

PUBLISHED VERSION

Samuel Alexander and Peter Burdon
Wild democracy: a biodiversity of resistance and renewal
The Ecological Citizen, 2017; 1(1):45-54

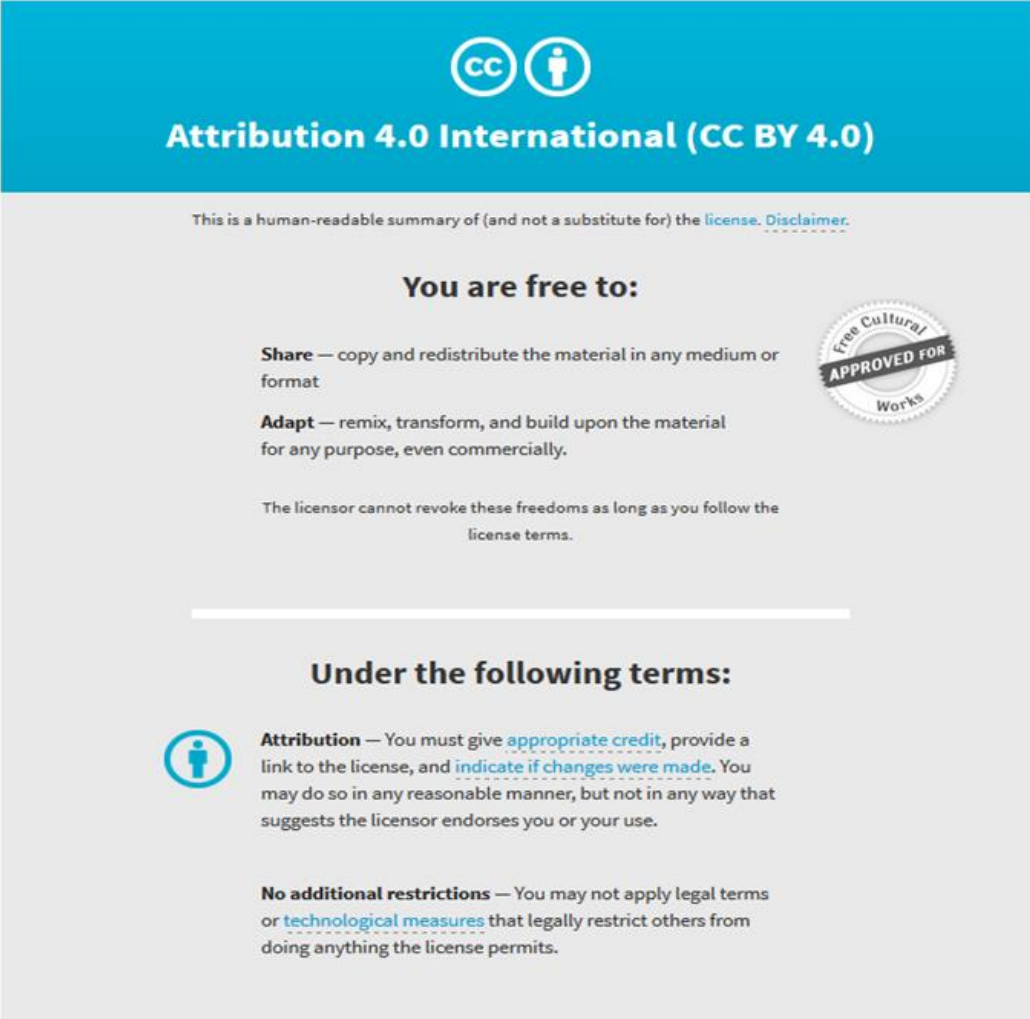
The copyright of the content belongs to the authors, artists and photographers, unless otherwise stated. (If authors, artists or photographers wish for some alternative arrangement to be put in place for their piece [e.g. assigning a Creative Commons licence to it], they can request this at the time of submission.)

