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INTRODUCTION

MAIA RAMNATH,
FOR THE PERSPECTIVES
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“The non-sustainability and bankruptcy of the ruling world order is fully evident. The need for alternatives has never been stronger....As we face the double closure of spaces by corporate globalisation and militarised police states, by economic fascism aided by political fascism, our challenge is to reclaim our freedoms and the freedoms of our fellow beings.... At the heart of building alternatives and localising economic and political systems is the recovery of the commons and the reclaiming of community. Rights to natural resources are natural rights. They are not given by States, nor can they be extinguished by States, the W.T.O, or by corporations... Globalisation has relocated sovereignty from people to corporations, through centralising, militarising States.”

—Vandana Shiva.¹

As I write this introduction, the radio plays in the background marking the fifth anniversary of the destruction wrought in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. Later the story shifts to another tragedy of rising water: the devastation that continues to escalate in Pakistan. Two natural disasters, conveniently blameless “acts of God.” Except that it’s impossible to separate nature and society, at a time when weather patterns, distribution of flood, storm and drought have been profoundly affected by human activity in ways that have become impossible to plausibly deny. And that even leaving aside the question of our effect on the weather, storm and flood are less the true causes of massive disaster in such cases, than the chronic social pathologies that storm and flood lay bare: the economic maldistribution

revealed by the function and dysfunction of levees and canal systems, the sacrifice of infrastructure to prioritize military build-up and elite super-profits, and the political agendas that twist relief and recovery efforts. In both Louisiana and Pakistan, a deluge washed the occluding dust from the map of dispossession and privilege. In both places flood refugees suffered from the priorities of an economy driven over decades not by the common good but by the needs of US militarism, neoliberalism and empire building.

Speaking of which, there's the little matter of fossil fuels. Now the radio's moved on to the BP oil spill unleashed by a deep-water drilling rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico last May, lately called the biggest environmental disaster in US history. Here too it's impossible to disembel the ecological issue from the political and economic questions. More than just the substance of our society's insatiable addiction, crude oil is a currency of which control of dwindling sources is indispensable in order to retain global power, whether drilled off the coast in the neighborhood of our first flood, or piped across the marches of Central to South Asia, the site of our second.

If I surf through the alternative news, I can read about mountaintop removal in the Appalachians, not only destroying the mountains and their ecosystems, but poisoning, exploiting and impoverishing the coalmining communities based there; or about First Nations mobilization in defense of the tar sands of Alberta, illustrating the way extraction of energy resources is so often synonymous with primitive accumulation, i.e. accumulation by dispossession, i.e. colonization; and the ideologies legitimating the conquest of nature so compatible with ideologies

of racial and cultural supremacy.² Or I can read about MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) sabotaging pipelines in Nigeria in the quest for local autonomy; or about the power struggles manifested in the vying of communities and interests for access to oil revenues in Iraq or Alaska.

Colonialism, capitalism, fossil fuel extraction, energy consumption, climate change, crisis. The vicious circle must be broken if life on the planet is going to continue. Some within our dissident big tent—primitivists, deep ecologists, the anti-civ contingent—might say that eradicating the bulk of the cancer of humanity is the best thing that could happen to the earth. (The ugly corollary of who is expendable and who will be left standing isn't always discussed.) Did we make a wrong turn at the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution, or somewhere thereafter—in spreading the goodies around, or putting someone in charge of spreading the goodies around?

The articles featured in this issue call not for the destruction but the transformation of civilization. Each is acutely aware of existing in the shadow of approaching disaster, and yet each refuses to succumb to nihilism: their radical rejections of the status quo are tied to a positive agenda of realizing the alternatives that could stave off annihilation. What's more, they neither perpetuate the nature/culture dichotomy (as primitivism often does), or deny (like neoliberalism) the entanglement of ecological and economic dimensions. By implication, these articles open the door to debate on the question of whether rationalism and technology are cause or cure (or both, or neither) for our terminal condition—that is, whether the damage has been done by the success

of modernity's projects and logic, or by their failure; by using them at all, or by misusing them in the service of profit and power?

Like all our authors Javier Sethness takes the risk of total catastrophe as his starting point, comparing the possible outcomes of human-induced climate change to mass suicide, mass murder or genocide by the advanced capitalist societies: a true end of history or final solution for humanity as a whole. He supports the theory of "capitalism's second contradiction," namely that infinite capital expansion is impossible given the finite nature of planetary resources. But he argues that what we need is need to fulfill rather than negate the philosophical aspirations of the Enlightenment, arguing that industrial capitalism is actually the antithesis rather than the expression of these modes of thought. He also emphasizes that violence and ecological destruction are rooted not in capitalism alone, but in social domination and concentration of power. Therefore, any way out of our terrifying dead-end lies in anarchistic thinking on social organization, or "libertarian eco-socialism"—regardless of whether we accept the creative applications of technology he suggests as ways for anarchistically organized society to sustain itself.

Rooting their piece in the context of the Camp for Climate Action in the organizing around the Copenhagen summit in 2009, Andre Pusey and Bertie Russell extend this critique to activist approaches. Mapping out some of the groups and internal tensions within a complex field, their critique of those organizers who continue to frame demands within a scientific/technocratic framework, or who adopt liberal reformist or state-oriented strategies, is as sharp as their critique of the false apoliticality

of the liberal "carbon consensus" on climate, with its implicit conformity to the economic and geopolitical status quo. In contrast, Pusey and Russell insist that environmentalism must be radically, uncompromisingly anti-capitalist. This requires a truly oppositional approach including an affirmative struggle for real alternatives, based on the "creation and defense of the commons" and a transcendence of economically measurable concepts of value.

We also include here the Portland, Oregon based Parasol Climate Collective's review of the anthology *Sparkling a Worldwide Energy Revolution*, edited by recent IAS grant recipient Kolya Abramsky and published by AK Press. Their collaborative reading and assessment of the book is informed by hands-on engagement with "the questions we have yet to ask and answer as a movement" regarding the coming "energy transitions" and our ability to navigate these transitions toward a free society based on anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist principles. It's a glimpse of hope that the doomsday scenario ironically makes possible, but by no means guarantees. When the current system breaks down—which these selections suggest is a question of not if, but when—we had better be prepared for the opportunity to implement a better one. To paraphrase Parasol, quoting Caffentzis: will the closing of the energy frontier, and/or arrival at the planetary limit beyond which it's no longer possible to "externalize the contradictions of capitalism," make inevitable our ultimate liberation? Or just deliver us even more firmly into the hands of oligarchs controlling and selling what we need to survive, from energy to food? As we're reminded here, it's not only the *form* of energy we use that defines a just and

sustainable economy, but the structures of power that define its use.

Similarly, to a pervasive collective cultural imagery of apocalypse (and a vigorous dystopian tradition) Brian Tokar juxtaposes an equally vivid utopian counter-imaginary of autonomous, sustainable communities and visionary social movements freed from the taint of 20th century totalizing experiments gone wrong. The utopian tradition at its best, he argues, refers to “a dynamic process and not a static place.” For him, the guidelines to such alternatives are to be found within the holistic ethic of social ecology in the tradition of Murray Bookchin; and utopian thinking in action exemplified by recent land-based peasant struggles or the pre-Reagan era anti-nuclear movement. Tokar too indicts capitalism as, by definition, unavoidably destructive of ecological balance; but he’s a bit more skeptical of technology as a boon. He also skewers the “false solutions” of alternate energy sources from nuclear power to biofuels, carbon trading and greenwashing.

Our final selection, *What We’re Reading*, replaces *What’s Happening*. Three activist-authors examine new books, showing why they are worth reading, and are important to anti-authoritarians.

As a bottom line, all these writers point to the need for shifts in political and philosophical ideas if we are, in Tokar’s words, to “meaningfully address the simultaneous threats of climate chaos and potential social breakdown while renewing and further developing the revolutionary outlook of social ecology.” But most importantly of all, they point to the need for putting these ideas into action.

By the way, here’s we’ve been up to lately in the attempt to do just that:

As part of a collective of collectives—including AK Press, City from Below, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative, Manifesta Musicians’ Collective, Midnight Special Law Collective, Red Emma’s Bookstore and Coffeehouse, Solidarity and Defense, Team Colors Collective, and the Trumbullplex—the IAS helped organize “A New World from Below: Anarchists and Antiauthoritarians at the Social Forum” during the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit in late June 2010. Each collective contributed funds to print seventy-five hundred copies of a newsprint broadsheet), which brought thousands of forum-goers to talks, panels, and workshops focused particularly on the visionary side of anarchism.³ The New World from Below also organized a bustling convergence space at the Spirit of Hope Church, where Food Not Bombs/IWW Solidarity Kitchen fed the multitudes for four days. The space was replete with free literature as well as free ice cream, strategic discussions as well as music, including a musical benefit for the Student and Farmworker Alliance; in short, with prefigurative anarchism in action. Because the convergence center was operating outside the context of a protest, there was time for informal, relaxed conversations about where anarchism in North America could and should go from here, including plans in the early stage for some sort of strategizing “forum” next summer, to include many of the same constellation of collectives.

This summer we also awarded grants to four new projects, a tough choice following the usual round of agonizing discussion. The board would like to publicly thank everyone who applied, and heartily congratulate grantees Kolya Abramsky for “Steps toward

Community-Worker-Led Conversion of the Energy-Intensive Industries, Collective Control of Production, Reparations, and De-Growth: Detroit and the World”; Emma Dixon for “Women, Love, and Anarchism: British Feminism, c. 1968–1978”; James Generic for “Across Three Decades of Anarchism, v. 2: Lessons Learned from the Wooden Shoe Collective”; and the Rosehip Medic Collective “Alternatives to Emergency Medical Services (EMS).” Each received a grant of \$500 to assist in the writing process.

This winter, look for the second title in our Anarchist Intervention book series: *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society* by Andy Cornell, due out this coming winter on AK Press. The book features artwork by Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative members Kristine Virsis and Anarchist Interventions series designer Josh MacPhee. As with all books in the Anarchist Interventions series, each author agrees to donate at least 50 and up to 100 percent of any sales proceeds to the IAS.

Last but not least, the Board is delighted to welcome several new members to the family this fall: Sara Coffey in Detroit, Sara Galindo in Los Angeles, Lara Messersmith-Glavin in Portland, and Chris Dixon in Sudbury, ON.

ENDNOTES

1 Vandana Shiva, “The Living Democracy Movement.” Feb 23, 2002. <http://www.zcommunications.org/the-living-democracy-movement-by-vandana2-shiva> (accessed 9/5/10). Later in the piece she calls not for abolishing the state but for redefining it as trustee and protector of communities from the ravages of neoliberal capital; but in substance, her arguments

over the past decade for decentralization, small-scale agriculture and bottom-up egalitarian access to the commons as the way to link social justice with sustainable ecology are points worth considering.

2 Fun factoid: According to Polaris Institute’s Tar Sands Watch website, <http://www.tarsandswatch.org/tags/military-links> (accessed 9/3/10), “The U.S. Department of Defense is the world’s leading consumer of petroleum, sucking up about 340,000 barrels of oil every day, more than the total national consumption of Sweden or Switzerland. . . The Pentagon is the single largest institutional buyer of oil in the world, consuming an estimated 85 percent of the U.S. Government’s use of oil.”

3 Available for an online peek at <http://anarchistussf.wordpress.com/>. Scroll down the home page until you find it.



PLANETA O MUERTE

ATMOSPHERIC DIALECTICS: A CRITICAL THEORY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

JAVIER SETHNESS

“To provide for the permanence of life of the population of each nation of humanity that inhabits the planet Earth is the primary and essential function of politics.”

—Enrique Dussel¹

“The bourgeoisie live on like specters threatening doom.”

—Theodor W. Adorno²

It would unfortunately not be entirely absurd to claim climate change to be the greatest social problem of the twenty-first century. Short of the historical development and proliferation of nuclear weapons, nothing else seems to pose such a dire threat to human welfare as do the projected consequences of climate change. A recent report released by *The Lancet*,³ for example, claims it to constitute the greatest threat to human health in this century. The dialectics of dangerous anthropogenic interference with the global climate and the greenhouse effect—which itself dialectically has allowed for the emergence and evolution of life on Earth for nearly four billion years—represents a problematic that, in Dussel’s view,⁴ joins the mass persistence of global material poverty in constituting the final limit to the age of modernity, the capitalist mode of production, and political liberalism.

Such a conclusion follows from the climatological evidence provided in recent years by Mark Lynas, a British environmental journalist who appears to have assiduously read through and synthesized thousands of reports and studies

released by climatologists regarding the various threats posed by climate change and compiled them in his 2008 book *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*, published by National Geographic. Besides introductory and concluding chapters, *Six Degrees* is comprised of six chapters, each of which deals with some of the possible socio-environmental changes that will accompany each degree-Celsius increase in the global average temperature that may come about during the current century as a result of human-caused carbon emissions, whether historical, contemporary, or future, as well as the release of other greenhouse gases. If more or less correct in its science,⁵ Lynas's *Six Degrees* surely represents a decidedly important contribution to the advancement of social knowledge, and to praxis in defense of life itself more generally. As such, then, it surely should be read and thoughtfully considered by a wide audience, especially those who, in identifying themselves as revolutionary leftists, seek the actualization in history of liberated existence—a project that could find its determinate negation in the 'realization' of catastrophic climate change. What this essay sets out to do, then, is to review the breadth of potential negations that Lynas finds in the prospect of climate change and then to discuss some contributions that leftist⁶ political thought might have. I deal here mostly just with the problem of climate change, which should in no way be taken to suggest that I find unimportant other socio-environmental problems. It is merely to claim climate change to be perhaps the most pressing such problem.

This work, then, will be comprised of two parts: one which largely follows Lynas in presenting many of the possible future realities he examines in his

Virgil-like tour of various potential climate change scenarios in *Six Degrees*, and a second that critiques Lynas and dominant approaches on climate change more generally from a libertarian eco-socialist perspective. The conclusion here set forth, with Adorno,⁷ is that “[p]erspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world” as it currently exists, that de-naturalize the “monstrous apparatus”⁸ of capitalism, domination, and planetary destruction—life-negating realities that, as Walter Benjamin⁹ observes, are too often treated as “historical norm[s]”—and that hence provide actual grounds for hope for the prospect of a happy humanity and a “free nature.”¹⁰ It is to be hoped that the present work, then, constitutes something of an effective means by which to help convince people in the main of the thoroughgoing transformations that they soon must help to effect if total catastrophe is to be averted.

To begin, then: Lynas opens his discussion of some of the likely realities of a world warmer by one degree by telling us that such increased temperatures would cause perennial drought to affect the Great Plains of the western United States, eventually bringing about a “hyper-arid state” characterized by a return to the desertification observed during the Medieval Warm Period, with calamitous consequences for agricultural productivity and hence human life both locally and globally. The upheavals that would follow from such would dwarf the experiences of the 1930s Dust Bowl in the U.S. A global average temperature increase of one degree relative to pre-industrial times also threatens to render Mt. Kilimanjaro ice-free and to degrade Alpine permafrost. Lynas also asserts an average increase of one degree will heat the oceans beyond the

threshold at which coral as a species can survive, resulting in the mass bleaching of the coral reefs and the effective eradication of the immense biodiversity that resides in such—the oceanic equivalents of tropical rain forests. Made warmer by increased average global temperatures of 1° C, the oceans may in fact come to produce more frequent hurricanes of greater intensity than previously known to humans. The general trend expected to be felt around the world warmer by 1° C would be one marked by increased incidence of drought and the progressive making-inhospitable of much of the world to human and non-human life.

An average global temperature increase of 2° C, the threshold of warming considered to be ‘safe’ by many dominant global institutions, for its part exacerbates many of the trends of a world warmer by one degree and introduces a few frightening climatic discontinuities. “Marine deserts” are expected to be vast in such a world—large oceanic regions bereft of plankton and phytoplankton. The collapse of such species results from the acidification spurred by higher contact of ocean-water with increased carbon-dioxide concentrations (the dissolving of carbon dioxide in water makes such water more acidic). Such developments would prove disastrous for two important reasons: first, plankton constitute the basis of the life of much of the oceans’ biodiversity, hence acting in much the same way as do plants and trees on land; secondly, phytoplankton serve to remove billions of tons of carbon from the atmosphere every year. According to Lynas, furthermore, a two-degree rise in average temperatures would likely make the heatwave conditions that killed up to 35,000 people in 2003 annual events in Europe. A two-degree increase

in average global temperatures would also surpass what NASA climatologist James Hansen finds to be the critical melt threshold for the Greenland ice sheet. The extinction of such famous megafauna as polar bears, ringed seals, and walruses would seem to be inevitable in a world warmer by two degrees, Lynas tells us. Such a world would also witness the near-eradication of tundra biomes and a dramatic northward retreat of the permafrost boundary. These conditions might well make historically traditional ways of life impossible for the Arctic-dwelling Inuit, as well as call into question the very survival of the Uru Chipaya people of the Bolivian highlands, among others.¹¹ Recent reports of the effects a two-degree change would have on India show it devastating the country’s wheat-producing northern states as well as contributing to further destruction, displacement, and death from the combination of more intense monsoon seasons, driven in turn by warmer oceans, and increased flooding and mudflows as the ice cover of the Himalayan Mountains goes further into decline. The climatic changes that would accompany this might indeed bring about the complete disappearance of glacial ice in the Andes, which currently supplies water to millions in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile. The risk of crop failure and increased hunger and starvation will increase dramatically across most African countries, given an average increase of two degrees; Lynas briefly mentions the example of Mali, where up to three-quarters of the population could go hungry under such conditions—up from one-third currently. As he reminds us, preventing mass starvation around the world will be “increasingly difficult” in a world warmer by two degrees, though he does

write that the “majority of humanity” will probably survive such warming. The same does not hold, unfortunately, for much of the non-human world: an average increase of two degrees is expected to place a third of all living species of Earth at the risk of extinction.

