fact that *all ecological problems are in fact social problems*, thus requiring social solutions.

From our discussion thus far then, two things should be immediately clear concerning Bookchin's 1987 critique of deep ecology. First, that the critique was both timely and necessary. There is surely nothing controversial in acknowledging that the problematic trends within deep ecology in the 1980s were in dire need of challenging. Although to some of today's readers, many of the philosophical problems and contradictions of deep ecology, and many of Bookchin's criticism thereof, may seem self-evident, in the mid-1980s, deep ecology had significant intellectual currency. Moreover, as Bookchin himself stressed, to the ecology movement, still very much in its infancy, these dangerous ideas represent a serious threat to its credibility and further growth. Again, they needed to be challenged and opposed, and as noted at the outset, we need be vigilant about the possibility of their re-emergence today.

Second, Bookchin's critique provided (and provides) this challenge: "Social Ecology versus 'Deep Ecology'" was (and remains) a robust examination of the theoretical and political failings of deep ecology, and although beyond our remit to examine in full here, it should be noted that Bookchin's challenge was based entirely on the ecological philosophy he had been developing for the previous thirty years. However, as we now finally turn to examine, the challenge Bookchin laid down in 1987 remained woefully unanswered. To be sure, the deep ecologists responded to Bookchin in large numbers, as we shall see. However, these responses failed *in their entirety* to address the substantive issues he raised. Rather, these extraordinary responses shifted the focus onto Bookchin's personal motivations and in the process set in train the Bookchin caricature that would entrench itself to the present day.

### Earth First! Responds

In late 1987, *Earth First!* responded to Bookchin's Amherst address by including a "special section" in their November 1 issue turned over to articles that offered a reaction. The tenor of the articles in this section was established by an introduction provided by "The Editors."<sup>62</sup> They explained that, in fact, it was "surprising" given the radical nature of their movement, that *Earth First!* had come under "so little criticism in the last seven years" and how they were relieved to finally sense the stirrings of a critical literature.<sup>63</sup> More surprising for The Editors, however, was the fact that this critical literature included "several inconsequential 'anarchist' punkzines in the US" which had started accusing *Earth First!* of racism and fascism. They then explained how these themes

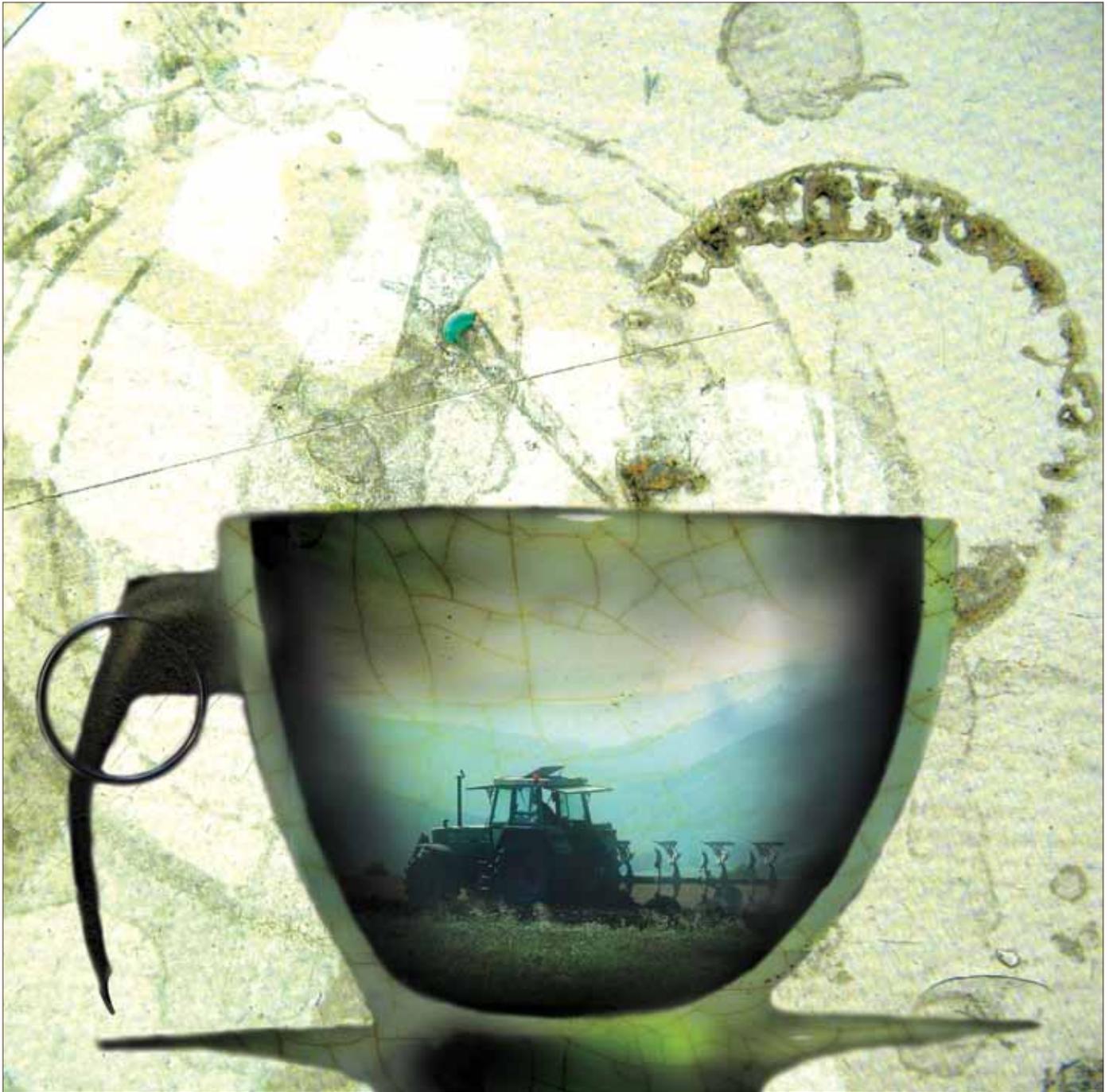
were then picked up by the Big Daddy of American Anarchism, Murray Bookchin, in a papal bull he delivered at the Greens Conference in Amherst ... Lumbering like the WWII German battleship Bismarck, Bookchin delivered his heavy guns towards a variety of targets, including deep ecologists like Devall, Sessions and Naess.<sup>64</sup>

The imagery here of war and conflict, of weaponry and targets was in fact the very first stone laid in the building of the Bookchin caricature. Not only did this infuse the contemporaneous critiques of Bookchin in *Earth First!* and elsewhere but this imagery would also resurface in the mid-1990s as people reacted to Bookchin's critique of anarchism, when, again, he would be accused of being heavy handed, of being a pugilist, of being out to attack.