The Journal reserves the right for all content to appear on its website in readable and printable format indefinitely, and the right for all published writing to be translated into other languages for further distribution. There is no limit on printing or distribution of PDFs downloaded from the website.

<http://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/article.php?t=wild-democracy-biodiversity-resistance-renewal>

PERMISSIONS

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



The image shows a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) license card. At the top, there is a blue header with the CC logo and a person icon, followed by the text "Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)". Below this, a disclaimer states: "This is a human-readable summary of (and not a substitute for) the license. [Disclaimer.](#)". The main body is divided into two sections. The first section, "You are free to:", lists two freedoms: "Share" (copy and redistribute in any medium or format) and "Adapt" (remix, transform, and build upon for any purpose, even commercially). A circular seal on the right says "Free Cultural Works APPROVED FOR Works". Below this, it states: "The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms." The second section, "Under the following terms:", lists two conditions: "Attribution" (give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made) and "No additional restrictions" (do not apply legal terms or technological measures that restrict others from doing anything the license permits).

27 November 2018

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/115308>

Wild democracy: A biodiversity of resistance and renewal

Might the theory and practice of liberal representative democracy need to be rethought in and for the 'Anthropocene'? What resources are available when trying to orientate oneself in radical political space today? In this paper, the authors draw on varieties of anarchism and Marxism to develop a new, ecocentric political sensibility and practice, which they call 'wild democracy'. Calling for a 'biodiversity of resistance and renewal', this signifies an eco-egalitarian politics that privileges grassroots participation over parliamentary representation, with the aim of transcending capitalism and initiating a degrowth process of planned economic contraction. Focusing attention beyond the ballot box, this analysis attempts to rethink the meaning of political participation in an age of ecological crisis and deepen the understanding of what it means to be an ecological citizen today.

The great American philosopher John Dewey once wrote: "Every generation has to accomplish democracy over again for itself" (Dewey, 1981–90: 299). His point was that at each moment in history citizens and nations inevitably face unique challenges and problems, so we should not assume the democratic institutions and practices inherited from the past will be adequate for the conditions of today. Our ongoing political challenge, therefore, is to 'accomplish' democracy anew, every generation.

It seems we have forgotten Dewey's lesson. Too often we assume instead that democracy is something that has been achieved already, once and for all. Why do we need to reinvent it? Indeed, in the wake of every election, it is easy to be seduced back to the comfortable unfreedom of the shopping mall or withdraw into the existential numbness of social media or television, believing that, having voted, our political work is done. The task of governing is now in the hands of our so-called 'representatives'. That's what political participation means in a market capitalist society, doesn't it?

This is, of course, an impoverished, even dangerous, conception of democracy, which we propagate by way of casual

apathy at our own peril. It is government of the people, certainly, but not government by the people and increasingly not for the people. Accordingly, with a deferential nod to Dewey, below we offer an outline of a new political orientation, sensibility and practice – a position we call 'wild democracy'. In a global tide that seems to be drifting enthusiastically towards ecocide and fascism, wild democracy signifies a radical and participatory eco-egalitarian politics that seeks to take root beyond the tired parliamentary distinctions of left and right. This is an attempt to rethink the meaning of political participation in an age of ecological crisis and deepen the understanding of what it means to be an ecological citizen.

During the course of this preliminary statement, we intend to show how wild democracy can be enriched by drawing on the resources of both anarchism and

Samuel Alexander and Peter Burdon

About the authors

Samuel is a lecturer with the Office for Environmental Programs, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia. He is also Co-Director of the Simplicity Institute.

Peter is Associate Professor at the Adelaide Law School and Deputy Chair of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Ethics Specialist Group.

Citation

Alexander S and Burdon P (2017) Wild democracy: A biodiversity of resistance and renewal. *The Ecological Citizen* 1: 45–54.

Keywords

Anarchism; eco-anarchism; eco-socialism; Marxism; societal change

Wild democracy in a nutshell.