Lynas opens his discussion of some of the likely realities of a world with an increased average global temperature of three degrees with a grim examination of the decidedly catastrophic changes Botswana and southern Africa generally would suffer in such a world: the “great sand seas” of the Kalahari Desert are expected to begin expanding, much as the Great Plains are expected to have done earlier, and bring about a new environmental regime characterized by features “far off any scale that would permit human adaptation.”¹² Botswana and much of southern Africa, then, would become a space that would “no longer be able to support human habitation,” that would likely dispatch its few surviving residents through famine. With a global average temperature three degrees higher than pre-industrial times, furthermore, the Earth may well see the beginnings of a permanent El Niño, a climatic event that might well lead to the drying out of Amazonia and the decline of the Asian summer monsoon, two conditions that Mike Davis finds to have synergized with the onset of capitalist colonialism in South Asia and much of Africa to have produced the worst famines recorded in human history—ones that killed between 30 and 60 million people.¹³ Such a world would moreover see the decidedly violent drying out and final self-immolation of the Amazon rainforest, current home to half the world’s biodiversity and thousands of indigenous groups—an ecosystem

that by itself accounts for a tenth of Earth’s total photosynthetic output. In a world that sees the conflagration of the Amazon, hurricanes with potential speeds of at least a half-category higher than the highest ever recorded—Category 5—are expected to pummel several coastal cities around the world. The Greenland ice cap will quickly go into terminal decline under such conditions, and lakes and relatively unarable land will dialectically appear in the far northern latitudes in place of the receding ice. In such a world, parts of Central America and Australia will experience dramatically more intense drought and the collapse of agricultural productivity; much of these two regions, the current home to over 60 million people, will simply be rendered uninhabitable. An increased average temperature of three degrees will likely contribute to the perennialization of drought in Indonesia and the dramatic melting of the Himalayan glaciers—which currently sustain half of the world’s total human population. Under such climatic conditions, up to fifty percent of all species currently living will be at risk of extinction. Lynas also briefly examines the rendering-uninhabitable of “an entire latitudinal belt across the whole width of the globe”¹⁴ and the probable mass migrations of people that will follow, together with the likely concomitant rise of naked fascism in the less horribly affected Western/Northern societies.

A world four degrees warmer will present conditions never before experienced in the entirety of the evolutionary course of humans. One effect of transitioning to a world four degrees warmer would be the existence of higher sea levels that would undoubtedly threaten the existence of essentially all human settlements and ecosystems

located on the Earth's coasts, from Bangladesh to Egypt. In addition, such an average temperature increase would likely result in the breakup of the Ross and Ronne ice shelves of Antarctica, which in turn would lead to the collapse of the entire West Antarctic ice sheet; indeed, the historical phenomenon of Earth's polar ice caps could be altogether absent in a world warmer by four degrees. Due precisely to the increased melting of glaciers and polar ice brought about by such warming, the Atlantic thermohaline circulation system may begin to slow down and fail altogether under such conditions, subjecting parts of northwestern Europe to a climate resembling that of Siberia. As the permafrost boundary recedes dramatically northward with average temperature increases past three degrees, stored carbon and methane deposits will begin to be decomposed and released, further contributing to the climatic apocalypse. At this point in the climate catastrophe, moreover, very little of the globe's land surface will be expected to be capable of supporting agricultural production, due to the combination of drastically reduced water availability and violently accelerated evaporation rates likely experienced in a world warmer by four degrees. Mass starvation, Lynas warns us, will be the norm for most humans still existing in such a world; the very collapse of human 'civilization' itself is likely.

In a world warmer by five degrees, Lynas informs us, there will come to exist two essentially perennially drought-stricken latitudinal belts, one in each hemisphere: that of the Southern hemisphere will engulf much of southern South America, eastern Africa and Madagascar, and essentially all of Australia as well as those Pacific Islands that still exist, while in the

North nearly all of Central America, southern Europe, the western Sahel and much of Ethiopia, southern India, Indochina, Korea and Japan will be similarly affected. A world experiencing such warming will see a marked decrease in the flows of the Nile, the drying up of the Rimac, and the near-total disappearance of California's winter mountain snowpack. Under such climatic conditions, the downstream flows of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers are expected to have declined by at least half. In a world hotter by five degrees, the few remaining 'sanctuaries' for life on Earth—what is now parts of Canada and Siberia in Russia—would be menaced by summer heatwaves and forest conflagrations that could even provoke disruptions in agricultural production capacity. A warming of five degrees could in addition very well provoke the destabilization and decidedly violent release of ocean-bound methane hydrates, which some geologists blame for the rather dramatic shift the Earth's climate took toward an extremely hot state 55 million years ago. Apparently, the historical release of such methane took place concomitantly with the mass extinction of life in the deep ocean and the attendant further acidification of the world's oceans. The warming potential which lies in such methane hydrates beyond the 5° C increase that would cause them to be released could in fact propel the Earth to become another Venus.

With six degrees of average increase in global temperatures the Earth's oceans will likely be bereft of all life save for some organisms residing in the few marine biomes not yet rendered totally anoxic. "Super-hurricanes" are likely to be regular events in such a world. Lynas suggests that these freak storms may be so powerful as to be able

to circumnavigate the globe and destroy most of the forms of life with which they would come into contact. The prospect of the development of methane clouds emerging from the release of methane hydrates in the warming oceans does not seem to be unimaginable. Lynas tells us that such methane-air concentrations would likely be highly flammable and perhaps even more destructive than even the most 'advanced' weapons yet produced by humans. We are even told that the hydrogen sulfide and methane-air clouds created through such extreme warming might even work to effectively dismantle the ozone layer that currently protects life on earth. It is not inconceivable that the synergy of these life-destructive factors could well reproduce the conditions of the mass extinction at the end of the Permian Age 251 million years ago in which 95 percent of all extant species went extinct.

DISCUSSION

"The reason why the totalitarian regimes can get so far [...] is that that the outside nontotalitarian world, which always comprises a great part of the population of the totalitarian country itself, indulges [...] in wishful thinking and shirks reality in the face of real insanity."

—Hannah Arendt¹⁵

"Before the spark reaches the dynamite, the lighted fuse must be cut."

—Walter Benjamin¹⁶

If the reports synthesized by Lynas in *Six Degrees* as well as the general argument he presents are scientifically sound, the potential consequences posed by climate change for life on Earth could well be nothing less than totally catastrophic; the scale of the threat, indeed, is as shocking as it is horrifying.

Given the breadth and depth of the environmental and social disasters resulting from climate change that Lynas tells us could soon come to pass, it is perhaps somewhat strange that he refrains from editorializing much during his presentation of the material evidence for such claims in his book, though he does intermittently reveal some of his own feelings on the enormity of the problem. At one point, he muses that humans are "indescribably privileged" to be born into the only planet on which life is known to exist in the universe.¹⁷ He goes on to claim that the conscious destruction of the rich diversity of life on Earth which follows from the changes that will likely be brought about by climate change is "undoubtedly a crime," one far worse than "the cruelest genocide or most destructive war."¹⁸ He firmly asserts that he can find no legitimate excuses for "collaborating" with such a criminal process and, citing the precedent of the Nuremberg tribunals, claims neither ignorance nor subordination within hierarchical social apparatuses to constitute legitimate defenses against complicity with the perpetuation of such. Lynas suggests that the "moral path" lies in "actively resisting" the "horrendous fate" that could come about as a result of the processes he examines in *Six Degrees*,¹⁹ and he rather significantly argues that the seeming bleakness of the present situation should propel us not to embrace defeatism but instead radicalism.

These sometimes-legitimate observations of Lynas notwithstanding, we can in all probability say that Lynas' expressed perspectives in *Six Degrees* are in some ways surely constrained, as social reproduction more generally is constrained by the profound irrationalities of hegemonic capitalism. The present work, however, is not similarly

constrained; as such, it can potentially provide a more honest and thoughtful—that is, expressly radical—examination of many of the questions Lynas raises as well as present some potentially productive perspectives he unfortunately does not consider in *Six Degrees*.

To begin with, then, it should be clear from the preceding examination of Lynas's findings that, as Adorno writes,²⁰ "the world is deeply ailing." Perhaps the foremost consideration regarding such is quite simply that the changes associated with each degree-increase in the average global temperatures reviewed by Lynas in *Six Degrees*—indeed, even and especially the more frightening scenarios of warming beyond two degrees Celsius— theoretically could come about in a matter of decades. This is a far cry from the end-Permian mass-extinction event that seems to have occurred over the far broader time-scale of perhaps 10,000 years. If little substantive is soon done to restrict human contributions to climate change, then, the likely future rate of warming probably will be exponentially more violent than it has been during analogous periods of climate change in the Earth's geological history. It is to be imagined, then, that the intensity of such warming rates will far outstrip the ability of ecosystems and human societies to adapt accordingly. If warming surpasses a two-degree increase beyond pre-industrial average global temperatures, the unfortunate reality will likely be that the death of much of humanity and the marked acceleration of currently prevailing mass-extinction rates will become inevitable. An average global temperature increase of 2° C by itself is, as reviewed above, disastrous enough. Indeed, as Kolbert writes in the close of her dark assessment of current warming trends,²¹ it is as though technologically 'advanced'

societies currently are essentially 'choosing' to destroy themselves together with much of the rest of life on Earth.

Let us now then briefly turn to some of the predictions various climatologists have made regarding the likely extent of climate change in the current century. Lynas tells us that scientists have established "beyond reasonable doubt" that the Earth has warmed by 0.7° C since pre-industrial times.²² The Fourth Assessment Report published in 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts a possible range of global average temperature increases of between 1.1° and 6.4° C by the end of this century. As Lynas grimly informs us, however, such predictions may indeed be conservative, considering that the various feedback mechanisms that might turn climate change into a self-perpetuating phenomenon are still unquantified and hence excluded from consideration for the IPCC's conclusions. A rough approximation of the likely effects of such 'positive' feedback loops may indeed have led 90 percent of climatologists polled by *The Guardian* in 2009 to claim that humanity would fail to limit average global temperature increases to 2° C.²³ Indeed, a study on climate change released in the same month by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, more pessimistically realistic than most other climate change predictions as regards the prospect of humanity's achieving significant carbon-emission reductions in the near future, found that the median global average temperature increase that would likely be reached this century would be 5.2° C and claimed a 90 percent chance that the band of temperature increase reached in this century would be between 3.5° and 7.4° C.²⁴ The study's authors are quick to clarify that even their decidedly

bleak conclusions might be under-estimates, as they, like the IPCC, also did not fully account for the various feedback mechanisms that could arise with the process of extreme climate change. A more recent report, this one published by the UK Met Office, similarly claimed it plausible that average global temperatures would increase by 4° C by 2060 without serious action aimed at mitigating carbon emissions in the near term,²⁵ while the Global Carbon Project reported in November 2009 that average global temperatures could well increase by 6° C before 2100.²⁶ A May 2009 study released by Kofi Anna's Global Humanitarian Forum, for its part, found climate change processes already to be killing 300,000 people around the globe each year. It claims 98 percent of those "seriously affected" by climate change to be residents of less economically developed societies and finds that 90 percent of the total economic losses resulting from climate change are to be borne by such societies.²⁷

What is then currently being enacted, in other words, is the effective mass murder of a historically unprecedented number of human beings by the 'advanced' capitalist societies of the world—the citizenry and political-economic leadership of the United States and Western Europe, as well as that of the former Soviet Union/Russia, China, and India to a lesser extent. Such potential developments, indeed, seem to be tantamount to humanity's "collective suicide,"²⁸ though the 'realization' of such a suicide would surely be predated by an effectively genocidal attack on those societies that, as Lynas reminds us, have least contributed to the development of the catastrophic process of anthropogenic climate change—that is, Fanon's "wretched of the earth."²⁹ Those who perish as

a result of climatic disruption would not merely die; they would, as O'Neill argues,³⁰ be killed, and such crimes amount to nothing less than homicide.³¹ The occurrence, indeed, of the decidedly barbaric catastrophes that would accompany a rapidly warming world would likely dwarf the torturous brutality to which so many were subjected in the twentieth century and have been during the trajectory of the historically alienated *Weltlauf*, or 'world-course,'³² generally: the horrors that would likely enter history within such a world would constitute the extension and final realization of such historical horrors as the 'Columbian Exchange' and colonization and colonialism more broadly, slavery (both formal and informal), apartheid (whether in its South Africa, Israeli-Palestinian, or capitalist permutations), fascism and Stalinist 'socialism,' domination—of external nature, the self, and other sentient beings—and brutality and social irrationality generally. If Western societies and the 'emerging markets' of the capitalist 'successes' of China, India, Brazil, and others do not soon come to effect a radical overturning of the potentially anthrocidal and even biocidal *Weltlauf*, then, their failure to act would constitute the final negation of the promises of history, whether conceived of in Hegelian or Marxian terms, as well as that of what Kropotkin³³ sees as the very basis of human society—that is, solidarity; of the promise Arendt³⁴ sees in the concept of "beginning," and especially that of each new human birth; of the world that Subcomandante Marcos wishes for, one in which "we all can fit," in which "peace, justice, and liberty" are not realities alien to humanity³⁵; of Bookchin's dreams of achieving a non-hierarchical human society that ceases to dominate nature³⁶; of Adorno's vision of a world in which

“no-one shall go hungry anymore,”³⁷ in which life is to go “without unfulfilled needs”³⁸; of Horkheimer’s “truly human society”³⁹; of Benjamin’s conception of a society that has achieved “the abolition of domination” and concomitantly allowed for the blossoming of a “redeemed [humanity]”⁴⁰; of Fanon’s advocacy⁴¹ of a “new start,” a “new way of thinking,” a “new man [sic]”; of Ahmad’s endorsement of socialism,⁴² which he sees as the sublation of capitalism’s myriad cruelties; of the prospect for Marcuse’s “non-repressive civilization”⁴³; or, indeed, of Levinas’s very conception of the “miracle of creation”⁴⁴—“the creating [of] a moral being”—or his account of truth⁴⁵: “to encounter the Other without allergy, that is, in justice.”

As horrifying as it may be to contemplate, what is currently at hand, if it goes unchecked, would constitute a rather final violation of the new categorical imperative that Adorno, writing after the Holocaust,⁴⁶ assigns to us—that is, that humans “arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, [so that] nothing similar will happen.” Were the worst projected consequences of climate change to come about, then, this would mark the final victory of totalitarianism in history—the unveiling, in essence, of the profound brutalities of the capitalist mode of production, which has long made impossible the satisfaction of the human needs of far too many and that “tends toward the extermination of humanity” itself.⁴⁷

Now is not the time, then, to engage in the “lucid consolation” of humor that Crichtley⁴⁸ advises us to adopt in light of our powerlessness to overturn exploitation and oppression generally. It is instead to seriously and rationally assess the prospect of total catastrophe with which capitalist (post)modernity has

threatened the very continued existence of most human and non-human life forms on the only planet that as far as we know has ever given birth to life itself, as well as to evaluate and overturn our own contributions, in both individual and structural terms, to the prospect of such. The task which lies before us is nothing less than the “radical transformation of world society”⁴⁹ and the realization of a global ecological society, one that, in marked contrast to global capitalism, would be characterized by social relations that, in Janet Biehl’s view,⁵⁰ would not threaten the very material preconditions of continued social reproduction and existence generally with collapse—an eventuality that Earth scientist James Lovelock⁵¹ likens to the dénouement of Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Such a political project is, as Dussel⁵² reminds us, more radical and thoroughgoing than any other previously considered, let alone realized. If such a project were also to include the traditional libertarian-socialist emphasis on the eradication of material poverty, class society, and social domination generally—as this author thinks it undoubtedly should—its realization would be made even more difficult. In essence, then, “the forces against which [we] must act,” Adorno tells us,⁵³ “are those of the course of world history.”

As regards climate change alone, though, the enormity of the problem is potentially staggering and even overwhelming. Lynas tells us⁵⁴ that the stabilization of average global temperature increases at 2° C relative to pre-industrial times necessitates the peaking of greenhouse-gas emissions by 2015 and a concomitant “safe landing” at a global atmospheric CO₂ parts-per-



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million concentration of 400, or a 450 CO₂-equivalent ppm concentration. Basing his calculations off the 2007 IPCC report, Lynas tells us that reaching such targets would require a 60 percent cut in global emissions by 2030 and an 85 percent reduction by 2050, with the U.S. having to reduce its emissions by 85 percent by 2030. Such a trajectory is clearly not the one favored by the world's dominant elites. According to Lynas, carbon emissions have already soared far beyond the decidedly weak targets established by the Kyoto Protocol.⁵⁵ The legislation aimed at reducing carbon emissions as proposed last summer by the U.S. House of Representatives calls for a mere 4 to 7 percent reduction in U.S. emissions relative to 1990 levels,⁵⁶ while the Senate version of the bill has been tabled indefinitely.⁵⁷ The Obama administration, for its part, has consistently rejected calls for the U.S. to reduce its carbon emissions by 40 percent relative to 1990 levels by the year 2020, with its representative Todd Stern dismissing such proposals as "not feasible" and "not necessary."⁵⁸ That Obama himself should have treated the December 2009 Copenhagen summit with the levity he did is, then, unsurprising.

In any case, were a strong treaty to have been enacted at Copenhagen last year, there is reason to believe that it may already be too late to stave off the worst projected consequences of climate change: due to historic emissions, it is at this point a fait accompli that global average temperatures will rise by a total of 1.5° C, even if all emissions were somehow to stop tomorrow, and the 2006 Stern report on climate change informs us that the carbon-dioxide equivalent of total greenhouse-gas concentrations in the atmosphere was at the time of its investigations estimated to be 430 ppm, just 20

from the level beyond which total climate catastrophe seems to become basically inevitable.⁵⁹ It should be said, of course, that Stern finds the "only politically realistic option" to be the stabilization of atmospheric carbon at 550 ppm, a level which Lynas tells us would likely bring about a global average temperature increase of 3° C,⁶⁰ together with all the feedback loops that would further increase the rise of global temperatures, and with it hardship and suffering, toward truly apocalyptic levels.