Returning to the debate in 1987, the first article in the supplement of the November 1 *Earth First!* matches *exactly* those images established by The Editors' introduction. Here, Professor R. Wills Flowers, an environmental ethicist from the University of Florida explains that the deep ecology movement has "caught the public attention with amazing speed" and that with any such movement, success spawns envy.<sup>65</sup> One example of this envy is Bookchin, whose "purpose," Flowers tells us, "is to supplant deep ecology with his own brand of social activism, social ecology," a process which rendered Bookchin's critique "rich in obfuscation, deception, and pointless invective."<sup>66</sup>

Flowers goes on to describe Bookchin's critique as an "attack" – again, a term, as we shall see, that would recur again and again – directed at the deep ecologists, and describes "Bookchin's attempt to corner the word 'ecology.'" Strangely, there is no evidence provided for such an assertion, and instead of taking Bookchin's critique on its expressed intentions – of offering a critique of deep ecology and a clarification of social ecology – and instead of dealing with the issues raised, Flowers argues that "Bookchin's real aim" is not a detailed critique of the direction of the ecology movement but is in fact an attempt "to gain ground in his ideological turf war with Naess, Devall and Sessions." Again, Flowers offers us nothing in terms of substantiating this claim and, in truth, resorts to nothing more than ad hominem insinuation and accusation. Like much of the insinuation around Bookchin that originates from this period, one is left wondering quite how Flowers arrived at his conclusions on Bookchin's motivations.

There is *some* passing discussion of the issues Bookchin raised in terms of what social ecology stands for (not, it should be noted, of the criticisms of deep ecology) but unfortunately, it is lost in the constant insinuation that Bookchin's motivations are less than sincere. Indeed, this attitude engulfs the entirety of Flowers's piece, and even in those places where he attempts to discuss issues alone, he gets it badly wrong. For example, in discussing Bookchin's view of humanity's place in the natural world, he argues that Bookchin



has “swallowed whole the dogma of humanity as the apex of an evolutionary ladder,” and as a result, “human intervention in nature is given blanket justification because it is a ‘product of evolution.’”

As will be obvious to anyone with even only a passing familiarity with Bookchin’s work, nothing could be more inaccurate than this description of the role Bookchin ascribes to humanity in

his overall philosophical programme. Indeed, as is hopefully clear from our discussion of Bookchin’s critique, the notion of humanity having a “blanket justification” for interfering in the natural world is as alien to Bookchin as evidence appears to be to *Flowers*: again here he offers no material on which he has drawn this conclusion on Bookchin, no section of text – not even from Bookchin’s critique, the piece he is ostensibly responding

to. Rather, he appears intent on stating that Bookchin is not only motivated by a “turf war” with the deep ecologists but also that he is wrong theoretically yet cannot see it, as his social ecology “remains mired in the old anthropocentric narcissism: humans self absorbed with humanity.”<sup>67</sup>

It is perhaps in Flowers’ concluding remarks, however, that he is at his most problematic. Here, he argues that Bookchin’s “fixation” on the destructiveness of capitalism means he “gives scant attention to some of the most acute aspects of the ecological crisis.” Further, this focus on capitalism means there is nothing “novel” in Bookchin, simply “a restatement of the old Left/Liberal/Marxist/Progressive social reform ideology,” and like those ideologies that went before it, “social ecology is notable for its obsession with ‘political correctness’” and fails “to propose concrete solutions to our problems.”<sup>68</sup>

It is difficult for the present author to even *begin* to know from where Flowers has drawn these criticisms. Indeed, they are so wide of the mark, it is, at times, almost as if Flowers is offering a critique of somebody else’s work. As will be shown, this is not a characteristic particular to Flowers alone: it recurs again and again, increasing over the years as the Bookchin caricature begins to take hold. We return to this issue below, but Flowers’ misreading (or more properly, *non-reading*) of Bookchin needs noting here as we examine the initial construction of the Bookchin caricature.

Elsewhere in *Earth First!*, Chim Blea would employ the exact same logic in replying to Bookchin. S/he argued that Bookchin’s critique was unsurprising, something to be expected: “Being a cynical Earth First!er of the misanthropic flavour” s/he wrote, casually advertising the very misanthropy that Bookchin had critiqued, “I have long expected the dogmatic Left to attack the Deep Ecology/Earth First! Movements.”<sup>69</sup> Again, the description of Bookchin’s critique as an “attack” is used as a springboard to accuse him of nefarious motivations and ill-thought-out political manoeuvring. Again also, the fundamentals of Bookchin’s critique are overlooked, as Blea focuses on the “vehemence” and “viciousness” of Bookchin’s critique.

Overlooking the contradiction of a writer who admits her own “misanthropic flavour” – writing in a journal which had by then a track record of misanthropic leanings – Blea goes on to explain the reasons for Bookchin’s “vehemence.” First, s/he argues that the “viciousness” of Bookchin can be put down to “sour grapes”: “Murray Bookchin has been toiling away for years developing and promoting his ‘Social Ecology’ and has received little notice,” s/he tells us, and then suddenly, “Deep Ecology and Earth First! appear and steal all the attention that should rightfully be his.” The second reason Blea cites to explain Bookchin’s “attack” is even more unsubstantiated. Drawing a parallel with the split in the German Greens between the Fundis and the Realos of the same period, s/he contends that Bookchin’s “tirade” at Amherst “may

have been part of a coordinated attempt by American Redgreens to launch a pre-emptive strike on the Green Greens and engineer a coup in the American Green party,” again an accusation based on no evidence, only insinuation.<sup>70</sup>

Of course, what makes this worse, for Blea, is that on top of these motivations, Bookchin is an old-fashioned ecologist, still mired in anthropocentrism. “Wilderness is unimportant” to him, s/he contends, “other species do not have intrinsic value. The world is a collection of resources for human beings. Bookchin is entirely correct – there is a great gulf between his ‘Social Ecology’ and Deep Ecology.” Of course, this outmoded approach made Bookchin a relic of the “Old Left,” riddled with hypocrisy, and then, apparently without irony, this avowed misanthrope concludes that “Bookchin and other far leftists prattle about their great love for human beings,” but in fact, “when they get down to dealing with actual, individual people, they become vicious, spiteful and nasty. Ad hominem arguments prevail.”<sup>71</sup>