Opposed to the conventional 'top-down' politics and economics of growth, wild democracy recognizes that we are living in an age of gross ecological overshoot and seeks to establish an ecocentric, decentralized democratic culture by privileging 'grass-roots' participation over parliamentary representation with the aim of transcending capitalism and initiating a degrowth process of planned economic contraction.

“Today it is widely assumed that it would be ‘illiberal’ to govern in such a way that would curtail ecocide.”

Marxism. For us, this involves living in the utopian spirit of *creative resistance and renewal* – prefiguring alternative, post-capitalist modes of existence – even if at first they are always and necessarily partial, compromised, temporary and small-scale. Whether engaging in acts of resistance or renewal, we argue that the wild imagination is the most potent force at the disposal of post-capitalist social movements. The path beyond is, as yet, unimagined. This is the democracy “to come” (Derrida, 2010: 73–83).

Resources for wild democracy

In recent years, the term ‘Anthropocene’ has entered the vocabulary of scientists and philosophers, and is slowly filtering into public discourse more broadly. In a sentence, this notion reflects the idea that human activity is now so fundamentally degrading the ecosystems of Earth that this constitutes nothing less than a new geological era – the first geological era ‘caused’ by humans. Like reckless gods, we are transforming the face of the planet, a licence apparently granted to humanity (or parts of humanity) under the name of ‘freedom’, by the philosophy of political liberalism. Today it is widely assumed that it would be ‘illiberal’ to govern in such a way that would curtail ecocide. Such governance would interfere illegitimately with our so-called freedoms – our apparent human right to commit ecocide. “Freedom for whom?” we might fairly ask.

Is it not reasonable to believe that we might need to rethink politics, especially liberal democratic politics, in and for the Anthropocene (Purdy, 2015)? This is especially so, we argue, to the extent that the nations making the heaviest and most unsustainable demands on the planet are the hyper-consuming capitalist economies of the democratic West. From this perspective, the ecological reality can become a political imperative, leading to collective environmental decision-making where for now there is only collective vulnerability to ecological change as a consequence of collective inertia.

So what are our options? What resources do we have to draw on when trying to orientate ourselves in radical political space today?

Marxism

Marxism represents the most prominent alternative to the capitalist mode of economy and representative democracy, so it’s an obvious place to begin considering what a radical politics might mean, and a useful point of departure for understanding the politics of wild democracy.

What are we to make of Marx’s works today? First, his critique of capitalism remains as relevant as ever, even if it needs updating for the 21st century (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Marx fiercely objected to the concentrations of wealth and power produced within capitalist economies and argued that this was not a conditional but an inherent feature of them. Recent evidence seems to support this (Piketty, 2014). Indeed, today the richest eight people now own more than the poorest half of humanity (Hardoon, 2017). No fancy theorizing by liberal ‘free marketeers’ can possibly justify this indigestible disparity of wealth. It *demands* a political response, driven by the citizenry.

Furthermore, a strong (though not absolutist) case can be made that the ‘superstructure’ of democracy and culture under capitalism is insidiously shaped by the ‘economic base’ of privatized, corporate interests, in ways that entrench the underlying policy aim of profit-maximization in undemocratic ways. For these reasons, among others, we contend that Marx was right to reject capitalism as unjust and undemocratic, and the position of wild democracy expounded and defended in later sections rests, in part, upon this Marxian critique of capitalism.

What of Marx’s theory of social change? While Marx is sometimes interpreted as a staunch materialist who was fixated on the laws of history, another reading is available which is more helpful for the current project. As David Harvey (2005: 1) notes, Marx was deeply influenced by Saint-Simon and his suggestion that “[n]o social order could

achieve changes that are not already latent within its existing conditions.” Put another way, a society cannot make a radical break from its past and every significant social change must first build the conditions for its emergence in the present society. This was true in the transition from feudalism to capitalism and Marx recognized that it would be necessary for whatever came next.