As Lynas warns us, then, "what is politically realistic for humans is wholly unrelated to what is physically realistic for the planet."⁶¹ This contribution is a lucid one, up to a point: it is certainly true that the type of socio-political action considered acceptable by constituted power will utterly fail on the question of climate change, as it so long has on questions of material poverty, economic inequality, and oppression generally. It seems unfair, though, for Lynas to equate the expressed philosophies and interests of the world's ruling elites and their advocates with humanity in general. It is clear that, were the worst of the projected consequences that are to accompany climate change to come about, such would constitute the determinate crushing of the dreams of ordinary people around the world—whether they be Palestinian refugees, Mexican farmworkers, Amazon-dwelling indigenous groups, or, indeed, the 6.7 billion other humans that currently reside on Earth, in addition to the between 8 and 12 billion that are expected to exist by mid-century. It is neither most of the people currently living on Earth nor their future children who are responsible for the potentially world-destructive phenomenon of climate change; it is, instead, the leaders and

residents of the West/North, in addition to those of Russia, China, India, and Brazil, who are responsible in this sense. It is indeed to be imagined that, were humanity in general to adopt the ‘veil of ignorance’ and enter Rawls’ Original Position,⁶² it surely would choose to live neither in a world in which climate change would pose as serious a threat as it does, nor one in which the relatively privileged of such a world would submit to the legitimacy of such economic and political systems as capitalism, that are entirely complicit with the factors that have driven and will likely continue to drive this most pressing of social problems. With Horkheimer,⁶³ then, we can say that “[t]he battle cries of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution are valid now more than ever,” that the principle that both Hegel and Marcuse⁶⁴ see in such—“that thought ought to govern reality”—are entirely legitimate, and must be realized in history desperately soon—for, if humanity does not succeed in undertaking a “radical reconsideration of itself” in this sense, it is entirely plausible, as disturbing as it may be to contemplate, that “there will be no more human history” at all, that “all will be lost.”⁶⁵

By way of brief excursus, then, perhaps one of the most important elements in the struggle to stave off the worst excesses of projected climate change would be an attempt at trying to understand some of the reasons for the current predicament. To begin with, it would seem that anthropogenic global warming has come about largely as a result of the discovery and mass consumption of fossil fuels since the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Its breadth and depth has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the non-realization of a transition to clean, renewable

energy, a historical possibility that seems to have been largely negated by the not insignificant role that Big Oil has played in politics around the world as well as the relative unprofitability of rational alternatives to a petroleum- and coal-based economy within the prevailing economic system. The emergence and long-sustained victory of a mode of production that valorizes economic profit above all else, however, surely bears much of the blame for the problems of the current situation, for capitalism, according to Bookchin,⁶⁶ makes “the plunder of nature into society’s law of life.” Quite simply, the self-expansion of capital stands radically at odds with the protection and maintenance of ecosystems and, indeed, life itself.⁶⁷

Schainberg⁶⁸ posits the existence of a ‘treadmill of production’ in growth-based economies, whether capitalist or ‘socialist,’ whereby the three dominant forces of society (capital, labor, and government) come to support perpetually increased economic growth, whatever its adverse effects on the environment or human society—capital, to maximize profits; labor, to retain employment, wages, and hence survival; and government, to allow for the collection of the tax revenue on which it depends. Following Schainberg, James O’Connor⁶⁹ claims to have found a ‘second contradiction of capitalism’ beyond the one originally identified by Marx. In his view, competition among profit-maximizing producers under capitalism leads inexorably to the degradation of the finite natural resource base of such an economy and ultimately undercuts the very possibility of a future. Sachs’s⁷⁰ endorsement of a “politics of sufficiency,” in which individuals and human populations take only as many resources from the planet as is necessary for survival and moderate comfort, is then entirely fanciful

insofar as the capitalist mode of production exists. Just as “[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly,”⁷¹ in this sense, so cannot an economic system that acknowledges no limits to growth and that in turn demands economic growth, often exponential, as a precondition for economic viability and ‘success,’ both individual and institutional—and that in turn analyzes from a perspective of profitability and ‘pragmatism’⁷²—protect nature. The failure of the historical realization of the Marxian dialectic—the overthrowing of capitalism by the proletariat and the subsequent establishment of socialism—and the concomitant victory of the capitalist ruling class across nearly the entire globe also goes some way in explaining the prevailing state of affairs, for it is to be imagined that a relatively non-hierarchical series of either workers’ states or anarchist communes, coupled with the Marcusean-Hegelian realization of reason in social relations generally, would have served as a better framework in which to approach and ultimately overturn the problem of climate change than has capitalism. Furthermore, the “introduction of power as the only content of politics, and of expansion as its only aim,” which Arendt⁷³ sees as having accompanied the rise of capitalism and the historical victory of the bourgeoisie, is arguably central in understanding the present predicament, as is consideration of the fact that the historical onset of bourgeois rule simply re-entrenched the historical exclusion of the majority from effective participation in the management of society, together with the social alienation that results.⁷⁴ For Arendt, such factors synergize to effect the eradication of questions of right from the general consciousness and replace such with imperatives to obey and conform with existing arrangements—a bourgeois formula that she sees as having

been instrumental in the development and ‘success’ of totalitarian movements and regimes, and one that, given the negotiations climate change will likely introduce into history, is unfortunately still highly relevant today. Moreover, the persistence of social isolation and loneliness in many societies, of the “experience of not belonging to the world at all”—additional factors that Arendt⁷⁵ finds to have made possible the rise of totalitarianism in history—is also deeply troubling in this respect. It should further be said that it is rather unlikely that a global political system that has failed to substantively punish countless Nazi war criminals as well as the ‘individuals’ Idi Amin, Haile Mariam Mengistu, Augusto Pinochet, Royal Dutch Shell Corporation, Henry Kissinger, Ariel Sharon, George W. Bush, and Tony Blair for their myriad crimes against humanity and the Earth—and, indeed, that is often run by these same oppressive and repressive forces—would succeed in neutralizing the social forces most responsible for historic and future climate change, regardless of whether the latter essentially destroys much of life on earth. The marked failure of the general recognition that “the Jew is a human being”⁷⁶—that the excluded, oppressed Other, whether human or non-human, is a subject worthy of concern—surely also goes some way in explaining some of the present problematic, as does Fotopoulos’s⁷⁷ claim that at the heart of many current socio-political ills lies the problem of the concentration of power. Behind all of these analyses, of course, stand those of Horkheimer and Adorno⁷⁸ and of Bookchin,⁷⁹ who find not just capitalism but social domination, and especially the domination of nature, to be the fundamental problem of human history.

As seemingly overwhelming, then, as the threat of climate change seems

to be, and as fundamental and deep-seated as the factors that contribute to such arguably are, this should not be taken to mean that we can or should do nothing. As Lynas reminds us,⁸⁰ this is the time for action, not resignation. The traditional environmentalist suggestion to 'reduce, reuse, and recycle' is hardly irrelevant at the current moment, if reduction here is meant to be taken as a radical one, at least in terms of the various superfluities that much of the population of many Western societies consume. Reduction must not, of course, be made into a general prescription, for the materially impoverished of the world surely need more consumption rather than less. It is nonetheless clear that a dramatic transformation of energy systems to clean, renewable sources is desperately needed. Kolbert's brief exploration of space-based solar power—a project that would involve launching photovoltaic array-laden satellites into space, where they would collect many times the amount of energy available to Earth-based solar plants, and having them beam back the collected energy to Earth⁸¹—seems rather promising in this regard, however unlikely the prospect of such projects under prevailing conditions, especially given the current global economic downturn. Were any such seemingly radical project to be executed under currently prevailing socio-political conditions, though, it is to be imagined that the benefits of such would follow the legacy of much of historical scientific advancement and hence be distributed in economically and nationally/regionally discriminating ways: if such projects were to be based on consideration of economic profit, that is to say, it is more than likely that such developments would fail on both ecological and human grounds. The

concept of "solar communism,"⁸² then, represents a more rational and humane alternative to that which currently exists. Less fanciful, perhaps, is Lynas' recommendation⁸³ that the destruction of the Earth's tropical rainforests be halted, for he says that doing so could be crucial to keeping global average temperature increases to the 2° C threshold. It seems that the drastic reduction of meat consumption, especially in the West, could also be instrumental toward this end.⁸⁴

If, however, few or none of the more rational courses of action still open to humanity are taken in the near future, it may become necessary to engage in some form of defensive geo-engineering of the climate, such as the launching of reflective mirrors into space or the mass spraying of aerosols in the atmosphere, in an effort to try to avert some of the more horrifying possible futures that Lynas describes to us. As long as the existent forms of social relations exist, it is to be expected that any such program would be highly problematic and far from rational or legitimate—the advent of such may well blunt the need for the reduction of carbon emissions and would thus, inter alia, condemn the Earth's oceans to certain death—but it is to be expected that it would be less horrible than the projected consequences of the essentially business-as-usual approaches favored by the dominant classes of the world.

This of course should in no way be taken as an endorsement of currently prevailing constituted power. The argument advanced here has repeatedly stressed the dire need to radically break with the total insanity of capitalism and its reformist apologists. Now more than ever is the time for humanity to awaken from the social alienation propagated by liberal capitalism and other repressive ideologies

and come to engage on a mass scale in truly radical collective action designed at overthrowing the currently prevailing Weltlauf. The task that lies ahead is not one that can be realized by any One, for “[t]he only possible Messiah is a collective one,”⁸⁵ and it is not one that will be achieved, as both liberalism and traditional religions tell us, through patience and waiting but rather through our own efforts at “bringing about [its] coming.”⁸⁶ The “monstrous, horrible world”⁸⁷ brought about by global capitalism and domination generally that threatens the very continued existence of much of humanity and life itself on Earth must be resisted. It is our task to become like the communist partisans of Mikis Theodorakis and Maria Farantouri’s “O Antonis,” who fight alongside and in defense of the Jews—those excluded, marginalized, and condemned by prevailing society, those who have been reduced by constituted power to “debased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible” beings.⁸⁸ We must come to adopt the “existential revolt” of Marcuse’s ‘Great Refusal,’ whereby “the whole organism, the very soul of the human being” comes to rebel against “organized and socialized destruction”⁸⁹ and bring about a “real state of emergency,” one that could represent actual hope for humanity in its struggles against both fascism and world-destruction alike.⁹⁰ The creation of such life-affirming resistance is, as Arendt⁹¹ claims, the very precondition for the creation and defense of a world “fit for human habitation,” one in which humanity can in fact exist.⁹²

How such a movement might be born, nurtured, and developed in society is of course an essential question to consider, and one whose answer may in fact prove depressingly debilitating, considering the climatic changes that

will likely come about if radical action is not taken soon. It seems rather unlikely, for example, that Americans, Western Europeans, and Chinese will suddenly adopt strictly vegan diets and concomitantly engage in insurrections aimed at removing world-destructive elites from power, as necessary as these developments may indeed be at present. Given that it is the most materially impoverished of the world who are suffering and likely will suffer the most from the changes wrought by global warming, this might give Marxist and anarchist critics of society further reason to work for the abolition of the rule of the bourgeoisie; were environmentalism in the main not to have been historically reduced to being “institutional, Band-Aid, and reformist,”⁹³ as Speth explores in detail,⁹⁴ it could have served as a potential ‘exit-point’ from the ruling absurdities of capitalism.

The tragic reality, of course, seems to be that none of these potentially critical philosophies holds much sway in much of the popular consciousness today. In much of the West, where the epithet ‘socialist’ is often used as an insult in mainstream politics, Marxism has been indivisibly linked to the horrors of Stalinism and the Soviet Union, while much of environmentalism has seemingly given up its radical potential in favor of accommodation with existing society. Anarchism for its part is associated with nihilistic violence as well as advocacy of Hobbesianism. The role that the culture industry⁹⁵ has played in serving to assimilate the exploited masses into prevailing society and neutralizing the critical potential of many social theories seems undeniable, as does the normalization of the “banality of evil”⁹⁶ directed against various others—European Jews, Vietnamese, Palestinians, Iraqis, women,

children, non-heterosexuals, the materially impoverished, social 'undesirables',⁹⁷ non-human animals, or the planet Earth itself—within the dominant culture. In this sense, the palpable excitement expressed in recent memory over the accession of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States reflects many of these decidedly anti-social maxims; the rather absurd acceptance by many of Obama's empty rhetoric regarding 'hope' and 'change' may indeed thus serve to repress contemplation of the decidedly life-negating threats posed by unchecked climate change as well as serious action aimed at mitigating it. As Horkheimer warns us, "the affirmative spirit in which the horror of reality is not sublated will only serve to eternize it."⁹⁸

None of this pessimism, however, should be taken to mean that reality need be the way capitalist reformism and its defenders would have it, with all the injustices and horrors that entails; it is instead to dialectically hold out the possibility of a radically different and better world, one whose birth could perhaps be helped along by means of serious-minded, rational approaches to problems as serious as catastrophic climate change, together with compassion for its many victims, both human and non-human. Nonetheless, the pessimistic desperation often evinced in this essay is meant in part to hold out the dire possibility that human history may indeed come to an end before even having transcended the "pre-history"⁹⁹ of capitalist barbarism if the prevailing Weltlauf is not somehow overthrown.

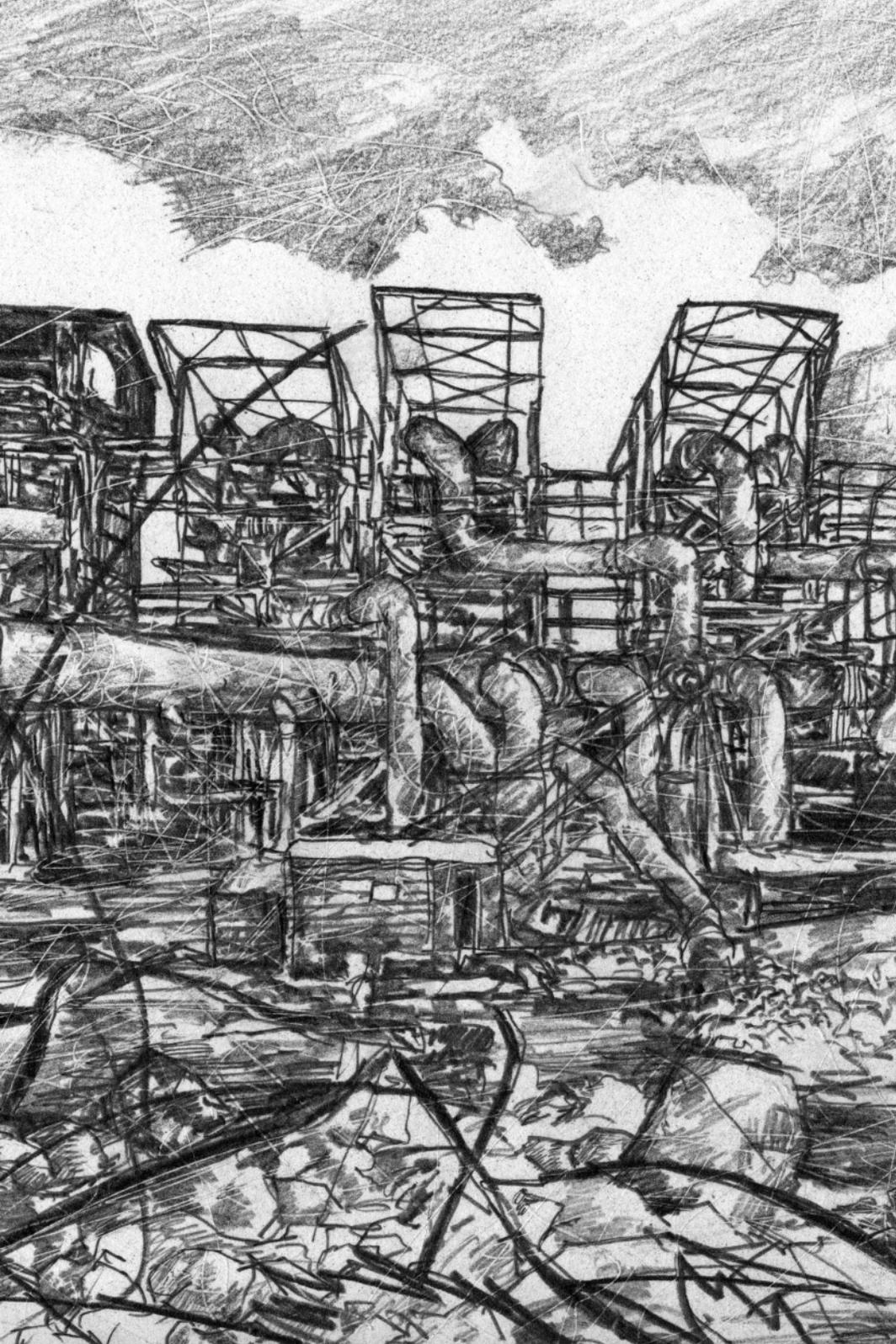
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THE CLIMATE CRISIS OR THE CRISIS OF CLIMATE POLITICS?

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« *Karabash*
Armsrock
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The threat of an impending climate crisis has rightly dominated the headlines over recent years – unabated carbon emissions, alongside peak oil, are leading us to a bleak, even apocalyptic scenario. In addition to this we are experiencing a crisis of neoliberalism, where the restructuring of capital is finding ways to exploit (and hence worsen) the ecological collapse it has fomented. Both in the UK and worldwide, we have seen the emergence of movements aiming to tackle climate change. These movements embody a politics that appears to cross the political spectrum, but in fact all gravitate around a single apolitical space, or as Steven has termed it, a “post-political space.”¹

As the UN prepared to meet for the COP15 in Copenhagen, we found our movements in a state of political crisis. Dominated by methodologies that rely on an emerging carbon consensus as the basis of their (a)politics, movements such as the Camp for Climate Action find themselves powerless to engage with the decentered problem of climate change. There is an urgent need to reassess climate change in terms of power and productive relations, and to move beyond the single-issue environmentalism that has isolated climate change as the preserve of a specialist eco-activist vanguard.

This essay understands the COP15 and its aftermath as a potential for revealing and overcoming the

schizophrenic tension of environmental movements. We point towards the emerging climate justice movements as an opportunity to move beyond the post-political towards an antagonistic politics of the commons.