In his own response to Bookchin, Foreman would restate the principles of Earth First!, and in so doing, would further entrench the philosophical problems of deep ecology and their logical conclusions.<sup>72</sup> “In everything we do,” Foreman argued, “the primary consideration should be for the long-term health and native diversity of Earth. After that, we can consider the welfare of humans.” Furthermore, the “individual human life is not the most important thing in the world,” and “has no more intrinsic value than a Grizzly Bear.” Perhaps most worryingly, backing up his original quotes concerning the famine in Ethiopia, he contends that “human suffering resulting from drought and famine in Ethiopia is unfortunate, yes, *but the destruction of other creatures and habitat there is even more unfortunate.*”<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, Foreman’s “enthusiastic embracing of the philosophy of Deep Ecology or Biocentrism” is taken to the furthest extremes in his response when he argues that biocentrism “states simply and essentially that all things possess intrinsic value or inherent worth.” Moreover, “things have value and live for their own sake.” This view extends to *all* “things,” for Foreman – even inanimate objects, such as “rivers and mountains.” Moreover, deep ecology

is an ecological point of view that ... views Earth as a community and recognises such heretical truths as that [sic] “disease” (malaria) and “pests” (mosquitoes) are not evil manifestations to be overcome and destroyed but rather are vital and necessary components of a complex and vibrant biosphere.<sup>74</sup>

The place this kind of biocentrism plays in the overall schematic of deep ecology is revealed when Foreman argues that ultimately, the “absolute litmus test” for membership of Earth First! is their commitment to the principle that “there are too many human beings on Earth,” and that “the refusal to recognise the need to

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lower human population over the long run clearly defines one as a humanist and places [one] outside the bounds of Earth First!”<sup>75</sup> Of course, this “litmus test,” this commitment to the notion that there are far too many human beings on Earth sits nicely next to a commitment to the intrinsic worth of malarial mosquitoes.

## The Academy Responds

Outside of the pages of *Earth First!* the response to Bookchin would follow exactly the same patterns. Indeed, the two primary academics of deep ecology, Devall and Sessions, would respond in almost identical (and no less polemical) terms. Devall, for example, responding in a comment on the debate between deep ecology and social ecology,<sup>76</sup> would begin by arguing that the furore stemmed not from the comments that he elicited from Foreman in their earlier interview concerning the famine in Ethiopia, nor from his silence in the wake of them, but from the success of deep ecology itself. “If attacks indicate that a social movement is important,” Devall argues, apropos of no such claim, “then the deep, long-range ecology movement has arrived as an important force on the American intellectual scene.”<sup>77</sup>

This is confirmed for Devall by the emergence of “long and steamy diatribes” critiquing deep ecology. In particular, Devall continues, “in 1987, anarchists-leftists-Marxists, led by Murray Bookchin, launched an attack on deep ecology.” Again here, we see the emergence of the notion – based on no evidence – that Bookchin was “attacking” deep ecology; and again, it is insinuated that he did so on behalf of some greater “Old Left” alliance in the name of political manoeuvre. Despite the paucity of his “anarchists-leftists-Marxists” denomination (a denomination that Devall openly acknowledges is an “over-simplification”) to level the term “Marxist” at Bookchin shows no familiarity with Bookchin’s work, much like the criticisms found in the pages of *Earth First!*. But more than this: it shows no engagement with the critique Bookchin offered in 1987, or the reasons why he offered his critique. Again here, the charge of attack is levelled at Bookchin without taking him at his word, and addressing the basis of his criticisms.

Rather, Devall follows the patterns (and language) of the earlier responses by focussing on the emergence, rather than the content, of Bookchin’s critique. “Attacks by some leftists,” he claims, “indicate that the deep ecology movement is considered the new boy on the block and a *turf war* has erupted.”<sup>78</sup> He continues that deep ecology theorists “seek cooperation and have no interest in a turf war.” This example of the academic deep ecologists picking up the themes laid down in the pages of *Earth First!* is a common one: Warwick Fox would do the same when, in commenting on Bookchin’s critique, he argued that Bookchin launched a “vitriolic attack upon an ideological competitor that was receiving, and that continues to receive, much greater attention from the ecophilosophical

## > NOTES

- 53 Ibid., p. 10.
- 54 Murray Bookchin, “What is Social Ecology?” in Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 2007), p. 29, emphasis added.
- 55 Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology,’” p. 3.
- 56 Ibid., p. 4.
- 57 Ibid., p. 10.
- 58 Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, pp. 30–31.
- 59 Ibid., p. 31.
- 60 Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus ‘Deep Ecology,’” p. 10.
- 61 Ibid., emphasis added.
- 62 Foreman was in fact still editor of *Earth First!* at this point.
- 63 The Editors, “‘Dangerous’ Tendencies in Earth First!” *Earth First!*, November 1987, p. 17.
- 64 Ibid., p. 17.
- 65 R. Wills Flowers, “Of Old Wine in New Bottles: Taking up Bookchin’s challenge,” *Earth First!*, November 1, 1987, pp. 18–19.
- 66 Ibid., p. 18.
- 67 Ibid., p. 19.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Chim Blea, “Why the Venom?” *Earth First!*, November 1, 1987, p. 19.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Dave Foreman, “Whither Earth First!?” *Earth First!* November 1, 1987, pp. 20–22.
- 73 Ibid., p. 20, emphasis added.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Bill Devall, “Deep Ecology and its Critics,” *Trumpeter*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring, 1988), pp. 55–60.
- 77 Ibid., p. 55.
- 78 Ibid., emphasis added.
- 79 Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), p. 37.

community than Bookchin's own ideas," the parallels with Blea's response above being all too obvious.<sup>79</sup>

As well as picking up the "turf war" analogy, Devall also follows the pattern of the earlier responses in stating the importance of "cordial relations" in critical exchanges: "Confrontation, diatribe, denouncing comrades, and factionalism are characteristics of the leftist movements," and not deep ecology.<sup>80</sup> What Devall does not do is tell us what the new characteristics of deep ecology are, but we know from the written record discussed above: they are misanthropy, cultural arrogance, and even racism. Again, being cordial is not, and should not, always be the right way to proceed against such dangerous ideas.<sup>81</sup>