Marx offers his most complete elaboration of this idea in *Capital – A Critique of Political Economy: Volume 1*.¹ In Chapter 15, Marx provides an example of transformation during the development of machinery and large-scale technology into the workforce. In the fourth footnote, Marx unpacks a series of conceptual elements which, David Harvey (2010: 189) argues, provide a framework for thinking about “dialectical and historical materialism.” Marx (1992: 492, footnote 4) writes:

Technology reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations.

In this single sentence Marx identifies six elements that are in motion during the shift towards large-scale technology. They are:

- 1 technology;
- 2 the relationship between humans and nature;
- 3 the actual process of production;
- 4 the production and reproduction of social life;
- 5 human social relations;
- 6 mental conceptions of the world.

These elements are not static but in motion and linked through a *process of production* that guides human development. Each element constitutes a *moment* in the process of social development and is subject to perpetual renewal and transformation. We can study this

evolution from the perspective of one of the moments or examine interactions among them; for example, we might consider how our relationship with the rest of nature changes in light of new technology.

This brief description highlights something of crucial importance to the realization of projects seeking to reinvent democracy for present conditions. Often social theorists focus on one or two ideas and position them as determinants of all others. For example, it is common for environmental philosophers to ground their analysis purely in the sphere of ‘mental conceptions’ (e.g. shifting from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism [Devall and Sessions, 2001]). In contrast, we contend that a deterministic focus on any one of the elements identified by Marx is insufficient. In practice, major social transformations are far more complex and produce all kinds of localized contingencies (Harvey, 2010: 196). A deterministic stance fails to capture this complex interplay and misrepresents the requirements for social change.

While Marx offers tools that are useful for critiquing capitalism and thinking about social change, it is also vital to note that his thinking was embedded in the ‘productivist’ growth paradigm that is responsible for so much ecological harm. We can hardly blame Marx for this blind spot, however, because he was writing at a time when the ecological effects of industrialization were only just beginning to show themselves. He wrote in an age before climate change, peak-oil concerns, topsoil erosion and biodiversity loss were factors, among others, that any coherent politics had to address. The earth was not yet ‘full’. The Anthropocene had not yet set in.

Nevertheless, knowing what we know now, Marxism must undergo a deep revision in order to remain relevant in our era of overlapping environmental crises. First and foremost this means transcending the ecocidal economics of growth. Promisingly, this theoretical revision is well underway, with a sophisticated body of scholarship on eco-socialism developing

“In practice, major social transformations are far more complex and produce all kinds of localized contingencies. A deterministic stance fails to capture this complex interplay and misrepresents the requirements for social change.”

“If sustainability is to be taken seriously, capitalism must be replaced with a post-growth or steady-state form (which eco-socialism exemplifies), operating within planetary limits.”

in recent years (Sarkar, 1999; Foster, 2000; Baer, 2016). While this literature draws on traditional Marxism, it also transcends it in important ways. The essential argument of eco-socialism can be briefly summarized: if capitalism has a growth imperative built into its structure, and limitless growth is ecologically unsupportable, then capitalism is incompatible with sustainability (Smith, 2016).

Therefore, if sustainability is to be taken seriously, capitalism must be replaced with a post-growth or steady-state form (which eco-socialism exemplifies), operating within planetary limits. In the most developed regions of the world, this ecological equilibrium must be preceded by a phase of planned economic contraction, or *degrowth*. Obviously, degrowth by definition is incompatible with the growth imperative of capitalism, so here we have an environmental logic to support the social justice logic forcefully presented by Marx: capitalism cannot be reformed; it has to be replaced.

Anarchism

Anarchism is a political worldview and practice that rejects not rules but rulers. Anarchism, we argue, is not chaotic but represents a way of reasserting a human-based politics. Its method is to submit every decision and every action to politics. Under anarchism, there is no voting for someone else. People speak as themselves and decisions are made by processes that cannot bypass or elude collective models of decision-making. The ‘method’ in this case then is a decidedly horizontal one, rather than a top-down model.