It can be argued that over recent years, the UK has seen the development of a broad popular response to the clarion call of tackling anthropogenic climate change. At the forefront of this movement, at least from our perspective, is the Camp for Climate Action (CCA), a movement that began in 2006 as a “place for anyone who wants to take action on climate change... and for anyone who’s worried about our future and wants to do something about it.”² Elsewhere we have seen widely recognized environmental NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace joined by more traditional development or aid NGOs such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, often in broad coalitions such as Stop Climate Chaos. Even governments have jumped on the social movement bandwagon, with the UK’s Environment Secretary, Ed Miliband, calling for a “popular mobilization” to tackle climate change.³

Despite this seemingly burgeoning response, the political imagination of those responding to the crisis of climate change has been stifled by a scientific discourse that has fostered an apolitical space⁴ and resulted in a carbon consensus. A fundamental compatibility has arisen between autonomous organizations, NGOs, government and business, around the shared discourse of “parts per million,” facilitating a politics-without-antagonism where “the ‘enemy’ is a mere thing [CO₂], not socially embodied, named and counted.”⁵ The result of this abstraction is the suspension

of the political, where the only debate that remains is over what technical or ascetic measures are best placed to remedy the crises we face. The politics of these movements have become focused on carbon-cuts and tipping-point timelines, and despite sometimes fiery rhetoric, the methods for affecting change become hardwired to affecting a thoroughly apolitical debate.

This apolitical space means groups such as the Camp for Climate Action have failed to find the antagonism they need in order to develop a fully anti-capitalist perspective, and as the UK Anarchist Federation state, “there is a very real danger of the Climate Camp being turned from a genuine movement for social change into a lobbying tool for state reform.”⁶ As capital restructures itself around so-called “green” policies, the emerging climate movement risks unwittingly bolstering this restructuring, ushering in a form of “green capitalism.”

However, the emerging climate justice movement, composed of diverse networks such as Climate Justice Action (CJA) and Climate Justice Now! (CJN!), is pushing the tension between the liberal carbon consensus and a properly anti-capitalist analysis to its limits. While this appears as a crisis in climate politics, we encourage the reading of “crisis” in a positive sense. This political crisis is indeed the “hope of Copenhagen,” the hope that what may emerge from the period following the COP15 is a more expansive politics that moves beyond the restrictions of existing climate change movements towards a struggle over life itself.

THE POST-POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The global warming that we have experienced over the past 150 years is directly linked to the increase in CO₂

and other greenhouse gases emitted as a result of human activity. The full range of the political spectrum have nailed their colors to the mast – to be a climate change denier is akin to being a ‘flat earther’⁷ – and the calls for urgent action to tackle the impending climate catastrophe are being heard on a daily basis. Although difficult to predict accurately, the effects of anthropogenic climate change are already contributing to over 300,000 deaths a year, widespread droughts and famine, and the increasing precariousness of global security⁸. The Refugee Studies Centre considers that “human migration, forced or otherwise, will undoubtedly be one of the most significant consequences of environmental degradation and climate change in decades to come,”⁹ both directly and through an increase in conflict over access to arable land or fresh water. In short, the climate crisis is the “greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced.”¹⁰

Given the grave implications of maintaining existing levels of global emissions, let alone increasing them, stunningly little has been done to change global trends of production and consumption. The so-called attempts to reduce global emissions, most notably the UNFCCC process and its infamous Kyoto protocol, have been deemed woefully ineffectual in creating any real emissions reductions. Indeed, the only significant reductions in CO₂ emissions in the last thirty years have coincided with the collapse of the state-capitalist economies of the Soviet Union, and the current neoliberal crisis.¹¹

The reality of the climate crisis combined with the complete lack of concrete global emissions reductions has been responsible in part for the significant rise in civil society groups

campaigning ‘against’ climate change. In the UK, climate change has over the course of the past decade risen to the top of the agenda not just for environmental NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, but also for more traditional aid and development organizations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, often in broad coalitions such as Stop Climate Chaos.¹² Outside of the NGO sector, campaign groups such as Plane Stupid and Climate Rush have emerged, taking actions ranging from runway occupations to super-gluing themselves to a number of symbolic subjects/objects, such as the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, the Department for Transport, BP Headquarters, and the statue of Viscount Falkland in the Houses of Parliament.

Of standalone significance, the Camp for Climate Action (CCA) is a network that aims to build a “social movement to tackle climate change,”¹³ which developed directly out of the Horzone Camp at the Gleneagles G8 in 2005. Taking inspiration from the Argentinean uprising in 2001, the Horzone Camp was organized into a series of ‘barrios’ that represented the different geographical regions of the UK; the CCA still organizes on this principle, but has dropped the term ‘barrio’ in favor of ‘neighborhoods.’ The CCA publicly emerged in 2006, where it organized a weeklong action camp outside Drax coal power station in Yorkshire, the UK’s largest single point emitter of carbon emissions. It has subsequently organized a yearly week long camp along the four principles of “education, direct action, sustainable living, and building a movement to effectively tackle climate change.”¹⁴ While the yearly camp has been a mainstay of the CCA, it has also organized a number of high profile direct actions

including ‘The Great Climate Swoop’ (a mass invasion of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station) and a protest at the European Climate Exchange in the City of London as part of the G20 protests.

Given the diversity of groups that are calling for action on climate change, even the UK Climate Change Secretary Ed Milliband has called for a strong social movement, it may seem absurd to suggest that climate change exists in a post-political space. However, despite the apparent diversity represented by these groups, they all place scientific discourse at the centre of their understanding of the problem and also the solutions. As such, all antagonistic positions are subsumed “within a new political space grounded upon science and technocratic administration, where the only legitimate debates that remain concern the finer points of the governance mechanisms to be implemented.”¹⁵ The post-politics of climate change is therefore one of liberal consensus, where “there is no contest on what appears, on what is given in a situation and as a situation. Consensus means that the only point of contest lies on what has to be done as a response to a given situation.”¹⁶

While the science of global warming has formed arguably the most totalizing liberal consensus, it is by no means the first time what we have experienced the apolitical effect of liberal governmentality. The nature of liberal consensus is by definition the exclusion of real difference, the reduction of contestation to nothing but quantitative variations on a predetermined identity. Alain Badiou makes this point through his assault on liberal multiculturalism, in which he finds that the demand for respect of the “Other” is a rhetorical stand in for assimilation or exorcism.

This “Other”—the Pakistani, Turkish, Jewish, Whoever—is only tolerable if it is understood as a variation on the self, as something that can be related to the “Self” through association. However, as the unfolding of global conflict at the hands of Western governments since 9/11 has shown, “the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the right to ‘differences’ are clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference* . . . this celebrated “Other” is acceptable only if he is a good other—which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us?*”¹⁷ The essential characteristic of liberal consensus, as Foucault traced in his genealogies of judicial and medical institutions, is therefore the exclusion of dissenting views and the homogenization of difference.

Previous attempts to establish consensus have been based on seemingly more ideological grounds such as ‘development’ or ‘democracy,’ ground, which *could* ultimately be contested. As has been highlighted by Hardt and Negri, the two decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the overcoming of the binary between ‘East’ and ‘West’ were dominated by a project to establish a unilateralism based on a liberal consensus of *democracy*. The discourse adopted to support this project was one of terrorism, the ‘Other’ which was posited as the ultimate threat to the liberal consensus. Yet the “financial and economic crisis of the early twenty-first century,” along with the increasing lack of legitimacy in contradictory attempts to export ‘democracy’ through bloody wars, ultimately sounded the end of this fragile consensus.¹⁸

The unique nature of the ‘carbon consensus,’ and what makes it infinitely more dangerous than previous attempts to establish liberal consensus, is that there can be no tolerable ‘Other.’

Anthropogenic climate change is a totalizing force that encompasses the entirety of human activity, and given the apocalyptic picture that has been painted, it becomes 'morally' impossible to be opposed to the 'carbon consensus' and those regimes that act in the name of it. What is evident is that "the parameters of democratic governing itself are being shifted, announcing new forms of governmentality, in which traditional disciplinary society is transfigured into a society of control through disembedded networks of governance."¹⁹ This new form of governmentality will be based on a set of moral principles embedded in the carbon consensus, and will be enforced using new tools of governance such as carbon rationing and the subsequent monitoring of every aspect of our daily lives. As with all regimes of governmentality, the 'madman' or the 'terrorist' will forever be created in a witch hunt that ends in either exclusion or destruction, where the role of government-as-police extends to the elimination of both internal 'dissidents' and external 'rogue' states that fail to conform.

While the carbon consensus may provide the new-and-improved platform on which an emerging governmentality is developed, overcoming the present crisis of political legitimacy, the "post-political condition is [also] one in which a consensus has been built around the inevitability of neoliberal capitalism as an economic system."²⁰ This is a reflection of Fukuyama's thesis that after the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' we have reached the 'end of history,' where the neoliberal capitalist method of organization has emerged the eternal victor.²¹ This 'end of history' is a fundamentally post-political condition, since it describes a space with no political contestation, just the

absolute hegemony of neoliberalism. As Zizek has outlined, "it is easy to make fun of Fukuyama's notion of the 'End of History,' but most people today *are* Fukuyamean, accepting liberal-democratic capitalism as the finally found formula of the best possible society, such that all one can do is to try to make it more just, more tolerant, and so on."²² Much as in the political manifestation of the liberal consensus there is no room for *real* contestation but rather only difference in relation to the self, the neoliberal condition is one where *all* forms of economic organization are ultimately subsumed to the 'ultimate' leveling force of *the* market.

The crisis of climate change not only offers a way to reinstate liberal forms of governmentality, but to 'reboot' the neoliberal failure as 'Capitalism 2.0.' As the chairman of Shell UK has noted, "for business, tackling climate change is both a necessity and a huge opportunity. This creates a huge new opportunity for British business nationally and internationally."²³ This post-political carbon consensus fosters a situation in which capital-in-crisis is capable of restructuring, unleashing a new round of accumulation made possible through initiatives such as the 'Green New Deal'²⁴ and carbon trading, thus maintaining capitalist hegemony even if it's neoliberal clothing is out of fashion. The carbon consensus can therefore be understood as the much sought elixir that not only allows for the reformation of political systems but the reengagement of capitalist processes of expropriation and accumulation.

'WE COME ARMED ONLY WITH PEER-REVIEWED SCIENCE'²⁵

The conditions of the emerging post-political consensus around climate

change are somewhat different to previous regimes of governance. What makes the climate consensus not only possible but also so dangerous is the supposed neutral prophecy of the 'science' which supports it; the only ground for contestation appears to be within the domain of science itself. The political is erased from the debate, as the only way to affect a change in policy is to contest within science itself. Whether it be 'climate deniers' jumping on the UEA email scandal²⁶ like a pack of wolves or environmental activists holding up the IPCC Fourth Assessment report as the holy grail, politics becomes nothing but a management process. All this points to a coming-of-age of liberalism, in perhaps its most frightening of guises, and demands a reassessment of the existing political attempts to engage with climate change.

As has been outlined in the previous section, the past decade has seen a dramatic rise in the number of civil society groups and NGOs mobilizing around the issue of climate change, deploying methods from postcard campaigns to the blockading of coal power stations. Despite this, climate change has remained almost uniquely an 'environmental' issue, "an issue of *science* rather than *politics*,"²⁷ and the various goals or demands of these movements have a dangerous tendency towards supporting the emerging carbon consensus and the associated shift in governmentality and neoliberal restructuring.

The broad environmental coalition Stop Climate Chaos (SCC), which incorporates over 100 different organizations, is the *sine qua non* of this post-political tradition. Jointly founded by Ashok Sinha, who was also behind the much-maligned Make Poverty History coalition responsible for the suffocation of dissent at the G8 in

Gleneagles,²⁸ SCC has organized a series of campaigns such as 'I Count', which lobbied for a stronger climate bill in UK parliament. In response to the COP15 conference, SCC organized a march through London entitled 'The Wave,' calling on "world leaders to take urgent action to secure a fair international deal to stop global warming exceeding the danger threshold of 2 degrees C,"²⁹ and calling for "a green economy and [the creation of] new jobs."³⁰

The methods used by groups such as SCC and their member organizations tend to be eschewed by campaign groups such as Climate Rush and Plane Stupid as either ineffective, or as inaudible without more militant direct action forcing these concerns to be addressed by those in the seat of power. It is possible to distill the actions of these groups in to two categories; firstly, the explicit attempt to put pressure on decision makers, an example of which is a Climate Rush banner drop at the UK Coal headquarters in February 2009, which was part of "calling for tougher measures to control CO2 emissions."³¹ This form of action can be considered as 'militant lobbying' which in no way questions who makes decisions or the interests in which they make them, but seek to use more dramatic and often illegal methods to influence the decision makers. The second form of action is a more direct intervention where the purpose is to have an immediate impact on carbon emissions. Examples of this include when 29 activists halted and boarded a coal train bound for Drax power station in June 2008,³² the shutting down of Kingsnorth power station in August 2008³³, or the Didcot power station occupation in October 2009.³⁴ For many involved, these actions aim to directly prevent carbon emissions at points of production. Nonetheless, these

highly media orientated actions also appeal strongly to the first category of action, demanding popular support for their effectiveness, and more often than not have carefully crafted press releases designed at placing pressure on either corporations or government.

The actions taken by these groups are often interpreted as being more 'radical' or 'militant' than the methods deployed by major NGOs. However, this appears to be no more than a battle of rhetoric, based on a flawed logic of what it means to be taking more radical or militant action. The approaches of both SCC and some direct action groups illustrate an underlying complicity, and indeed reliance, on the liberal 'post political environmental consensus,' and are therefore radically reactionary as it obstructs the development of divergent and conflictual trajectories. Underpinning these diverse methodologies is an agreement on how we interpret the climate crisis, meaning the "only debate [is] over technologies of management, the arrangements of policing, and the configuration of those who already have a stake whose voice is already recognized as legitimate."³⁵

Some groups, such as the CCA or Workers Climate Action, entertain more explicitly anti-systemic politics, however, as we will argue in the next section, even for those elements of the burgeoning climate movement who proclaim an affinity with anti-capitalism, there is a problem with locating an antagonism in their political analysis which would enable them to develop a full anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian praxis.

'WE'RE ALL ANTI-CAPITALISTS . . . TOMORROW'

The Camp for Climate Action has a headache. It wants to deal with

capitalism; many of those involved consider themselves 'anti-capitalists,' there are wide ranging debates about the role of capitalism in the climate crisis at workshops held during climate camps, and there is possibly even a general agreement between those active in the climate camp process (those who attend monthly national gatherings, are involved in working groups and local neighborhoods) that capitalism is the root cause of climate change. However, any concrete engagement with an anti-capitalist politics is shut down, either by the perceived 'urgency' with which it is deemed necessary to act, or through the lack of antagonism present within its politics. This means that CCA has papered over the real cracks of tension present within its politics and actions, rendering itself a paper tiger.

The urgent nature of the climate crisis has a debilitating affect on the development of more radical forms of political engagement within the CCA. While it is foolish to contest that the crisis of climate change is of immediate concern to us all, the invoking of urgency generally plays into the development of the liberal carbon consensus. Reports such as the New Economics Foundation's 100 Months report and the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, which predicted the need for a peak in global emissions by 2015,³⁶ has infused a need to deal with climate change 'first,' where everything else becomes relegated to something we can deal with tomorrow. As Monbiot states, "stopping runaway climate change must take precedence over every other aim."³⁷ It is not only think tanks and commentators that have fallen into using the urgency card, individuals active within the CCA have also proclaimed "the aim of climate camp should be to stop human kind destroying the

planet, leave aside the socialist/capitalist debate. The system we have is capitalist, stopping climate change is more important than stopping capitalism.”³⁸ As is made explicit above, this “invoking [of] urgency is essentially a politically indeterminate move” whereby those that invoke urgency do so to explain why a certain political project demands precedence.³⁹ This is the underlining of the carbon consensus, a fundamentally *apolitical* position that “legitimizes itself by means of a direct reference to the scientific status of its knowledge.”⁴⁰

The implication of this consensus is, as outlined above, the suffocation of the space for antagonistic politics. Rather than simply an abstract point, this suffocation has concretely emerged within debates within the CCA—a number of workshops at the 2009 Camp at Blackheath stand out as examples of this widely experienced tension. The first of which was a workshop attended by one of the authors and around 200 other participants entitled ‘If not Carbon Trading then what?’ The discussion took as its starting point the illegitimacy of carbon trading as a solution to the climate crisis, but rather than opening up a discussion on the problem of the financialization of climate change, it proceeded to offer a number of more ‘workable’ solutions such as ‘Tradable Energy Quotas,’ a ‘Green New Deal,’ or a ‘Kyoto 2.’ Despite contributions from the audience challenging the underlying premise of what was being offered to us as ‘workable solutions,’ the urgency of climate change was reasserted by both the speakers and a number of voices in the audience, re-grounding the debate firmly “over technologies of management.”⁴¹

Damien Abbot found this same problem in his attendance at the workshop ‘Green Authoritarianism: Can we

save the climate without surrendering our liberty?’ In a discussion around the legitimacy of an aviation tax, the prevailing sentiment was that despite ‘our’ anti-capitalist politics, a tax is a measure that we should accept, as it would reduce the demand for aviation and hence benefit the climate. What he observed as “more pernicious” was the regularity with which “the time-frame in which it is posited that something can be done to halt a global temperature rise [was] used as a bludgeon to quell any argument.”⁴² A report by the Anarchist Federation on the workshop entitled ‘10 Years on from Seattle: Anti-Capitalism, Where Now?’ again highlighted this tendency to stress “the urgency of climate change, and the time scale we have to work with” and the corresponding “possibility of using the state as a strategic tool for our movement” – yet these very same points were held side by side with a discussion of “what ‘our’ (i.e. anti-authoritarian) alternatives are.”⁴³

This regularly experienced suffocation of antagonist anti-capitalist positions exists as form of schizophrenic⁴⁴ tension, for both individuals⁴⁵ and with the CCA as a whole, between an anti-capitalist desire and the quasi-gravitational pull of the liberal carbon consensus. To this extent, we argue that it is not the case that the CCA is full of entrenched liberals wishing to take the camp on a more liberal trajectory (although this may well be the case with certain individuals), but rather that the presence of this schizophrenic tension, and the consequent attempts to commensurate two fundamentally incompatible positions, leads to contradictory and often unintelligible political positions.