Devall then goes on to "review the deep ecology movement both for critics of the movement and for supporters confused by the attacks on deep ecology"<sup>82</sup> and here he restates, unknowingly, some of the very reasons that Bookchin offered his critique in the first place. Devall argues that "deep ecologists and their critics *generally* agree that major reconstruction of society is necessary."<sup>83</sup> However, despite a paragraph in which anarchist forms of organisation are posited as "self regulating ... ecologically aware communities" which "complement" ecological resistance, Devall concedes that "deep ecology theorists have been less interested in political economy and more interested in the causes of anthropocentrism" when dealing with the ecological crisis.<sup>84</sup>

Further, in reversing this anthropocentrism, Devall restates his commitment to the biocentric "inherent worth of all beings,"<sup>85</sup> and although he states that "neither Naess nor myself have ever suggested that AIDS is a blessing," he still refused to condemn those in the deep ecology movement who did.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, he simultaneously addresses the "the leftist criticism" of population control by arguing that "it is unclear how Bookchin and some leftists view the question of continuous, rapid population growth" and drawing a parallel with China ("that socialist state," he notes) and its reactionary population control measures, of physically restricting a couple to no more than one child, he asks whether Leftists would "accept these policies in Mexico or the US?"<sup>87</sup>

Of course, the insinuation is that barring the reduction of human population through the operation of natural forces – through famine and disease – the only other options are the draconian measures carried out in the "socialist state" that is China, or some other such measures. Thus, Devall claims independence from the misanthropic extremes of deep ecology philosophy whilst at the same time indicating obliquely that those extremes might provide the *only* resolution of the population problem. It should be noted also that nowhere in Devall's response does he deal with the

specific problem raised by Bookchin: Devall's refusal to condemn Foreman's comments on Ethiopia in his interview of him. Nor does Devall deal with the more explicit tracing of the link between his own writings on deep ecology and the misanthropic conclusions drawn by Foreman and others.

Finally, Devall argues that "Bookchin has practically nothing to say here about Nature in the sense the ecological movement is interested in." According to Devall, Bookchin says "little or nothing about the flourishing of non-human life." Furthermore, "For Bookchin and his followers, it seems, Earth is not a sacred place. They do not seem to seek to discover their broader and deeper self but only to change economic and political institutions."<sup>88</sup> Again, the misreading (or more properly, *non*-reading) of Bookchin here is astounding. In truth, Bookchin's programme of natural and social rationality is built on a treatise to recover the lost "broader and deeper" human self, to fully locate it in the processes of natural evolution, and to create social forms that ensure the continued endurance of this self and the natural world.

Separately from Devall, Sessions would respond to Bookchin's critique<sup>89</sup> and, again, we see the exact same patterns emerge: there is no taking of Bookchin's critique at face value, solely the insinuation of ulterior motives. "In 1987," Sessions tells us, "Murray Bookchin and his Social Ecology group attacked Earth First! and the Deep Ecology philosophy."<sup>90</sup> Apart from the now familiar cry of "attack," what is most shocking here is Sessions' dismissal of the explanation for what gave rise to Bookchin's critique:

Certain *casual* remarks by individual Earth First!ers (made, to some extent, for their shock value to drive home the message of how out of balance contemporary humans are on the planet) concerning allowing Ethiopians to starve, and AIDS as nature's population control device, provided Bookchin the opportunity he needed.<sup>91</sup>

These "casual remarks," made "to shock," get no further treatment from Sessions. They are secondary, reduced to a mere add-on in the debate, despite the fact that it was Bookchin's main contention in his critique to draw out the connection between those remarks and the philosophical principles of deep ecology. This part of Bookchin's critique is overlooked, and the real issue at hand for Sessions is to prove Bookchin's sinister motives – that Bookchin was not really interested in the content of the discussion, but was looking for his "opportunity" to attack Earth First! In a further misreading of Bookchin, he argues that "in his 1987 attack, Bookchin ridiculed the idea that humanity was overpopulating the planet and destroying

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the biosphere.” Following this line of argument in a postscript, Sessions talks of Bookchin’s “general dismissal of the relevance of the science of ecology for humans,” and states that “it is not clear why Bookchin refers to his position as social ‘ecology.’”<sup>92</sup>

### Beyond the Bookchin Caricature

This final proclamation on Bookchin from Sessions, so indicative of the deep ecologists responses to Bookchin’s Amherst critique as a whole – in the sense of their uniform inaccuracy in terms of what Bookchin did in 1987 – is perhaps the most fitting point to take our leave of them. Unfortunately, it is beyond the remit of the present piece to fully elucidate Bookchin’s actual position on population, or the contention that Bookchin “dismisses the relevance of the science of ecology for humans,” but it should be noted in passing that nothing could be more inaccurate in describing Bookchin’s theoretical project. Again, proving this is beyond our scope in the immediate, but it is hoped that what has been demonstrated here is that nothing in the responses from the deep ecologists answered the searching and very important questions which Bookchin laid at the door of deep ecology 1987. Perhaps readers will conclude that the questions remained unanswered because they are unanswerable: the only thing that the deep ecologists could do in response to them was to try to kick up enough dirt to cover the terminal failings of their own philosophy.

Furthermore, it is hoped that it is now clear that it was in this kicking up of dirt, in this extraordinary collective response from the deep ecologists – based as it was on personal insinuation, as hominem argument and outright inaccuracies – that the Bookchin caricature began to emerge. Indeed, from this point on, whatever Bookchin did would be forever tainted by this exchange. His critiques were now always “attacks.” Thinkers new to Bookchin picked up where the deep ecologists left off. How could they not? There was such a significant amount of literature that pointed to Bookchin’s aggressiveness, his authoritarianism, his attempts to corner the ecology movement for himself, his dogmatism. As such, the caricature, specifically in his exchange with the anarchists of the mid-1990s, would become further and more deeply entrenched. However, our focus on his exchange with the deep ecologists – our focus on the grounds on which the accusations that plagued Bookchin until his death were based – allows us see that there was little in terms of an accurate portrayal of Bookchin and his work. Once we have exposed these inaccuracies and shed them from the debate on Bookchin’s work, we can begin the real task of reassessing social ecology and its utility as a philosophical and political programme in the present. ●

### > NOTES

80 Devall, “Deep Ecology and its Critics,” p. 55.

81 There was a curious pattern to the deep ecology responses to Bookchin’s critique: the appeal to cordial exchange whilst proposing philosophical positions that offer quite the opposite. To be explicit in the publication of statements about letting the victims of famine in Africa starve and then to ask for restraint in people who responded to this belies the unthinking nature of deep ecology. It is almost as if those who take up the positions of deep ecology simply refuse to see them through to their logical conclusions. When others do, and point out the serious problems therein, there is a shockwave through deep ecology.

82 Devall, “Deep Ecology and its Critics,” p. 55.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., p. 57. Indeed, Devall takes this notion of the deep ecologists being “less interested in political economy” even further to include the entire Western philosophical tradition on the list of things deep ecologists are less interested in. “Deep ecology theorists,” he argues here, “tend to see the whole path of Western philosophy (except for a few mavericks such as Spinoza) as leading to a dead end.” As noted, this is one of the two central planks of Bookchin’s criticism: the discounting of the thinking and writing of the human cannon which in part explains both the emergence of humanity from nature and also attempts to explain where things went wrong in terms of its current destructive relationship with the rest of the natural world.

85 Ibid., p. 58.

86 Ibid., p. 59.

87 Ibid., pp. 58–9.

88 Ibid., p. 59.

89 George Sessions, “Radical Environmentalism in the 90s,” *Wild Earth*, Fall 1992, pp. 64–7.

90 Ibid., p. 66.

91 Ibid., emphasis added. It is a further contradiction in the deep ecology response to Bookchin that the academic deep ecologists often attempt to distance themselves from the comments in *Earth First!* that sparked the debate – as Sessions does here with the term “casual remarks” – yet at the same time take up wholesale the terminology (like “turf war” and “attack”) first employed in the pages of *Earth First!*

92 Ibid., p. 68.

# NEW BOOKS

## **Raymond's Room: Ending the Segregation of People with Disabilities**

By Dale DiLeo

Training Resource Network, 2007

230 Pages, \$15 Paperback (\$24.95 Hardcover)

**Reading Dale DiLeo's *Raymond's Room*** makes me think of a photo exhibition I once attended in Santiago, the capital of Chile. The exhibition portrayed residents of an asylum for people with various kinds of impairments and mental illnesses. The pictures were shocking: Sick and skinny people were packed together in buildings that were falling apart. Several of the residents were smeared in what seemed to be their own shit. I can still see their facial expressions of desperation, apathy, loneliness and fear.

I remember thinking what kind of barbarian country it was to allow such a treatment of its people. In many countries of this world, "asylums" and other institutions for people with so-called "disabilities" have been dismantled, and the care-taking of persons with severe developmental or physical impairments has been humanized. But as Dale DiLeo shows, I was only partly right. The nature of how people with "disabilities" are treated in countries with more progressive disability policies than Chile, has not changed significantly.

Through his own experiences as a social worker, and equipped with additional facts, research and theoretical perspectives, DiLeo documents how persons with extensive impairments in the US are segregated from the rest of society in group homes and sheltered workshops. A large number of people, as many as 4 million in the US alone, are not allowed to attend the same educational system as other students, and they are only allowed to visit their communities collectively under the supervision by professionals.

We rarely think of services for "disabled" as an encroachment. My guess is that most of us – including those on the Left – believe that institutions such as special schools, group homes and sheltered workshops actually are beneficial for people with developmental impairments, such as autism, Down's Syndrome etc. At least they have somewhere to go to, haven't they? And at least they have a chance to live with people who are similar to themselves, don't they?

DiLeo turns this upside down, and shows that what we are talking about is a form of systematic discrimination and oppression: "[The disabled] are the last minority group in which legal segregation for housing and employment is still routinely provided. And their lives are controlled by one of the last publicly funded monopolies in America today."

DiLeo aptly describes the many negative aspects of being forcefully kept away from "normal" society. Group homes, although better than large-scale institutions, tend to reinforce anti-social and destructive behavior. Sheltered workshops often provide tedious and simple job tasks, and in many industries, workers are paid what DiLeo calls sub-minimum wages of less than a dollar a day! These enclaves are often justified on the basis that they prepare its clients for real life later on, but as DiLeo shows, most end up in a permanent state of preparation for "real life," as they are never able nor allowed to leave these institutions.

According to DiLeo, the Disability Industrial Complex (DIC) is the main force behind this segregation. The DIC is a billion dollar industry with extensive powers in defining disability policy, labeling people who it thinks should be encompassed by its services and prescribing their treatment. DiLeo himself worked inside this complex for several decades, and he shows through

various examples how it has a self-interest in keeping persons with mental impairments away from "normal" society. In one of the many stories in this book we meet Dave, a guy who has a tendency of spitting and cursing a lot – especially in the "wrong" settings – and none of the professionals in the DIC who worked with him ever thought he would be accepted at an ordinary work-place. With the assistance of DiLeo, however, Dave was given the opportunity to work in a port, loading and unloading ships. To the amazement of the DIC-professionals, Dave managed to keep the job. It appeared that spitting and cursing was an accepted and normal way of acting at the port, and his co-workers took little notice of what the DIC-professionals had labeled as a deviant behavior. As DiLeo says, what the disability services do mainly exaggerates the differences of people with impairments instead of the similarities they have with everyone else.

DiLeo's analysis of the DIC is the book's strength and the weakness. The advantage is that it shows how people with mental impairments systematically are held away from their communities, and that the DIC has to be dismantled before we can achieve a fully inclusive society. On the other hand, DiLeo seems to believe that dismantling the DIC and replacing it with community-oriented disability services, and supported employment, will abolish the oppression of people with impairments.

This analysis, however, avoids the deep-seated prejudices against people with developmental impairments in our society, and the skepticism of employers of hiring anyone who can be seen as unproductive in the competitive capitalist economy. These obstacles will not disappear if only disability services change. Is there not something fundamentally wrong in our society, when

some people will always need professionals to be included in our common activities? Should not family members, neighbors and friends be able to have more time to take care of each other, rather than leaving this to professional social workers? Should not people be allowed to worry more about their fellow citizens, than having to constantly worry about their own careers in a highly competitive society? DiLeo hardly touches upon these topics, maybe because his book primarily is written for other social workers.