This schizophrenic tension manifests itself not only in discussion but also in the emerging political demands

for 'green jobs' and 'just transition,' along with some of the actions taken by the CCA. Plane Stupid and the group Workers Climate Action, a group that formed and has been largely active within the CCA, but has over the past year been active with a number of non-aligned campaigns such as the Vestas have taken on the demand for 'just transition' and Visteon disputes. The underlying principle of a just transition is that the interests of workers in environmentally damaging jobs, such as the coal, automobile and aviation industries, need to be a fundamental part of our transition to a low carbon future. Given the necessity of closing down these industries if we are to drastically reduce carbon emissions, those that campaign for just transition recognize that it is morally vacuous to abandon these workers to the scrap heap of precarious labor, and that the 'interests of the working class' in these industries is incompatible with the environmentally driven demand for the closure of these industries. As such, the push for a just transition prioritizes the 'reskilling' of these workers in 'green jobs' such as windmill production or environmental auditing, facilitating both the closure of environmentally untenable industry *and* the provision of jobs in new 'clean and green' sectors.

While these demands may appear to be a highly progressive step forward for environmental and class politics, they make a fundamental mistake about the 'interests' of the working class that makes these demands fully compatible with the restructuring of neoliberalism as a 'green capitalism.' This demand for a just transition to a green economy is "in line with dominant political and economic structures and interests,"⁴⁶ as neoliberalism seeks to overcome the ecological "limits to capital" through

internalizing the contradiction between the environment and capital accumulation, installing it as a fundamental driver in the new round of 'green' capitalist accumulation. This demand for "an economic transition... ensuring a just transition of the workforce" has been incorporated in the UNFCCC negotiating texts⁴⁷ and at a national government level as Gordon Brown promises '100,000 Green New Deal jobs'⁴⁸ as part of providing a "good driver of growth"⁴⁹ that can allow neoliberalism to restart accumulation. Yet as any coherent left analysis of capitalism will tell you, the interests of capital and of the workers are *fundamentally* opposed.⁵⁰ As a worker during the Liverpool dockers strike from 1995 onwards exclaimed:

I don't particularly want a politics centred on 'the right to work at all costs.' I don't want to see my kids struggling for crap jobs. I think we're actually going through a revolutionary period, one where we should be saying 'fuck you and your jobs and your slave labour.' If wage labour's slave labour, then freedom from wage labour is total freedom . . . [H]ow many socialists within the political groups that have supported us have or would build a political strategy out of the refusal of wage work? I haven't come across any, but I know that's what Reclaim the Streets activists consistently argue and find that a breath of fresh air . . . Yer know, when we unite with people like Reclaim the Streets, we have to take on board what they are saying too, which is: 'Get a life. Who wants to spend their days working on the production line like that famous poster of Charlie Chaplin depicting modern times?' I think this is a concept the labour movement has got to examine and take on board.⁵¹

The current calls for ‘just transition’ by environmental groups, which have also been made by large labor unions in the US such as the AFL-CIO,⁵² face the very real danger of playing the “role that trade unions played in the Fordist era: acting as safety valves to make sure that demands for social change remain within the boundaries set by the needs of capital and governments, and actually further drive capitalist growth: the more they protest, the more ‘green technologies’ will grow.”⁵³

It is not only through engagements with just transition and ‘green economies’ that environmental groups have attempted to commensurate anti-capitalist politics and the climate crisis. At the beginning of 2009 the CCA made a decision to link the climate crisis and the financial crisis, in both its propaganda and its actions. This led to a ‘swoop’ and subsequent establishment of a Climate Camp held outside the European Climate Exchange in London as part of the G20 summit protests. The location of the camp was designed to send a clear message about the links between capital, carbon trading and the climate crisis. This attempt to develop an anti-capitalist direction to CCA repeats many of the criticisms leveled at the J18 ‘Carnival against Capital’ in 1999, namely that activists skilled in specific issue-based campaigns, well versed at the occupation of head offices and construction sites, mistakenly applied the same action repertoire to capitalism, locating its center, or at least a key node, in the City of London.

Although this criticism almost certainly doesn’t apply to all involved, many of who would have had a more nuanced analysis, the targeting of the City creates a mystification of capitalism with an overemphasis on financial capital. We

would level the same criticisms at the G20 meltdown demonstration outside the Bank of England, which although a good symbolic target, given the collapse and bailouts of the banking industry, personified capitalism as ‘those greedy bankers’ rather than articulating a generalized critique of capitalism. These events placed too much emphasis on financialization and risk being steered from generalized anti-capitalist critique into a call for more regulation, or worse, a moral indignation with the banking industry resulting in a scape-goating where ‘someone’ is to blame.

We must recognize that the schizophrenic condition between anti-capitalist politics and the liberal carbon consensus cannot be reconciled. Attempts to do so, as have been outlined, arrive at the subsumption of the values of one (anti-capitalism) in the process of the other (liberal consensus). Rather, we need to first diagnose our own schizophrenic political condition, and then tackle the mechanisms that serve to subsume the anti-capitalist to the liberal position. Our split personality may be entering a decisive moment of crisis, unable to contain these two personalities within the same subject. There is no dialectical synthesis to this crisis.

COPENHAGEN: JUST ANOTHER SUMMIT MOBILIZATION?

‘Crises precipitate change’⁵⁴

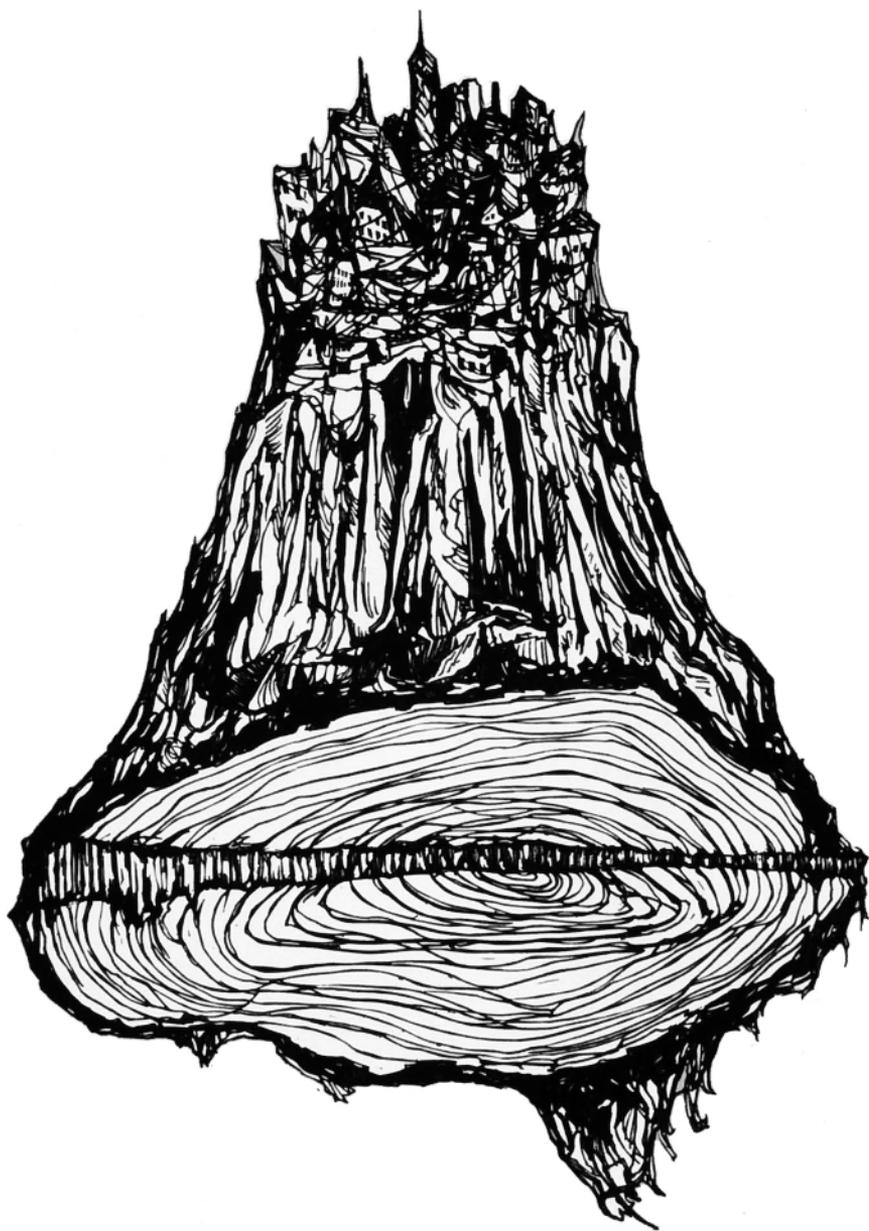
From the 7th-21st December, 2009 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met in Copenhagen for the Fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP15). The COP process emerged from the 1992 Rio Summit on the Environment and Development, or what has become colloquially known as

the 'Earth Summit.' The most high profile of the COPs was in Kyoto in 1997, where the infamous Kyoto Protocol was adopted introducing a series of carbon reduction strategies such as Cap and Trade and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).⁵⁵ The COP15 has been elevated to a messianic position by media and politicians alike, heralded as not only "compar[able] with Bretton Woods or peace treaties after the war" but "the most important negotiation the world will ever see."⁵⁶

The apocalyptic discourse surrounding the COP15 was echoed by the vast majority of NGOs campaigning around the issue of climate change. The UK's 'Campaign Against Climate Change' understood the COP15 as "our last chance to avert a global catastrophe of unimaginable proportions" and along with major NGOs such as Friends of the Earth Europe, called on "world leaders to take the urgent and resolute action that is needed to prevent the catastrophic destabilization of global climate." Together these NGOs mobilized up to a hundred thousand citizens to march in the streets of Copenhagen on December 12th, rallying behind a core of demands that call for "world leaders [to] take urgent and resolute action."⁵⁷ Much like past summit mobilizations such as Gleneagles G8 in 2005, a large 'alternative' network also mobilized for the summit. Beginning in September 2008, the global network Climate Justice Action (CJA) formed around a 'call to action,'⁵⁸ which the UK's Camp for Climate Action unanimously supported. Through a number of international meetings throughout 2008 and 2009, a series of working principles and 'network goals'⁵⁹ were developed that illustrated the shared trajectories of CJA and the 'movement of movements'

that had been dominant throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. This shared trajectory has led to those (mostly legitimate) criticisms of summit hopping that were directed at the 'movement of movements' to be regurgitated and directed at those groups mobilizing around the COP15.⁶⁰ For instance, an article in the UK movement publication, *Shift Magazine*, claimed that "besides having a good time" what could be achieved by the mobilizations "will be minimal."⁶¹ Contrary to these criticisms, we argue that the COP15 offers a unique place in terms of summit mobilizations, falling in time with a series of multiple crises.

It is not only the climate that is in crisis; as Mueller has outlined, we also face (at least) a bio-crisis, a capitalist crisis, and a crisis of political legitimation.⁶² The COP15 arrived at time when we face not only a tipping point for our complex climatic systems, but also a tipping point in terms of how capital organizes its accumulation and expropriation. Yet the nature of tipping points is that they are full of potential, they are when our systems are precariously balanced on an 'edge of chaos' where anything can happen.⁶³ It is for this reason that we must embrace crisis for all of its potentials; crisis as *opportunity* for something different. The COP15 spectacle was precisely an attempt to force these crises to unfold in a certain way, pushing systems back into a state of equilibrium where our potentials for radical change are once again extinguished. Yet there is no teleology in a crisis, they unfold based on the decisions and actions we take in the here-and-now. As Joel Kovel has noted, "these meetings will be a turning point. The question remains as to the direction taken, whether toward eco-catastrophe



« *Untitled*
Pete Yahnke
screenprint, 2010

or hope for life.”⁶⁴ The COP15 may well become understood as the point where one half overcame its other, where the schizophrenic subject of the environmental movement was forced into a final resolution or split entirely.⁶⁵ But let us reiterate the point—we must embrace this *subjective* crisis, fermenting the split between the liberal consensus and the antagonistic movements it captures. It is only through overcoming our personal political crisis that we will be able to form movements that can truly engage antagonistically with capitalism, governmentality *and* climate change.

THE HOPE OF COPENHAGEN FROM ABOVE

Copenhagen, or ‘Hopenhagen’ as some branded it, was representative of a crisis of values—do we solve climate change and move towards a more sustainable way of life, or do we start a new cycle of accumulation? This value-crisis is a battle between Copenhagen from above and Copenhagen from below. The battle of Copenhagen from above and below is a battle over ‘justice,’ a battle of values. Capitalism wants to maintain and extend its system of value over all existence—whereas the ‘below’ wants to change what it means to value existence in all its forms. Mainstream discourse branded Copenhagen as the ‘Bretton Woods’ of the twenty-first century, an epoch defining summit. Beneath this hyperbole laid a concrete aim to use Copenhagen to restore faith in the capitalist system and representative democracy in the midst of both a political and economic crisis. As Mueller & Passadakakis state, “the biocrisis is the opportunity that might just allow capitals and governments to at least temporarily deal with the legitimation and accumulation crisis.”⁶⁶

Not only was the COP used in attempt to bolster the ideology of

neoliberalism, governments attempted to use the climate and the bio-crisis as an opportunity to restructure and unleash a new round of enclosures. As the Turbulence collective point out, “the secret of capital’s longevity lies precisely in its ability to use limits and the crises they engender as a launch pad for a new round of accumulation and expansion.”⁶⁷ One example of this new round of accumulation is the development of new international regulation for the “rights to pollute,” which as Brunnengraber affirms is “the precondition for the creation of new markets.”⁶⁸ The ‘cap and trade’ initiatives introduced at Kyoto are a fundamental part of this, providing a new basis for investment in the model of the derivatives markets. Yet as Lord Nicholas Stern has outlined, it is not enough to create new cycles of demand, the neoliberal model demands the creation of a “good driver of growth” through “a sustained program to invest in and deploy energy conservation and renewable energies,”⁶⁹ incorporating the environmental limits of existing neoliberalism as the very driver of the new ‘green capitalism.’

This new round of accumulation and governmentality isn’t something that has its beginning in Copenhagen, elite climate change ‘solutions’ have always had capital accumulation as their rationale. As Brunnengraber states, “the Kyoto protocol was [...] the starting point for the emergence of an international regime of resource management that would soon open up new business opportunities.”⁷⁰ Not only do these false ‘solutions’ generate more profit for capitalists, but in addition a “number of ecologically sustainable forms of producing and living have actually been put under pressure not just by globalized capitalism, but more specifically by

a top down kind of climate politics.”⁷¹ The attempts to both reassert new forms of governmentality and to begin a new cycle of accumulation will not only fail to solve the climate crisis, but will also shut down grassroots alternatives in the here and now.

To be clear, there is no conflict between the ‘greening’ of society and the continuation of the capitalist mode of production. Even Thomas Friedman has gone green, stating, “making America the worlds greenest country is not a selfless act of charity or a naive moral indulgence. It is now a core national security and economic interest.”⁷² It would appear that Brunnengraber is right when he suggests that “we are witnessing the emergence of a climate neoliberalism.”⁷³ The development of ‘Green Capitalism’ is more than green wash or a rebranding exercise for Capitalism 2.0; while some reactionary capitalists may drag their feet and fail to pick up on the new direction markets are going, green capitalism “embodies the faction of the global bourgeoisie that understands the reality of climate change and of its own decline in political legitimacy in the face of the banking crisis and the consequent end of the neoliberal monetarist hegemony.”⁷⁴

Green capitalism may help shore up capitalism’s legitimacy crisis, but as Mueller & Passadakis state, it will not “solve the antagonism of the biocrisis, it will draw energy from it to drive forward which always must be capital’s first and foremost project: the accumulation of more capital.”⁷⁵ This accumulation rests ultimately on the capture of the common(s). As Foti states, “green capitalism wants to solve the economic crisis via green jobs and a new welfare system, but it will succeed in its task, only if it manages to widely redistribute what

Negri and Hardt call ‘commonwealth.’”⁷⁶ The struggle over Copenhagen from above and below was a value-struggle over our commonwealth, and this commonwealth is central to our antagonism over the crises we face.

This antagonism is completely lacking in the discourse of the big NGOs and the majority of environmental movements, they inhabit the post-political space they have helped to create and foster. Copenhagen from above thrives on this apolitical space that has been manufactured around the climate crisis. Many environmental lobby groups even go as far as being entirely incorporated into the false solutions being proposed by the big corporations, making them indistinguishable in their solutions to the current crises. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), for example, fundamentally supports capitalist strategies for dealing with the bio-crisis, giving its logo, and therefore tacit support, to a huge advert 1km from the Bella Centre⁷⁷ that states “climate responsibility is simple, it’s just good business sense” going on to say “let the clean economy begin.” On their website they state that “WWF partners with companies to help them achieve their environmental objectives.”⁷⁸

Commentators were correct in placing the COP15 on a level of equal or greater importance than Bretton Woods, but for all the wrong reasons. Despite those ‘inside’ voices hopelessly fighting for progressive solutions—we do not deny the heterogeneity of the conference itself—the UNFCCC negotiations are part of a dominant framework that has “precious little to do with the climate, and everything to do with the haggling over percentage points of economic growth.”⁷⁹ Copenhagen ‘from above’ was concerned with establishment of new

regimes of governing and the emergence of a new round of capitalist accumulation, representing a fundamental restructuring in both the political and economic rules of the game.

THE HOPE OF COPENHAGEN FROM BELOW

‘Meltdown expected, the wheat is growing thin
Engines stop running, but I have no fear’

—The Clash

The crises we face are by definition an opportunity, both for capitalist accumulation/restructuring, and the creation of a new world. We need to keep the categories open and in flux. The temptation in struggles around crises and the precariousness these crises engender is an entirely understandable desire to return to some form of normalcy. Yet we need to resist this conservative urge, as well as the apolitical overcoding that attempts to close these open moments into either ‘environmental’ (partial) struggles devoid of political content, or from economic crisis to ‘recession’ or ‘recovery.’ We must resist attempts to determine these crises as ‘depressions’ or ‘instabilities,’ as events that already have a preordained resolution in the continuation of that which already exists. The crises we face are unique, and offer us the opportunity to remake the world on our own terms.