I am sometimes surprised by the absence of disability issues on the Left. Maybe the reason is that so many Leftists have jobs inside the DIC, or that we are so unaware of these forms of oppression that we recognize it as something good and natural. A social ethics, anyway, cannot be based on good intentions— as the old proverb goes: the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

– Sveinung Legard

**Jihad and Jew-Hatred:  
Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11**

By Matthias Küntzel

(Translated by Colin Meade; Foreword by Jeffrey Herf)

Telos Press, 2007

180 Pages, \$19.95 Paperback (\$29.95 Hardcover)

“Until September 11, I was not particularly interested in Islamic anti-Semitism,” Matthias Küntzel explains in the introduction to *Jihad and Jew-Hatred*. “My main focus was German anti-Semitism.” The collapse of the Twin Towers changed that, and the result is commendable: Küntzel have given us a work that is as accessible as it is profound.

Few writers today, particularly on the Left, seem able to fully understand the general challenges that Islamist ideology pose to

secularism, universalism, and democracy. Usually, the radical Left – Trotskyists, autonomists, Maoists, and anarchists – ignore the challenges altogether, as if acts of terrorism were merely convenient pretexts for Western governments to tighten social control, limit civil liberties, and introduce racist policies. Or they tacitly support Islamism movements and anti-social terrorism with knee-jerk arguments from the 1960s about “anti-imperialism” and “self-determination.” Not so with Matthias Küntzel.

*Jihad and Jew-Hatred* traces the roots of 9/11 by exploring the ideology – and the historical development of this ideology – that prompted and justified the attacks on The World Trade Center. The ideology, and the ideologists, behind the terror attacks in 2001, Küntzel argue, was informed by deep-felt hatred of Jews. This book was originally published in German in 2002, with the telling title, *Djihad and Judenhaß: Über den neuen antijüdischen Krieg* (2002). Although updated, it is still based largely on German sources, but this in no way diminishes Küntzel’s findings or analysis; the facts are illuminating and the argument is solid.

Küntzel starts out by discussing the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood and its history in Palestine, with a particular focus on the role of Amin al-Husseini, the notorious Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He describes how Nazism and Islamism both emerged in the aftermath of World War One, largely as similar answers to the challenges of modernity; he even details extensive cooperation between the two movements, before, during, and after the Second World War. Küntzel then traces the development of Egyptian Islamism under the rule of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak – before he returns to Palestine with a presentation of the jihadist policies of Hamas. Throughout this book, Küntzel provides a well-grounded analysis of

Islamism as an ideology by presenting central figures like Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Osama bin Laden; and he demonstrates in historical detail how anti-Semitism have been central to this political ideology.

To his credit, Küntzel does not argue that there is anything inherently anti-Semitic in the Islamic tradition; he carefully describes how central ideological elements have been imported from European conspiracism, Nazism, and genocidal anti-Semitism, and that these have been consciously melded with archaic religious prejudices. Küntzel believes that the intransigent and deadly hatred of Jews – so pervasive in the Middle East today – was imported to the region by religious reactionaries with a clear political agenda, heavily influenced and supported by Nazi ideologists and their propaganda. Few can remain untouched by the detailed account of the collaboration between the Palestinian national leadership and the Nazi regime during the Second World War. With the downfall of German Nazism in 1945, and the subsequent European taboo on anti-Semitism, this poisonous legacy was carried over to the Middle East, where countries like Nasser’s Egypt even put former Nazi officials in prominent government positions. Through Küntzel’s historical lens, we see how the recent rise of Muslim anti-Semitism – although it created a distinctive, domestic brand of Jew-hatred – to a great extent emerged under the direct (as well as indirect) influence of European Nazism. We are provided compelling documentation of how European genocidal anti-Semitism and Nazism were indispensable in shaping Islamism into a unique brand of fascism.

The book ends with a brief discussion on the confusion, and the disturbing resonance, between the Left and Right in the aftermath of September 11; bringing in the chilling

prospects of more permanent alliances with extremists rejoicing in the wanton attacks on civilians in America and Israel. Unfortunately, suicide bombings, arbitrary killings of civilians on a massive scale, and explicit calls for extermination policies, are no longer considered wholly reactionary by the Left: It is with great historical irony that “progressives” today all too often condone the anti-social policies of outright religious reactionaries.

We must understand the trajectory and legacy of anti-Semitism and National Socialism in the Arab world, Küntzel argues: To reduce this to a European phenomenon is Eurocentrism of a very naïve and dangerous sort. This book effectively undermines any of the vulgar arguments that Muslim anti-Semitism is purely a consequence of current conflicts in the Middle East; that without the state of Israel and its defensive capacities there would be no hatred of Jews. No, Küntzel argues, Muslim anti-Semitism cannot be reduced purely to reactions on the current Middle East conflict and Israeli policies. Islamist hatred of Jews reaches far beyond questions of Israel and Zionism. Küntzel concludes by insisting that without confronting anti-Semitism forcefully and consistently, it is impossible to counter Islamism, as this hatred lies beneath their political ideology: Jew-hatred is as central to Islamism as it was to Nazism.

Matthias Küntzel has received several awards and wide acclaim for *Jihad and Jew-Hatred*. This, in my view, is well deserved: The book is an essential read for social ecologists; indeed, for all serious leftists and antifascists today.

– Eirik Eiglad

### **How Nonviolence Protects the State**

By Peter Gelderloos

South End Press, 2007

128 pages, \$12.00 Paperback

**Our contemporary period** raises new opportunities and challenges for building a revolutionary movement, and the question of tactics and strategies needed to achieve a libertarian

socialist society has become more pertinent than ever. A global economic meltdown and increasing ecological problems challenges us all, and so does the fierce combat between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment values, widespread disempowerment, and increasing questioning of the status quo. All these issues hold as much peril as promise for social ecologists: An increasingly extremist Right has as much potential to prevail in this atmosphere as a new Left. In this context, the arguments offered by anarchist activist Peter Gelderloos’ polemical book *How Nonviolence Protects the State* are a welcome criticism of many pacifist dogmas often received as common sense. At the same time, unfortunately, the book presents a poor collection of alternatives to those ideas.

Gelderloos’ book is the most direct and accessible challenge of pacifist ideology since Ward Churchill’s essay “Pacifism as Pathology” over twenty years ago, and they share many of the same strengths and weaknesses. A necessary discussion of social change and the role of violence in this have been languishing for too long among serious radicals: the positive value of Gelderloos’ book is above all in raising the issue of tactics for social change. Other commendable features of the work include the breaking down of criticisms into categorical chapters that offer valid assessments of pacifism’s paternalistic, privileged, and highly condescending attitudes toward the struggles of people of color, women, sexual minorities, and the poor in general. In chapters titled “Nonviolence is Racist” and “Nonviolence is Patriarchal,” the author makes a number of extremely telling critiques of often-privileged pacifist radicals’ views and treatments of oppressed groups’ struggles that do not conform to their standards of acceptable tactics. Gelderloos is also quite correct in his discussion of the often very naïve views on the state, the idea of revolution, and alleged inherently dehumanizing effects of violence on individuals who resort to it. These critiques, along with a clear demarcation at the beginning and end of the work separating the critique of pacifism as an ideology from

individual pacifists and their actions, are all to the book’s credit and deserve to be included in any further radical debate on pacifist ideology.

Yet, along with these solid points made, Gelderloos’ work is checkered with troubling aspects. In the first place, Gelderloos’ anarchist bias is so overwhelming throughout the entire work that the critique becomes limited in its ability to restart an important debate by seeming to be at times little more than an anarchist intercommunal polemic. Secondly, while justly critiquing pacifist dogma, the author often counters with a troublesome amoral point of view attempting to justify campaigns of violence by grotesque sects like the Red Brigades of Italy and the Galleanists in the US after the First World War. Actually, Gelderloos’ views for the tactics and strategies that a revolutionary movement should use in its struggle are vague in an awkward way, judging by his book. It often seem to be little more than a stereotypical anarchist rock-hurling-at-police-mentality that also comes off as very elitist in his condoning of tiny sects performing actions that should actually be the activity of the masses of people in motion. Through his arguments Gelderloos’ own views of revolution and social change in general appear to suffer as much from a simplistic and ahistorical understanding of these concepts and their realization as many of the pacifists he criticizes. Aside from these and other problems of the text, the overwhelming defect the book suffers from is a lack of a coherent ethics that should ground any discussion of the tactics for a revolutionary movement. Rejecting simplistic and glib pacifist moralism in no way invalidates the need to formulate ethical standards to guide revolutionary actions.

As a whole, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* will be of value primarily if it opens a serious discussion of the ideology it critiques. As for the alternatives needed to replace pacifism, it is my contention that social ecologists are uniquely placed to offer nuanced ideas on this matter, and hopefully such contributions by our movement will be forthcoming sooner rather than later.

– Michael Speitel

This journal presents ideas for radical social change, and also movements, projects, campaigns, and initiatives that translate these ideas into activism. To create and strengthen a social ecology movement in our own communities and regions, we need to look at a variety of examples of radical education and political organization. New communalist political organizations need to be rooted in a broad social ecology movement.

In this issue we present SEEDS, an exciting social ecology educational project located southwest of Seattle, on Vashon Island in Washington State, USA.

Text: Peter Munsterman

# SEEDS IN SEATTLE

“The process of providing a space for activists to come together and spark and inspire each other is a powerful one,” says Bob Spivey of the Social Ecology Education and Demonstration School (SEEDS). “From there,” he continues, “we can develop a more in-depth understanding of social ecology, and the effective means of manifesting and communicating it to the public.”

SEEDS is based on the urgent need for “an educational project aimed at both the global and the local community.” Co-founded by Bob Spivey and Patricia Birgen-Redwolf in 2007, it has since begun to collaborate with other community and environmental organizations on Vashon Island to form the Red Clover Group. In addition, SEEDS works in partnership with the Institute of Social Ecology (ISE) which for over 30 years has been a pioneer educational organization in exploring ecological approaches to food production, alternative technologies, and urban design, and played a catalytic role in movements to challenge nuclear power, global

injustices and unsustainable biotechnologies, while building participatory, community-based alternatives.

## INSPIRED BY THE ISE

Among other things, SEEDS has been inspired by the educational model of the ISE and its well-articulated project for social change. “I am struck by how participants in our workshops and study groups in various ways express the sense that social ecology is comprehensive, radical, and vibrant, and that the theory makes sense,” says Spivey and continues: “Some of us here believe that an experience similar to the interdisciplinary educational experience at the ISE is an effective one, given the present historical and cultural moment. Without softening or evading the revolutionary thrust of social ecology, we feel that it is important to work with a concrete project that actively engages with the needs of the community. Therefore, we have been involved in creating a Green Map for Vashon Island, doing organic remediation of the property we are leasing,

and other demonstration projects in addition to our workshops and study groups.”

Spivey believes that this helps in preparing the ground to plant a seed for a new world to grow, “for people to be able to imagine a truly transformed and ecological society, as well as experience non-hierarchical ways of organizing.” According to Spivey this has a dialectic of its own, and is especially important in a depoliticized culture like that of the contemporary US.

## GREEN-MAPPING THE ISLAND

The Green Map system intends to involve residents in developing sustainable communities through a participatory process by making local maps of the needs and potentials of their communities. Recognizing the importance and value of such a project, Spivey proposed that a Vashon Green Map might be eminently possible. Vashon resident Annie Brulé was put in charge to head the Vashon Green Map team, and in the late summer months of 2008 the SEEDS Vashon



Vashon Island residents add their ideas to the Green Map. Photo: Annie Brulé

Green Map team set-up booths at the local Vashon Saturday Farmers Market.

Holding community involvement to a high importance, the SEEDS Green Map team looked to Vashon residents for the location and the imagination of important sites on the island. “Two maps were displayed in fact,” points out Brulé, “one for writing down sites that we have now, that ought to be included on a sustainable/green living map of the place, and one for writing down sites that haven’t yet been created – an invitation to the community to brainstorm, if you will, to envision, the future we’d like to create in the place we live.”

Over the next year, a highly dedicated team worked to design, map and complete the Vashon Green Map and in the fall of 2009, the completed Vashon Green Map was presented and distributed. Comprised of 86 noted resources for “creative, sustainable living on Vashon,” the map included sites for organic/local food, future sustainable redevelopment, recycling, environmental education, public forests and parks, bicycle paths, and numerous other sites.

### ART AND REMEDIATION

SEEDS leases a property called the Beall Greenhouses. Due to heavy arsenic contamination of the soil, SEEDS has been performing a remediation process of the Beall property. SEEDS looks to use the Beall Greenhouses as a site for workshops and other educational projects that enables hands-on practicum opportunities for students in various aspects of collaborative restoration, myco- and phyto-remediation, rainwater catchment, water purification, renewable energy installation, and various other activities, while being guided by the social ecology principles of community control of energy, technology, and other resources.