Copenhagen offered us more than just a summit protest, more than the sum of its parts, whether it had turned out to be another round of street battles, like those over the eviction of Ungdomshuset in 2007, or a more carnivalesque creative spectacle, such as that enacted by the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination and their Bike Bloc. Copenhagen promised to be an Event, and the ‘Reclaim Power’ action

on the 16th can be viewed as an attempt to create a rupture with the refigurations of capital and governance that are underway. The attempt of demonstrators to enter the UN conference area to host a ‘peoples summit’ was not a call for a ‘different’ set of talks or a ‘better’ agreement. As dissident delegates on the inside disrupted the sessions and participated in an exodus from the proceedings, we witnessed a fundamental challenge to the process of Copenhagen from above and all it entails.

This is not just a struggle against climate change, or even the bio-crisis more generally. It is crucially an affirmative struggle, or as Mueller & Passadakis put it “a struggle not just against green (or any other) capitalism, but struggle for the constitution of alternatives.”⁸⁰ For us, these struggles, and the alternatives we hope to foster are fundamentally about the creation and defense of the common(s), in both their material and immaterial forms. Copenhagen and its affects must force a change in how we struggle around climate change. The traditional PPM framework and the value-neutral carbon consensus are incapable of accounting for the fields of struggle that animate the world we create. The inconsistencies and tensions that vitalize this emerging movement have the potential to force the crisis of climate change out of its environmental straitjacket and into a fundamental struggle over life itself.

The uncertainty of the world that we face is something to be seized—for better or for worse. Copenhagen is an uncertain and open space occupied by forces from above and from below. We need to make sure that our energies have not become captured, constantly reaffirming our politics to the hope from below. We need to ensure that our

struggles don't become a 'Make Poverty History' that cheer on government leaders in their business of expanding business, prioritizing endless economic expansion over life. The battle we face is clear—capital or life.

IN-CONCLUSION

'Tomorrow dawns a day when
nothing is certain'⁸¹

The COP15 came hot on the heels of the ten-year anniversary of the Seattle WTO demonstration in 1999. Ten years before that, 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of 'actually existing socialism.' A decade earlier in the UK the election of Margaret Thatcher ushered in an era of neoliberal policies and the totalizing mantra that 'there is no alternative.' Ten years before that the Piazza Fontana massacre marked the beginning of the 'strategy of tension' in Italy, part of a state-sponsored right-wing attack on the Italian Left's 'Hot Autumn.' What do all these dates and events illustrate? That the circulation of struggles to remake the world from below, and of those that wish to close down that space and return it to the profit motive, is a refrain throughout history. It is more than possible that the COP15 will be looked back on as the point at which we entered a new cycle of (carbon) struggle.

The sense of hopelessness that is implicit in the failure to find non-capitalist solutions has been deliberately produced through the post-politics of the carbon consensus; we need to collectively overcome this hopelessness and replace it with a 'hope in common.' This common hope is the prerequisite for the creation of 'other values'⁸² which will help us to struggle against the bio-crisis while also expanding the common(s),

creating the possibility of a real movement that can abolish the present state of things. To this extent 'Hopenhagen' is not an empty concept, but rather the prerequisite for a new politics.

This essay is a call for both political activity beyond measure – beyond economic value – and also towards the affirmative creation of common values. As De Angelis states, "either: social movements will face up to the challenge and re-found the commons on values of social justice in spite of, and beyond, these capitalist hierarchies. Or: capital will seize the historical moment to use them to initiate a new round of accumulation."⁸³ The climate, or even the 'environment,' isn't just another 'issue,' it's a central political battleground from both above and below. We need to fully realize this and act accordingly. We need to put aside purist political positions and become involved in the messy world of actually existing social struggle. As Böhm states, "in times of crisis, act!"⁸⁴

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ecological and social struggle.*

ENDNOTES

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44 The authors are using the term 'schizophrenia' in the colloquial sense that infers a dual personality. The authors are aware that schizophrenia and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) are clinically distinct conditions, and that DID offers a 'clinically' more accurate analogy of the split subject we are suggesting. However, we are using the term schizophrenia colloquially so as to not muddy our political-philosophical analysis with clinical analysis, a topic on which neither authors are literate.

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COAL

WILL NEVER BE

CLEAN



WE DON'T WANT PEACE WE WANT VICTORY!

Marrichiweu: "Ten times we will win".

The Mapuche people have resisted colonialism, repression and eviction for over 500 years. The current threat that the Mapuche face is from logging companies, and multi nationals such as Barrick Gold, and Santander Bank who are responsible for spreading environmental destruction throughout Mapuche territory.

Continuing their centuries long tradition, the Mapuche will continue to fight!

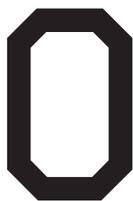


ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE: ENERGY PRODUCTION AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

LARA MESSERSMITH-
GLAVIN, FOR THE
PARASOL CLIMATE
COLLECTIVE

« *Marrichiweu*
Amor y Resistencia
screenprint, 2010

A review of *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition to a Post-Petrol World*, edited by Kolya Abramsky. (Oakland: AK Press, 2010).



One of the most intimidating aspects of climate change is its scale. When we imagine it as a thing in itself, it becomes monstrous, far out of proportion to our ability to stop or even slow it in its path of influence. We cannot petition or strike against it. We cannot use rocks or molotovs or even guns to slow it down. It is already happening: the earth is warming, little by little, and with that shift we witness a seemingly endless chain of results, from catastrophic storms and droughts to changes in human and animal migration patterns, disappearance of species, and altered ocean chemistry. In the face of these effects, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, and to turn one's attention to those problems which seem more solvable, and less apocalyptic. Yet it is important to remember that the engine behind this global dilemma is human activity, and is therefore human in scale. The better we are able to break the issue down to its parts, the closer we will be to understanding how we can fix it, and thereby confront the enormity of the issue in a manageable, intentional way. In the process of examining the sources of climate change, we find the sources of many other human issues, as well. Not only does this effort trace a map of

the way out of ecological disaster, but it may also lead to a more just and equitable world order.

A great deal of literature exists on many of the pieces of this giant puzzle: the physical mechanism behind a warming planet, the present and future effects of climate change, renewable energy technologies, and the politics of fossil fuel economies; yet little has been done to explore the concept of energy from a radical perspective. A new collection from AK Press, *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition to a Post-Petrol World*, edited by Kolya Abramsky, seeks to fill this gap by bringing together analyses of energy production and consumption from a broad spectrum of views around the world, from the progressive to the anti-capitalist Left.

As Abramsky says in his introduction, "This is not a book about climate change. It is a book about energy."¹ The central thesis of the collection is that energy is the lynchpin of a potential transition to a new and better world; recapturing the commons and disassociating local and global economies from hydrocarbon energy resources are vital challenges for a successful revolutionary project. The book delves into the problems confronting the transformation of global and local energy systems, and unearths the tensions between alternative visions for the distribution of both energy and power. In light of declining natural reserves of both coal and oil, renewable energy production may form a new field of contest for control of resources. While many see the transition to these renewables as an opportunity to adopt a decentralized model of social organization, capital recognizes the need for industrial scale generation to maintain its hegemony over the energy sector.

Abramsky says that the intention of the book is to "trace some of the material processes and human relations on which the energy system is based. Importantly, it seeks to show that a transition to a new energy system requires a material process of building new social relations and not just a shift of ethical and cultural values."² The investigation of the material processes at work is the greatest strength of this collection. One chapter that stands out is Tom Keefer's essay, "Machinery and Motive Power: Energy as a Substitute for and Enhancer of Human Labor." Keefer reinvestigates some basic Marxist principles in clear terms without oversimplifying them, and describes industrial energy consumption through a history of automation and efficiency models.

"What is manifestly absent from most ecological economist thought is a critique of capitalism as a historically-specific economic system that is not only based on ever-increasing expansion, but is also compelled to substitute machinery (and the energy these machines require) for human labor in its quest to achieve higher margins of profit and to undercut tendencies towards working-class self-organization and resistance."³

Keefer reminds us that capitalism is not just a simple product of technological innovation so much as the result of a constellation of social relations that require increasing levels of exploitation to remain in motion. The introduction of machinery and new energy sources replace certain job tasks and devalue human labor, thereby weakening the position of workers in production. Then, the competitive market continues to favor those systems that increase energy efficiency and are able to exploit

labor at higher rates. "Every capitalist is in competition with many other capitalists, and seeks ever higher profits to reinvest in production...the key to continued accumulation lies in increasing the productivity of labor power purchased from the worker."⁴ This, in turn, translates to ever greater levels of exploitation, and as capital imposes its organizational forms and duplicates its social relations on a global scale, a world system of imperialism is the result.

This world system requires increasing amounts of cheap energy to maintain its hegemony. A key question at this moment in time is: Does capitalism have the capacity to achieve another round of "revolutionizing" the means of production as it has in the past? That is to say, can it shift to a different source of energy without disrupting its power? Or can a new order acquire control of what remains of the fossil fuel reserves in time to use that energy for a transition both to renewable resources and a new and more equitable means of distribution?

"A point of crisis will be reached with capital will no longer be able to externalize its contradictions. This will provide a whole new set of opportunities for revolutionary forces seeking to transcend the capitalist economic system...With the depletion of easy to access fossil fuel reserves and the impacts of global climate change, humanity will be required to build an alternative to capitalism under conditions of declining labor productivity and under solar energy constraints momentarily transcended by twentieth century industrial capitalism. Consequently, the implications for our theory and practice are significant, and deserve to be put at the center of any anti-capitalist revolutionary project."⁵

At the same time as the global economic system has been suffering internal

shocks due to credit crises and other destabilizing elements, climate change and peak oil may constitute new threats to capitalism's supply of cheap energy. Of course, while peak oil and global climate change are new developments, history is not without precedents, even for this. In "Everything Must Change So That Everything Can Remain the Same," George Caffentzis reminds us that "this is not the first time that capitalist crisis coincides with energy transition, as a glance at the previous transitions [from coal to oil and natural gas, and, unsuccessfully, from oil to solar] in the 1930s and 1970s indicate."⁶ Caffentzis suggests that capital and the state recognize this moment of weakness for what it is, and resist efforts on the part of revolutionary movements to utilize this period of transition as an opening for a restructuring of social relations: "The ultimate purpose of the Obama administration is...to preserve the capitalist system in very perilous times."⁷

Caffentzis goes on to outline the stages of a transition to renewable energy resources and the considerations that should be made. "The first element in the transition is to recognize that there will be inter-class resistance to the transition from those who stand to lose."⁸ The second element, he says, is to recall that non-hydrocarbon energy sources, i.e. renewables like wind and solar, are not necessarily in opposition to a capitalist structure. Indeed, capitalism and colonial expansion led to "the genocide of the indigenous Americans, the African slave trade, and the enclosures of the European peasantry [all of which] occurred with the use of alternative renewable energy!"⁹ Thirdly, while oil and coal are extremely efficient resources for generating surplus value, renewables will not immediately be in a position to replicate the same level of production,

which indicates that a transition is likely to lead to a great upheaval in terms of the process of production of energy, in particular for worker transitions and retooling. Lastly, he notes that, in light of the frequency with which capital has been able to recover from prior crises, the question remains: "Will this transition be organized on a capitalist basis or will the double crisis, opened up on the levels of energy production and general social reproduction, mark the beginning of another mode of production?"¹⁰

Are climate change and the threat of peak oil posing a genuine crisis for capitalism? On the one hand, the trend toward "green capitalism" seems to suggest not. As Tazio Mueller and Alexis Passadakis remind us in "Another Capitalism is Possible?," "crises are not necessarily bad things from the perspective of capital.... While serious crises always entail the massive destruction of capital, as well as transformation in the matrix of social power, this destruction of capital is precisely what is necessary for capital(ism) to maintain its innovative, revolutionary power."¹¹ However, for this power to maintain its primacy, it must use its own position of control to begin a more concerted shift to renewables now, in order to maintain its stranglehold on the means of production throughout the process of transition. Nonetheless, in light of actions such as the expansion of drilling in the Gulf post-Deepwater Horizon, and the pursuit of extraction in Alberta's tar sands, "it is increasingly clear that rather than the market rising up to develop solutions for climate change... we are witnessing what can only be described as the irrational, frantic push of market-forces in their most naked form, precisely at a time where reductions and radical transformation is required."¹²

Since capitalism is not likely to meet this challenge, it is an ideal opportunity for radical social transformation. "The historical record shows very clearly that deep, enduring changes in energy industries require the mobilization of mass social movements. We cannot simply wait for visionary politicians to forge the way."¹³ While the book does not give any precise recommendations for how these social movements are to come about, it does relate a number of efforts at transition and resistance to capital's appropriation of energy resources and the commons around the world.

In these pieces we find the tangible evidence of a movement - here is the inspiration, and the beginning experiments and models, both positive and negative, for how the future may look. Particularly inspiring are the accounts of resistance in South Africa, the efforts of the FARMA collective to build self-manageable energy systems with Zapatista communities, and the details of individually and communally owned wind generators in Denmark. The book is at its best in this regard when it lets people speak for themselves and their own experiences, as in Patrick Bond and Trevor Ngwane's piece, "Community Resistance to Energy Privatization in South Africa," which includes an interview with a 58 year old woman who describes her decision to have her electricity illegally reconnected by a neighborhood team of "bootleg technicians" after she was laid off and then unable to keep up with mounting energy bill hikes. Here the human interest shines through, while simultaneously providing a clear and relatable example of active resistance within a familiar political and economic setting, with practices and tactics that can be applied in a number of contexts.

Also of interest are the global surveys of struggle: Chapter 42, “Some Brief News Reports from Direct Action-Based Resistance Around the World,” and Chapter 46, “Two Mini Case-Studies: 1) The End of One Windmill Cooperative 2) Chinese Peasants Killed in Land Conflict Over Windmills.” These additions to the collection serve to underscore the tension between decentralization or community control of resources. In this situation—as evidenced by struggles in Mexico, Canada, Nigeria, and elsewhere—the general outlines of capitalist social relations are easily recognizable: tearing people from the land and the basis of their material reproduction through the enclosure of collective resources; the conversion of the survivors of this process to a disenfranchised proletariat; the physical destruction of the natural environment; and the use of violence to maintain the new arrangements. The more qualitative pieces are valuable for their direct-account format and the detail they offer about communities and their struggles. There are some good, rich stories here, but they are often merely anecdotal and lack analysis and context. Chapter 40, for example, “Dynamics of a Songful Resistance,” loses the impact of its message of forced displacement of communities along the coast of Columbia in the sentimentality of its internal metaphor: “Together, we built a fraternal fire and shared a small artisanal boat in which we ate together as equals and gently sung ourselves into dissonance.”¹⁴

One thing that is missing from this book is the voices of workers. This collection includes a number of position papers written by unions - Chapter 10, “For Democratic, National Development of North America’s Energy Resources,” for example, which lists as

its author “Various Energy Sector Trade Unions and Other Organizations,” or Chapter 41, “Call for an Immediate Moratorium on EU Incentives for Agrofuels, EU Imports of Agrofuels and EU Agroenergy Monocultures,” by “Diverse Organizations.” US labor has no representation in the collection at all, beyond the endorsement by the United Steel Workers of the statement issued in Chapter 10, “For the Democratic, National Development of North America’s Energy Resources.”¹⁵ The majority of these pieces are formalized statements issued by union leadership, and so may or may not reflect the interests or concerns of the workers themselves. In these pieces we see statements of reform and the defense of jobs; we don’t see examples of a real threat to capitalism, or a dedicated concern for environmental justice within organized labor.

Another criticism is that, while Abramsky clearly lays out a revolutionary intent in his introduction, the book draws much of its material from groups who are more closely aligned with the tasks of energy transition than with radical politics. Unions, liberal academics, and members of parliament figure prominently among the contributing authors.

Beyond simple questions of content, we identified several areas in which the book fails to completely meet our basic standards of clarity, readability, logical presentation, fairness, and usefulness. First are the book’s organizational structure and length. Abramsky states in his introduction, “the book has been carefully structured to be read as a whole, from beginning to end.”¹⁶ However, despite short introductions to each section, the thematic components that arise are overshadowed by the experience of reading the text itself. *Sparking a World Energy Revolution* is more than

650 pages long, and though the individual chapters are nearly all very short, as a whole they do not produce the linear and progressive narrative that Abramsky intends. The thesis of the book is lost in a jumble of details with works that are simultaneously too specific and yet not specific enough, or rather, their relation to the whole is lost in the minutiae of their individual purpose(s). While Abramsky clearly has a radical motive in mind, this commitment emerges greatly diluted from the overall span of the perspectives included.

In addition, the collection is lopsided in favor of a few prolific contributors. As the book's editor, Abramsky may be excused for contributing a long introduction and conclusion. But some other writers contributed surprisingly large numbers of articles as well—there are three by George Caffentzis, four by Sergio Oceransky, and six by Preben Maegaard (arguably the most problematic contributor in the book, politically and stylistically). If a diverse spectrum of opinions and viewpoints was the goal, perhaps it could have best been presented by an actually diverse representation of interests, rather than simply an array of topics covered by a small collection of men.

Another criticism is that many of the authors frequently rely upon highly specialized jargon without offering explanations or glosses. It is unfair to expect that every reader will know what the Gini coefficient¹⁷ indicates, for example, or what it means to measure an oil “reserves-to-production ratio” in “years.”¹⁸ In the interest of making the material and concepts more available to a larger audience, the inclusion of either a glossary or expanded footnotes would greatly improve the usefulness of this edition. Because *Sparking a New Energy Movement* fails as a linear, progressive

narrative, and because the quality and tone of the chapters are so varied, the book is best used as a reference text; the addition of an index would therefore be valuable for enhancing the accessibility of a future edition. As Bruce Pobodnik says in Chapter 3, “Building the Clean Energy Movement,” “this inclusivity is important, because individuals understand and respond to different kinds of messages about energy-related dangers. If the clean energy movement can build a diverse coalition of leaders, each of whom can speak effectively to constituencies from all across the political and ideological spectrum, it will more likely spread deep roots into societies throughout the world.”¹⁹

Ultimately, the book's strengths and utility as an educational overview of issues in the energy sector far outweigh its shortcomings of focus and readability. Much of its value lies in what it does not include; what is missing from this text indicates areas we need to investigate as a movement. For this reason, *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution* serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it assembles - possibly for the first time - the most comprehensive and wide-reaching array of thought and action taking place on the Left regarding energy and energy production. For this reason alone, the book is an essential addition to any serious reading list aimed at forming a more complete picture of the world today and the project before us. On the other hand, its deficiencies delineate the questions we have yet to ask and answer as a movement. Exactly how can an anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist social organization make the energy transitions necessary without creating devastating gaps in food production? What role will nation-states (or centralized authority structures) play, if any, in those

transitions? On what economic models can we reliably build a free society? How do we make it happen?