“At some point we plan to do some architectural restoration as well, providing an opportunity for learning green building skills,” Spivey remarks. “We see the Beall as a part-time educational campus for SEEDS, a demonstration site, and a grassroots community center, all aimed at fomenting radical and revolutionary actions at different levels.”

Both the current owners of the Beall property and SEEDS envision art and culture as an integral part of the Beall. “It is vital to stimulate creativity, in every way, as we approach the creation of a new society and a new politics,” Spivey explains. “I think we need to develop the art and culture approach more. We have had the advantage of using the seduction of art practice to make a lot of what we do attractive to SEEDS members and workshop participants.”

“The most vital traditions of art are part of a tradition of radical truth-telling: speaking truth to power, but also uncomfortable truths to movement leaders. We want to highlight these traditions if we are to remain a genuinely self-critical movement.” Spivey stresses, however, that SEEDS does “not consider art as the revolution. We do not want to create a truncated, ‘art’ takeoff on social ecology, but rather, we need to engage students in the whole project of social ecology, not just the necessary cultural element of activist art in community.”

### FUTURE PLANS

In September 2009 SEEDS launched the movement-building focused SEEDS Seattle as a compliment to its ongoing community-based projects on Vashon Island. “SEEDS Vashon is currently focused more on our demonstration projects like the Green Map and restoration,” Spivey clarifies, “while SEEDS Seattle has taken on a significant role in the local and regional development of a climate justice movement.” In addition, SEEDS Seattle has also begun holding monthly study group meetings.

In the long run, SEEDS intends to develop a journal as an expansion of their current newsletter, and expand more into Seattle and even Portland, and begin funnelling masters students into distant learning programs in social ecology at a college in Arizona. As SEEDS continues to grow, “and we are able to help complete the necessary certification process in Washington State, we aim to establish a fully accredited masters program in social ecology, as well as offering an undergraduate program through a portfolio process,” says Bob Spivey. ●

In January 2010, Communalism Press will publish *The Anti-Jewish Riots in Norway*.

## New Alliances of Hate?

**On September 20 in Stockholm**, on Al Quds Day, a new political constellation went public in Sweden. Muhamed Omar, who came out as a radical Islamist during the last war on the Gaza Strip, had created a new alliance whose declared intention was to fight Zionism. Present was Lasse Wilhelmson, whose background is on the left, and Ahmed Rahmi, the notorious anti-Semite behind Radio Islam. This anti-Zionist alliance was not only against Israel, but also sought to counter Jewish influence in Sweden.

“In the near future, we will probably build a party, not an Islamist party, but an anti-Zionist party,” Omar said to Swedish broadcasting. “We will not focus on Muslim issues but only on Zionism, so that we can have the broadest possible appeal.” Omar was not afraid of attracting Swedish Nazis; “Everyone who shares our slogans are welcome,” he said.

In trying to break down the barriers between Left and Right, Muhamed Omar is inspired by the exploits of the notorious French comedian Dieudonné. Dieudonné, whose background is in the antiracist left, has now become something of an icon for a new type of anti-Semitism. His anti-Zionism blames most ills of this world on Israeli aggression and Jewish influence, indeed to Zionism as a belief system. His *Liste Antisioniste* has to some extent succeeded in bridging the gulf – or blurring the distinction – between Left and Right. Dieudonné’s followers include a motley crew of holocaust-deniers, right-wing extremists, Islamists, and disgruntled Marxists.

It may be fair to argue that not all forms of anti-Zionism are anti-Semitic, but as a

rule, critics of Zionism use the familiar anti-Semitic techniques of double standards, delegitimization, and demonization. Being an anti-statist and an internationalist, I am certainly not comfortable supporting any nation-state. But I find it troubling – utterly despicable, to be honest – to call for the destruction of only the Jewish state, and to identify only Zionism as racist and exclusionary. Singling out only one form of nationalism or national identity is not anti-nationalism; it is prejudice and hate.

**Dieudonné and his ilk** are exponents for a new variety of “antiracist” anti-Semitism. If they hate the Jews, it is because Jews or Zionists today, allegedly, are the new Nazis, promoting racism and apartheid (even genocide and a new Holocaust!). Such views and this line of reasoning have gained a foothold far into the radical left. Interestingly, this *Liste Antisioniste* provided links between Islamists and LePen’s Front National. Dieudonné explains why he mingles with LePen: “He is the true Right, I am the true Left, the New Empire does not like either one of us.”

In the last European elections Dieudonné’s *Liste Antisioniste* gained some 1.3 percent of the votes in the Paris region. This, according to Maria Poumier, was a clear victory for them: “We had a very good result. This means that there are 37,000 convinced anti-Zionists in Paris! They share our values and ideas.”

Am I afraid that these new alliances immediately will attract the contemporary Left into the arms of the Right? No. My real worry is that what is usually called the Left today

has no intellectual “lines of defense” against such alliances and their demands. Ever since the impact of the Six Days’ War coincided with Cold War Bloc politics and the anti-imperialism of the New Left, discussions of Israel and Zionism have gradually washed away the boundaries between legitimate criticisms, real political conflicts, and irrational national hatred. The United States and Israel have come to be seen as the prime symbols of capitalism and the West; all opposition against this “New Empire” is deemed legitimate. Contemporary leftists, it seems to me, have lost their ethical standards. As they fall ever further into disarray and discredit, new movements will reap what socialists and anarchists for decades have sown with their upgraded “anti-imperialism of fools.”

Recently, in demonstrations against Israel, we have increasingly seen crude hate messages dominate the streets. Anti-Zionism and calls for the “death of Israel” have become the magical, unifying rallying cries of both the Left and Right. Calls for a “global intifada” unites seemingly progressive anarchists and socialists with reactionaries and outright fascists. We are witnessing a resuscitated hatred that should have been buried in 1945: These ominous demonstrations against Zionism have been massive and increasingly violent.

**Anti-Semitism and racism** – indeed all forms of hate politics – must be fought vigorously, including present-day anti-Zionism. A humanist Left *must* stand up to bar the influence of such ideas and movements, and take this fight to the streets if need be.



*If only because this planet's history, including its human history, has been so full of promise, hope, and creativity, it deserves a better fate than what seems to confront it in the years ahead.*

*Murray Bookchin (1921–2006)*

A decorative graphic in the bottom left corner consisting of several overlapping, light green, curved lines that swirl upwards and to the right, resembling a stylized wave or a spiral.

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