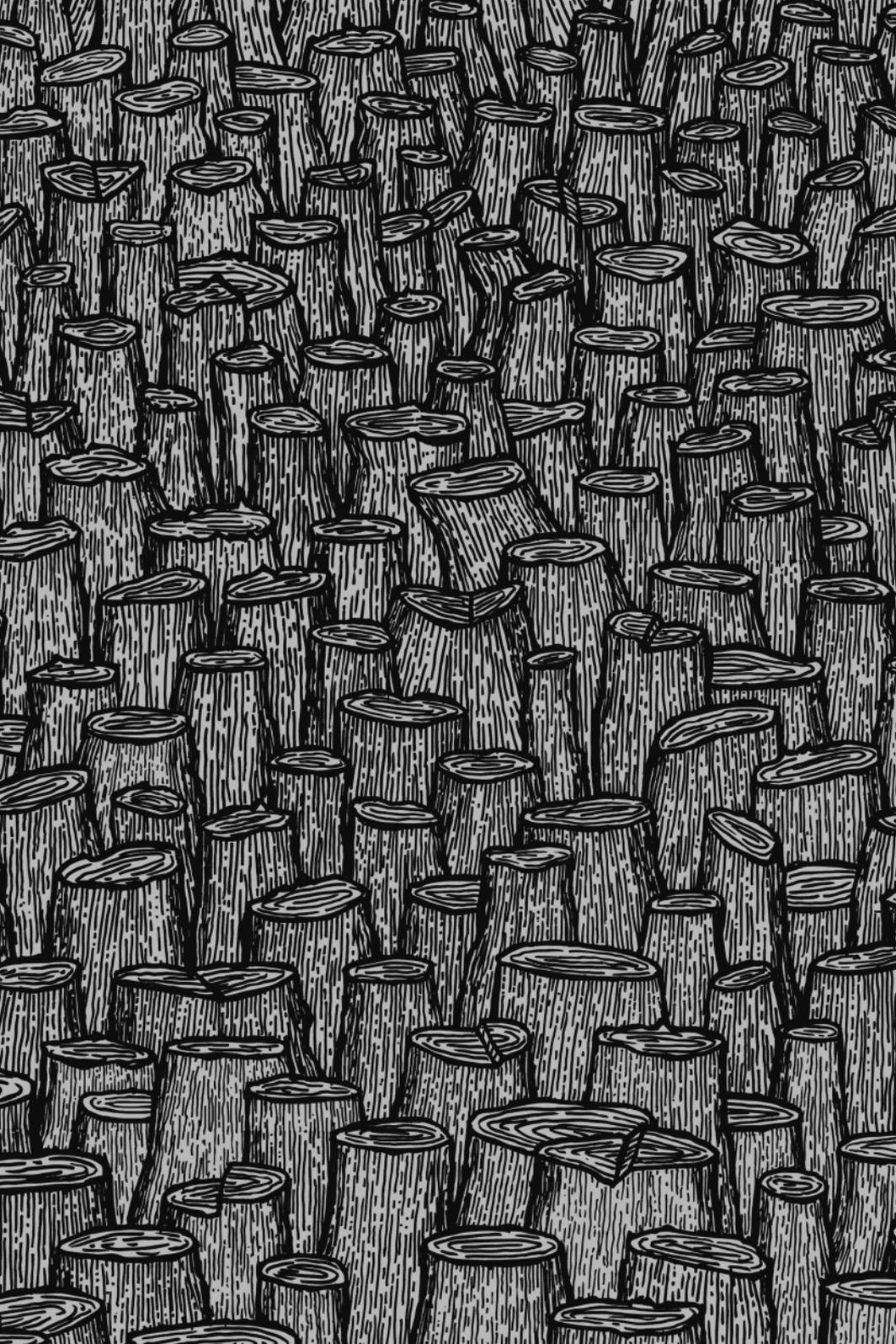
Lara Messersmith-Glavin is a board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies. She publishes a nonfiction 'zine, Alltopia (<http://www.alltopia.org>).

Parasol Climate Collective is a study and outreach group based in Portland, Oregon. We have developed a 5-part curriculum composed of approximately 500 pages of text and 35 minutes of video that explores anthropogenic climate change from a radical perspective. The materials we have collected and outlined, through learning objectives and suggested discussion questions, encourage study participants to consider the origins of the ecological crisis as it is rooted in the capitalist system, and the ways in which it is linked to other social and economic struggles around the world. The materials are intended to direct participants to envision workable, equitable alternatives to the current social structures and build a movement capable of putting those structures in place. Parasol also performs community outreach and education by meeting with other groups engaged in a wide spectrum of social justice work and by facilitating discussions on the ways in which a warmer world may affect their issue(s) of focus. As our own goals are educational, we have read this book as a group and evaluated its successes and weaknesses through the lens of the text as a learning tool.

Parasol Climate Collective is Paul Messersmith-Glavin, Lara Messersmith-Glavin, Ian McBee, and Emily-Jane Dawson. To obtain a free copy of the curriculum, or to schedule a workshop, please contact: parasol.pdx@gmail.com, or visit parasolpdx.wordpress.com.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Abramsky, Kolya, (Ed.) "Racing to 'Save' the Economy and the Planet: Capitalist or Post-capitalist Transition to a Post-petrol World?" p. 29.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 Keefer, Tom. "Machinery and Motive Power: Energy as a Substitute for and Enhancer of Human Labor." p. 82.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 85.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 89.
- 6 Caffentzis, George. "Everything Must Change So That Everything Can Remain the Same: Reflections on Obama's Energy Plan." p. 566.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 567.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 568.
- 11 Mueller, Tadzio and Passadakis, Alexis. "Another Capitalism is Possible? From World Economic Crisis to Green Capitalism." p. 557.
- 12 Walsh, Shannon, and Stainsby, Macdonald. "The Smell of Money: Alberta's Tar Sands." p. 333.
- 13 Pobodnik, Bruce. "Building the Clean Energy Movement: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective." p. 76-77.
- 14 Avendaño, Tatiana Roa, and Toloza, Jessica. "Dynamics of a Songful Resistance." p. 465.
- 15 *ibid.*, p. 155.
- 16 Abramsky, Kolya. "Racing to 'Save' the Economy and the Planet: Capitalist or Post-capitalist Transition to a Post-petrol World?" p. 24.
- 17 Oceransky, Sergio. "European Energy Policy on the Brink of Disaster." p. 173. Note: The Gini coefficient is used to measure the concentration of a variable - that is, economic inequality. A Gini coefficient rating of 0 indicates perfect equality within a society. A rating of 1 indicates perfect inequality.
- 18 Jasiewicz, Ewa. "Iraqi Oil Workers' Movements." p. 219.
- 19 Pobodnik, Bruce. "Building the Clean Energy Movement: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective." p. 77.



MOVEMENTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION: TOWARD UTOPIA OR APOCALYPSE?

BRIAN TOKAR

« *Resourced*

Josh MacPhee
screenprint, 2010

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 captivated 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. A 2009 Hollywood disaster epic elaborated the myth, falsely attributed to Mayan peoples, that the world will end in 2012. A 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. Numerous literary genres have embraced the apocalyptic mood, from Jared Diamond’s detailed histories in *Collapse*, to Margaret Atwood’s current dystopian trilogy, which began with the darkly satiric biotech nightmare, *Oryx and Crake*.

The prevalence of apocalyptic images is not at all limited to literature and 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 diplomatic failure of the 2009 UN climate talks in Copenhagen raised the profile of several new studies forecasting the dire consequences of temperature increases that may exceed 15 degrees in the Arctic and in parts of Africa.¹ Bill McKibben's latest book, *Eaarth*, elaborates the view that we are now living on a far more turbulent planet, one that is already strikingly different from the one most of us grew up on.

In this context, the utopian ecological visions that inspired earlier generations of social ecologists—and environmental activists more broadly—may 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 appear 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 only 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 world view, 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 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 a revolutionary outlook?

ECOLOGY AND CAPITALISM

From the 1960s until his passing in 2006, 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 his thinking, 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.²

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 20th 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.”³ But the *Times* acknowledged rising criticism of the trend as well, quoting the one-time “green business” pioneer

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. The Midnight Notes Collective writes:

... 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 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.⁴

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.⁵

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.

EXPOSING 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. Reducing fossil fuel use is certainly a necessary step, though attempting to transform our energy systems without

changing the way economic decisions are made may prove to be a futile pursuit. The latter approach, 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.⁶

The other broad category of capitalist false solutions relies on the tools of the so-called "free market" as a substitute for direct 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 many indigenous communities to the even more severe consequences of uranium mining and milling. Scientists still have few clues what to do with the ever-increasing quantities of nuclear waste that will 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 France's own legacy of nuclear contamination, as well as years of delays, quality-assurance problems, and massive cost overruns at the 5 billion

euro French nuclear construction project in Finland.⁷

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—sufficient 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.⁸

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 CO₂ 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.⁹ 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 proposed climate and energy legislation.¹⁰

Claims that the coal industry will soon clean up its act and cease contributing to the climate crisis are equally fanciful. While politicians incessantly repeat the promise of "clean coal," and the World Bank has established a new carbon capture trust fund for developing countries, scientists actually engaged in efforts to capture and sequester CO₂ emissions from coal plants admit that the technology is decades away, at best. Many are doubtful that huge quantities of CO₂ 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.¹¹ 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 sold as "capture-ready."

The difficulty of minimizing even conventional pollution from coal plants were dramatized by a massive spill of hundreds of millions of gallons of toxic coal ash in 2008, following the breach of a large dam in the US state of Tennessee. That incident literally buried the valleys below in up to six feet of ashen 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. An investigation by the *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.¹² 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 2007-8.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ The current push for agrofuels has consumed a growing share of US corn—more than 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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, where he challenged the traditional view of pollution as an economic “externality,” and proposed a direct equivalence between the harm caused by pollution and the economic loss to polluting entities if they are compelled to curtail production. “[T]he right to do something which has a harmful effect,” argued Coase, “is also a factor of production.”¹⁹ He proposed that steps to regulate production be evaluated on par with the value of 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.

The Canadian economist J.H. Dales, widely acknowledged as the founder of pollution trading, carried the discussion two steps further. First, he echoed the neoclassical view 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. “[T]he 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.²⁰ 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.²¹

By the mid-1970s, the still-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 proposed that regulation is only appropriate to replicate the market conditions of a “hypothetically competitive world” and introduced a broader array of policymakers to the concept of “marketable rights to pollute,” as a substitute for regulation.²²

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 the elder George H.W. Bush. These initiatives 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.²³ 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.²⁴

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."²⁵ 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 first need to prove their viability in the so-called "free market"—in marked contrast to ever-increasing subsidies for nuclear power and agrefuels.

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 would 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.²⁶ 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. This clash of worldviews 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 that a forward-looking 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 new grassroots antinuclear movement united traditional rural dwellers and those who had recently moved “back-to-the-land” 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, as of this writing, 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 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 political 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 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.²⁷ 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 has a wide reach 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 various 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... Draffy buildings create broke, chilly people—and an overheated planet.²⁸

Clearly, measures to address these problems will offer an important benefit for those most in need, and are a necessary step toward a greener future. But are such near-term measures sufficient? Since the 1970s, Amory Lovins has been a tireless advocate for dramatically increased energy efficiency throughout the US and 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, as we have seen, is that capitalism aims to maximize profits, not efficiency. Indeed, economists since the 19th century have suggested that improvements in the efficiency of resource consumption will most often increase demand and further economic expansion under capitalism.²⁹ 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. 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.³⁰

HOPE AND DESPAIR

If technological fixes are insufficient to usher in an age of renewable technologies, is the situation hopeless? Is a nihilistic response, anticipating a cataclysmic "end-of-civilization," 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 on the rise 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.³¹

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."³²

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, 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.”³³

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.

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.”³⁴

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 perspective 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 people around the world to refuse to accept an oppressive status quo and act to take the future into their hands.

Still, since the collapse of the authoritarian, nominally socialist bloc of countries that was dominated by the Soviet Union and spanned nearly all of eastern Europe, many thinkers have cast doubt on all forms of radical speculation about the future. Utopian political thought—with its legacy reaching back to Plato and to the writings of Thomas More in the early 16th century—is now seen by many as utterly discredited. Liberal centrists, as well as ideologues of the political right tend to dismiss the pursuit of any comprehensive alternative political outlook as if it were a potential stepping stone to tyranny. Even such forward-looking thinkers as the literary critic Frederic Jameson suggest that utopia “had come to designate a program which neglected human frailty” implying “the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect and reluctant subjects.”³⁵

This is in stark contrast to the view of Ernst Bloch, the mid-20th century chronicler of the utopian tradition who, instead, in Jameson’s words, “posits a Utopian impulse governing everything future-oriented in life and culture.”³⁶ Bloch’s exhaustive and free-ranging 3-volume work, *The Principle of Hope* begins with the simple act of daydreaming and embarks on an epic journey through the myriad expressions of the utopian impulse throughout Western history, spanning folktales, the arts and literature, along with the perennial search for a better world. “Fradulent hope is one of the greatest malefactors, even enervators of the human race,” states Bloch, while “concretely genuine hope its most dedicated benefactor.”³⁷

Current scholarship on the utopian tradition often views utopia as a central element in the emergence

of a secular social order, marking the decline of religion as the sole means for expressing people’s hopes for the future. French social critic Alain Touraine writes, “Utopia was born only when the political order separated from the cosmological or religious order ... Utopia is one of the products of secularization.”³⁸ Utopian scholar Lyman Sargent quotes the Dutch future studies pioneer Frederick Polak, who wrote in 1961:

. . . if Western man now stops thinking and dreaming the materials of new images of the future and attempts to shut himself up in the present, out of longing for security and for fear of the future, his civilization will come to an end. He has no choice but to dream or to die, condemning the whole of Western society to die with him.³⁹

The pioneering German sociologist Kark Mannheim wrote that “The utopian mentality is at the base of all serious social change” and saw the integrity of human will as resting to a large part on “the reality-transcending power of utopia.”⁴⁰ While the popular literature of the past two centuries wavers continually between the poles of utopia and dystopia, even many intellectuals who lived through the nightmare of Stalinism and its decline warn against discarding utopia along with the baggage of authoritarian Marxism. For example the Czech dissident Milan Simecka, who personally experienced the repression of the Prague Spring of 1968, writes that “A world without utopias would be a world without social hope, a world of resignation to the status quo and the devalued slogans of everyday political life.”⁴¹ Today, if we fail to sustain the legacy of utopia, not only will we miss the opportunity to

envision and actualize a humane, post-capitalist, post-petroleum future, but we may inadvertently surrender humanity's future to the false hopes of an ascendant religious fundamentalism.

The social critic Immanuel Wallerstein is one who has very recently sought to rescue utopian thinking from its role as a breeder "of illusions, and therefore, inevitably, of disillusion," proposing a renewed "utopistics" that broadly examines the alternatives and reveals "the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems."⁴² Wallerstein is one renowned contemporary social theorist who very explicitly speaks to the likelihood of a difficult, contentious and unpredictable, but potentially rational and democratic long-term transition to a post-capitalist world. It is in this spirit of exploring rational, liberatory future possibilities that today's climate justice activists are seeking to define the terms of a world beyond petro-capitalism.

TOWARD CLIMATE JUSTICE AND A GREENER WORLD

From the Zapatistas of south-eastern 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.⁴³

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 CO₂ 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 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.⁴⁴

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 often 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.⁴⁵

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.

A 2009 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.⁴⁶ 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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33 Richard Flacks, *Making History: The American Left and the American Mind*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 7.

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35 Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p. xi.

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37 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), p. 5.

38 Alain Touraine, "Society as Utopia," in R. Schaer, G. Claeys, and L.T.Sargent, eds., *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (NY: Oxford U. Press, 2000), pp. 18, 29. Interestingly Touraine, once a pioneering scholar of social movements, today

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40 L. T. Sargent, *ibid.*, p. 14; Krishnan Kumar, "Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Twentieth Century," in R. Schaer, et al., eds., *Utopia*, p. 265.

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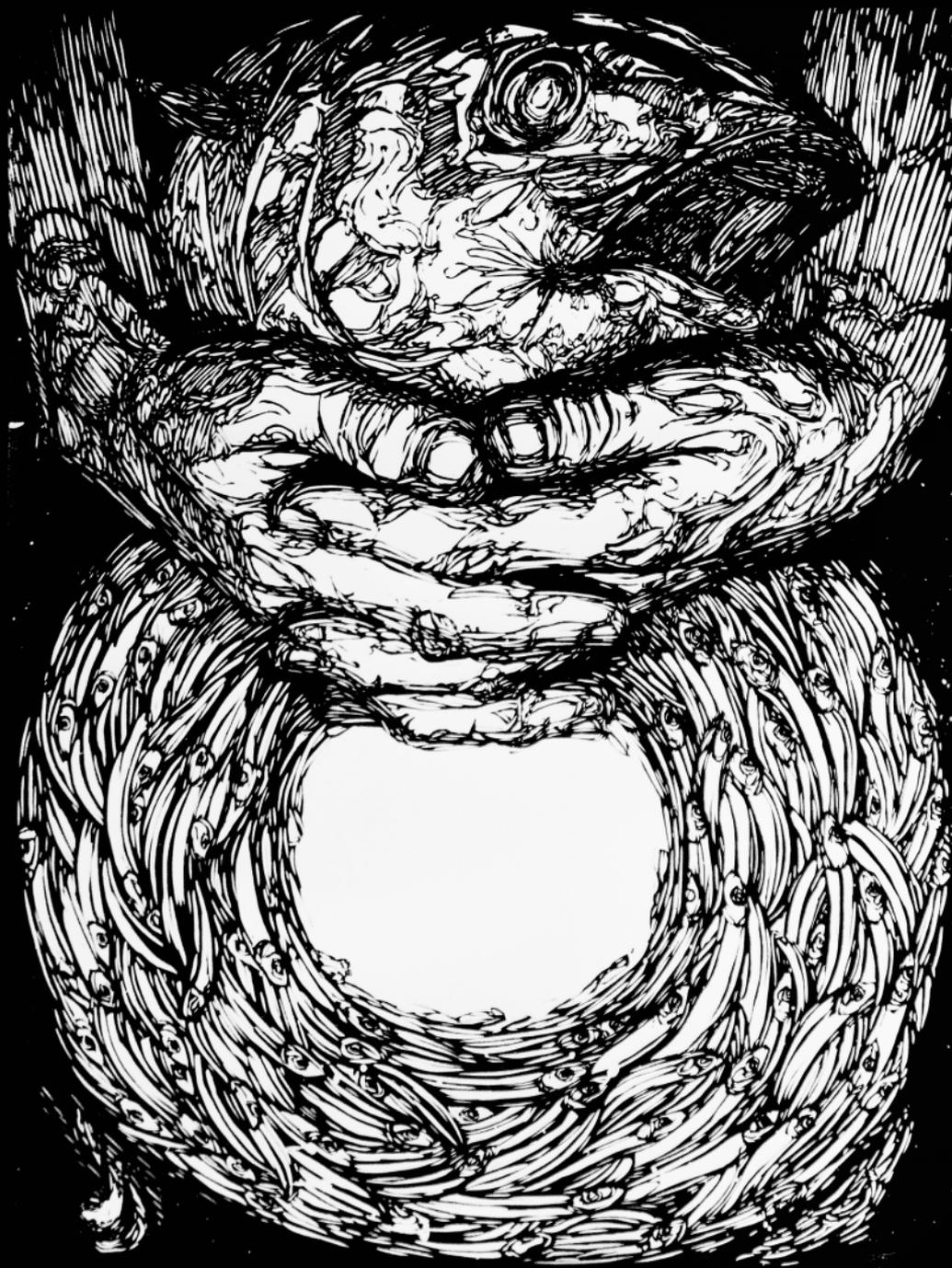
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WHAT WE'RE READING

CINDY CRABB, JOHN
DUDA, & JOSHUA
STEVENS

This issue, in place of the column What's Happening, we asked several individuals to tell us what their favorite three to five new books are. We heard back from three: Cindy Crabb, John Duda, and Joshua Stevens.

FROM CINDY CRABB:

Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism by Alison Piepmeier (New York: New York University Press, 2009) is an academic book about girl zines, and “what they can tell us about the inner lives of girls and women over the last twenty years.” This book explores ways women’s and girls’ sense of self, political involvement, agency and embodiment have been affected by writing and reading zines. Piepmeier uses this book to “consider what kinds of resistance are possible within this particular cultural and historical context and how girls and women leverage the available cultural materials to create personal identities and communities.” Academic, but fun to read.

Everyone who is involved in a collective or wants to do collective organizing should read *Come Hell or High Water: A Handbook on Collective Process Gone Awry* by Vannucci and Singer (Oakland: AK Press, 2010), even if they’ve been in a collective for years and think they know everything. It’s extremely accessible and to the point, and discusses just about every problem I’ve ever seen in collectives. Chapters

include “Tactics Used to Subvert Democratic Process,” “The Baggage of Collective Members,” “Banning,” “Relinquishing Control,” “Staying True to the Mission,” and much more.

It didn’t come out this year, but you probably haven’t read *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, by Julia Serano (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007). This book “. . . reveals the way that fear, contempt, and dismissiveness toward femininity shape society’s attitudes toward trans women, as well as gender and sexuality as a whole.” Political and brilliant.

FROM JOHN DUDA:

On The Lower Frequencies: A Secret History of the City by Erick Lyle (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2008) is a recent history of San Francisco and people’s resistance to gentrification. It is extremely funny and inspiring. Includes interviews with Biotic Baking Brigade, Gay Shame, Punks Against War, The UN Plaza Homeless Project; investigative reporting about welfare hotels mysteriously burning down during the dot-com era of city development, and much more.

There are three books released in the past year which I have found exceptionally intriguing from an anarchist perspective, precisely because while they all present accounts of people engaging in long-term struggles against the state, none of the struggles chronicled in the three books in question are being waged by self-identified “anarchists.”

James C. Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), for its part, makes the argument (following Pierre Clastres) that we need in many cases to

reread the history of people who have traditionally been regarded as primitive remnants of historical epochs preceding the emergence of the state instead as active deserters from the state, using geographic isolation, anti-sedentary agriculture, and even the deliberate abandonment of writing as weapons in a struggle to escape incorporation into the work regime of the state form. Focusing on a Europe-sized region of Southeast Asia spanning seven national borders he calls Zomia, Scott argues that the real history of this region over the past two millennia(!) is one characterized first and foremost by widespread and largely successful practices designed to evade and ward off the state.

A flaw in Scott’s book is his inability to draw consequences from these practices for contemporary struggles, but here, one can turn to Raúl Zibechi’s amazing account of present-day struggles against the state in *Bolivia, Dispersing Power: Social Movements As Anti-State Forces* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010). Here the account focuses on the indigenous alternatives to permanent, centralized power, against the backdrop both of Latin American neoliberalism and of social democracy under Evo Morales. What’s most exciting about Zibechi’s investigation is not just that it’s looking at fascinating anti-state conceptions and tactics embedded within indigenous society and culture, but that he’s concentrating on the encounter of these conceptions and tactics with modernity, and specifically in the way in which the city of El Alto, only a few decades old, has been constructed in the wake of mass displacement by its indigenous inhabitants in ways that thwart the formation or penetration of state power, and indeed, have proved potent means of constructing a platform

for broader challenges to state-facilitated neoliberal dispossession in Bolivia.

And speaking of cities and unexpected anarchisms closer to home, Matt Hern's *Common Ground in a Liquid City: Essays in Defense of an Urban Future* (AK Press, 2009), while making a number of important and highly accessible arguments about urban sustainability, settler culture, and gentrification, also traces the ways in which the best cities are those that build themselves—where self-determination, mutual aid, and horizontal sociality, rather than central planners and speculators, shape the built and lived environment. Again this process, which Hern tracks in neighborhoods from his hometown of Vancouver and around the world, is perhaps another kind of overlooked anarchism; an implicit anarchism. And while I'd be the last person to suggest that we shouldn't be explicit and call ourselves and our ideas "anarchist," it's the virtue of these three new books to remind us how much we can learn from other, more implicit forms of struggle against the state.

FROM JOSHUA STEVENS:

In its February 22nd obituary of Colin Ward, the *Guardian UK* reminded readers that "Colin saw all distant goals as a form of tyranny and believed that anarchist principles could be discerned in everyday human relations and impulses. Within this perspective, politics was about strengthening cooperative relations and supporting human ingenuity in its myriad vernacular and everyday forms."

Arguably, the uprising against the WTO in Seattle eleven years ago, and its unexpected success, rekindled an aspiration toward—and belief in the viability of—a more cataclysmic vision

of revolution. At that, it's one that has endured despite the fact that such successes have shown little in the way of replicability. Correspondingly, crises of virtually every stripe over the last decade, from economic collapses and tsunamis, to wars and hurricanes, to earthquakes and coups, have produced often unprecedented forms animated by solidarity, human innovation, and unconditional care. Often enough, these appear to have been pulled straight from the air we breathe, under conditions of unthinkable suffering and duress. Conspicuously, such crises rarely seem to inspire irrevocable, linear sorts of shifts toward revolution as it's conventionally understood. It makes for an instructive contrast one that Ward would've likely underscored. Fitting then that *Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010) should arrive in this particular moment. Covering ground from social theory to education, city planning, transportation, housing—all hats Ward wore at one time or another—editors Damian White and Chris Wilbert have assembled in 375 pages a collection perhaps unsensational in its pragmatism but stunning in its breadth, brilliance, and (most importantly) seriousness.

Combining Ward's observation of the revolutionary in the everyday with Howard Zinn's histories from below, Jordan Flaherty brings us *Floodlines: Community Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010). To borrow from Eve Ensler's nod to the book, it functions as something of a "people's history of the storm," whereby Flaherty excavates struggle as a piece of Louisiana's very culture, documenting the emergence of popular forms as a politics of necessity.

Simultaneously, what Flaherty offers well beyond this is a politics drawn from *narrative*, from before Katrina, up through the upheaval surrounding the Jena Six. Given his intimate relationship to these movements, his ceaseless dedication to illuminating them, and his unlikely victories in bringing them to the forefront of American consciousness, one could hardly ask for a more capable voice.

Also drawing on the cultivation of organic forms—particularly in the way of representation—is Jeff Conant's *A Poetics of Resistance: The Revolutionary Public Relations of the Zapatista Insurgency* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010). After some sixteen years, various iterations, tactical experiments, reinventions, and perhaps even simply the reality that there are now *adults* who were born, raised, and educated entirely within the world Zapatismo remade in southern Mexico, the fact of an initial few weeks of armed conflict almost seems a footnote. Appropriately, the first page of Conant's book quotes the late Edward Said, insisting on the primacy of narrative as a field of anti-imperialist struggle. And indeed Zapatismo's articulation, and the manner in which it captured the imaginations of vast sectors Mexican civil society against considerable odds, is virtually unthinkable when divorced from what could reasonably be described as a new genre of political writing. Therein we find not just a writing of words or pages, but a (re)writing of *possibility*. Conant's is a welcome meditation, and might be the first major work attempting a technical, tactical analysis of Zapatismo as a communications strategy unto itself.

Cindy Crabb is a writer, public speaker, and sexual abuse survivor

advocate. She writes the zine Doris, and edited the zines Support, Apoyo, and Learning Good Consent. (www.dorisdorisdoris.com)

John Duda is a collective member of Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse in Baltimore, where he also is finishing a PhD examining the intersections between anarchist/autonomist theory and the sciences of self-organization. He is the editor of Wanted! Men to Fill the Jails of Spokane (Charles H. Kerr, 2009)

Joshua Stephens is a board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies. He likes coffee and bikes, and dislikes socks.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS

JUSTSEEDS' RESOURCED PORTFOLIO

All of the illustrations in this issue of *Perspectives* are taken from *Resourced*, the 2010 Justseeds Artist's Cooperative portfolio.

Resourced is a bound portfolio of hand-produced prints, as well as an online collection of open-source graphics for use by social movements. It focuses on resource extraction and climate struggles, and includes 26 artist prints, with screenprinted covers and front sheet, as well as a booklet with additional information.

For centuries now, industries have been mining the globe in search of raw materials that can be converted into profitable commodities, displacing innumerable communities and leaving in their wake toxic, hazardous, and ecologically devastated environments.

While consumers experiment with greener lifestyles, the majority of the globe's population is left to deal with the ecological fallout of industrial and technological "progress." These are inequalities that only stand to increase as climate change and the unending capitalist pursuit of natural resources produce even more precarious ecologies. Already, thousands upon thousands of species are extinct or endangered, and millions upon millions of people have been thrust off of their land and into ecologically, politically, and economically hazardous conditions.

This is an "exhibition in a book," a teaching tool, a collection of reproducible graphics for activists and organizers, and a dialogue starter for community spaces, schools, conferences, and galleries. It can be used to help ask important questions about our environment:

- Who benefits from the extraction of natural resources and who pays the costs?
- Are there viable possibilities for alternative energy sources?
- Is it possible to distribute energy more equitably?
- What does resistance to Western and corporate climate policies look like?
- What role can workers in resource and energy sectors play in this resistance?
- How does environmental devastation affect different communities along the lines of race, class, and gender?

For more information about *Resourced*, to purchase a portfolio, or to access high-resolution, downloadable version of the images online, go to Justseeds.org/resourced.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Anarchism is at a high point. Anarchist organizing principles infuse contemporary social movements with models for decision-making and the importance of affinity groups; anarchist organizations and counter-institutions exist all over North America and Europe; Greek activists have shown the capacity for creating prolonged threats to State power; and the emphasis on local commerce and food production in the US echoes a widespread underlying desire for community building and control of resources. All of these things indicate an upsurge in interest in the principles we embrace. Now is a time for action. The ongoing economic crisis and the increasing threat of ecological disaster make fundamental social change more imperative than ever. But how?

Perspectives on Anarchist Theory will address this subject in our next issue. Our theme will be Building a Movement, and we would like to hear what you have to say about how we can bring a directly democratic social order into being.

What are the immediate challenges we face in building movements?

What should our guiding principles be?

How do we confront and overcome forms of social domination such as heteropatriarchy, racism, capitalism and the State?

How do we both overthrow exploitative social relations and institutions, and institute new ones based on freedom and mutual aid?

There are many questions that we, as a movement, need to answer – sooner, rather than later. For instance, Insurrectionism has recently emerged as a highly visible, and equally controversial, position. What does it have to offer? What are its weaknesses? What is the importance of building anarchist organizations? How can the needs of both urban and rural communities be understood and served? Should we be involved in social movement work, and if so, how? What does anarchism have to offer the problems of energy production? How are we going about making our dreams of a better world into reality, and what should our next steps be?

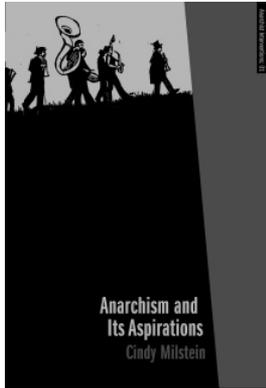
Our deadline for the next print issue is December 15th, 2010. All submissions should have endnotes rather than footnotes, contain no page numbers, and conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Please include your name and reliable contact information. Send your essays or questions to: perspectivesmagazine@googlegroups.com.

ANARCHIST INTERVENTIONS

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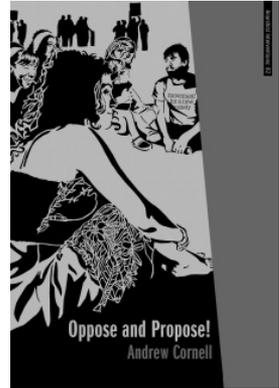
Following on the heels of the first title in our Anarchist Intervention book series, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* by Cindy Milstein, we're proud to introduce our second offering, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society* by Andy Cornell, due out this winter.

The Movement for a New Society (MNS), a network of feminist radical pacifist collectives in the United States active in the 1970s and 1980s, developed many practices at the heart of anarchist politics today: consensus decision making, mass direct action campaigns, collective living, unlearning oppressive behavior, and more. Participants opposed capitalism and eco-destruction in antinuclear and other movements, while they simultaneously proposed alternatives by creating everything from community-controlled housing and safety programs to antisexist men's support groups. In this way, the MNS served as a crucial organizational link between the movements of the 1960s and the post-Seattle global justice movement. Yet the group's political innovations created tensions of their own. Members found their commitments to "live the revolution now" often alienated potential allies and distracted them from confronting their opponents, while their distrust of leadership and rigid commitment to cumbersome



group processes made it difficult to keep their analysis and strategy cutting-edge. Andy's book will include discussions with self-reflective former members, original documents, and a detailed history of the MNS, revealing crucial strategic lessons for activists and organizers seeking to reinvent a holistic radical politics today. Like Cindy's book, Andy's features Josh MacPhee's series design along with artwork by another Justseeds Artists' Cooperative member, Kristine Virsis. And like all books in the Anarchist Interventions series, each author agrees to donate at least 50 and up to 100 percent of any sales proceeds to the IAS. In case you're not yet familiar with our series, here's the mission statement:

"Radical ideas can open up spaces for radical actions, by illuminating hierarchical power relations and drawing out possibilities for liberatory social transformations. The Anarchist Intervention series—a collaborative project between the IAS and AK Press—strives to contribute to the development of relevant, vital anarchist theory and analysis by intervening in contemporary discussions. Works in this series will look at twenty-first-century social conditions—including social structures and oppression, their



historical trajectories, and new forms of domination, to name a few—as well as reveal opportunities for different tomorrows premised on horizontal, egalitarian forms of self-organization.

Given that anarchism has become the dominant tendency within revolutionary milieus and movements today, it is crucial that anarchists explore current phenomena, strategies, and visions in a much more rigorous, serious manner. Each title in this series, then, will feature a present-day anarchist voice, with the aim, over time, of publishing a variety of perspectives. The series' multifaceted goals are to cultivate anarchist thought so as to better inform anarchist practice, encourage a culture of public intellectuals and constructive debate within anarchism, introduce new generations to anarchism, and offer insights into today's world and potentialities for a freer society."

You can order *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* now for yourself, your friends, and/or your bookstore or infoshop from AK Press (<http://www.akpress.org/2010/items/anarchismanditsaspirations>), and stay tuned for preorder information for Andy's book.

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Anarchism emerged out of the socialist movement as a distinct politics in the nineteenth century. It asserted that it is necessary and possible to overthrow coercive and exploitative social relationships, and replace them with egalitarian, self-managed, and cooperative social forms. Anarchism thus gave new depth to the long struggle for freedom.

The primary concern of the classical anarchists was opposition to the state and capitalism. This was complemented by a politics of voluntarily association, mutual aid, and decentralization. Since the turn of the twentieth century and especially the 1960s, the anarchist critique has widened into a more generalized

condemnation of domination and hierarchy. This has made it possible to understand and challenge a variety of social relationships—such as patriarchy, racism, and the devastation of nature, to mention a few—while confronting political and economic hierarchies. Given this, the ideal of a free society expanded to include sexual liberation, cultural diversity, and ecological harmony, as well as directly democratic institutions.

Anarchism's great refusal of all forms of domination renders it historically flexible, politically comprehensive, and consistently critical—as evidenced by its resurgence in today's global anticapitalist movement. Still, anarchism has yet to acquire the rigor and complexity needed to comprehend and transform the present.

The Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), a nonprofit foundation established in 1996 to support the development of anarchism, is a grant-giving organization for radical writers and translators worldwide. To date, we have funded some sixty projects by authors from countries around the world, including Argentina, Lebanon, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Nigeria, Germany, South Africa, and the United States. We also publish the online and print journal *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, organize the annual Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, and offer the Mutual Aid Speakers List. The IAS is part of a larger movement to radically transform society as well. We are internally democratic and work in solidarity with people around the globe who share our values.