While anarchism defies a unified theory, there are a few general principles that can be stated that help, at the very least, to delimit a boundary within which anarchism occurs. One idea recently offered by the North American Anarchist Studies Network seeks to lay out general anarchist principles (<https://is.gd/kQAVSm>):

We understand anarchism, in general terms, as the practice of equality and freedom in every sphere of life – life conceived and

lived without domination in any form; we understand this practice to belong not only to a better future but to the here and now, where we strive to prefigure our ends in the means we choose to reach them.

In its broadest terms, this is the basic anarchist vision of an ideal society, and it implies that the best strategy for moving towards such a society is for individuals and communities to live the new world into existence, here and now, without employing state support (and probably receiving a lot of state resistance).

The defining antagonism between anarchism and Marxism lies, obviously, in the differing roles the state is assumed to play in the transition to a post-capitalist society. Whereas Marxism sees the state as being *central* and *necessary* to that transition, anarchists tend to believe the state both should not and could not be the tool through which the ideal society is established. Other strains of anarchism argue that, if necessary, the state should be captured by anarchists via the democratic process (or, if necessary, through revolution) in order to initiate the process of decentralizing the state out of existence. That is, capture the state for the purpose of abolishing the state (Bookchin, 2001a; Bookchin, 2001b).²

Given that the question of *transition* is central to understanding political engagement today, this is not a tangential or inconsequential debate within radical politics. Rejecting the need for the state, anarchists practice what is sometimes called ‘prefigurative politics’. The best introduction to this topic is Wini Breines’ seminal 1989 book *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962–1968*. Breines argues that in the movements of the 1960s, there developed a whole new way of thinking about political organization that was opposed to the vanguardism of the left politics. She writes (Breines, 1989: 6):

The term prefigurative politics is used to designate an essentially anti-organizational politics characteristic of the

movement [...] and may be recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics. Participatory democracy was central to prefigurative politics [...] [The guiding task] was to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement relationships and political forms that “prefigured” and embodied the desired future society.

In prefigurative movements, participants are reweaving the social fabric and creating an alternative social world along the lines of the six spheres identified by Marx. The dynamic interplay within these spheres provides the foundation for the alternative social world that is being formed. Moreover, as evidenced by Breines, those engaged in prefigurative politics believe that the means they use in the present are intimately connected with the world that they are striving to create. Put otherwise, *means* are deeply connected with *ends*. Consistent with this, movement participants are encouraged to treat one another with respect and pay attention to race, class and gender dynamics within institutions. While such movements have encountered considerable resistance, there are also examples of prefigurative movements which have flourished over many years and incorporated hundreds of participants (Cornell, 2011; Lakey, 2012).

There is something very attractive, even compelling, about the immediacy, directness and lived commitment of anarchism. To employ the famous Gandhian dictum for anarchist purposes: “be the change you wish to see in the world.” The idea is that if enough people adopt and apply this attitude, the world will change, without the need for taking state power. Do not make demands of the state – it will ignore you. Do not wait for the Revolution – it may never arrive (or if it does, it will fail to live up to its ideals). Just get active in your local community and start building the new world today. And if it turns out you are alone building the new world, or the social movement is too small to achieve its ambitions, then at least you

are living out your values with integrity and authenticity.

Like classical socialism, classical anarchism needs to be revised in light of the ecological predicament. Traditionally, anarchists saw the state as the primary enemy. Today, however, that focus seems too narrow. After all, we could conceive of an anarcho-capitalist society that had abolished the state but nevertheless remained shaped by an economics of growth, leaving the question of sustainability (and therefore justice) unresolved. Anarchism, therefore, must evolve into eco-anarchism to remain relevant, and this revision has been led by figures such as Murray Bookchin (1990) and Ted Trainer (2010). Whereas democratic eco-socialists, as we have seen, tend to argue that a post-growth or steady-state economy should be designed and instituted via the apparatus of the state, eco-anarchists often envision a similar ‘ideal society’ but argue that it should be (or can only be) produced through localized grass-roots activity, where individuals and communities essentially create the new society themselves, without state support.

Wild democracy: A biodiversity of resistance and renewal

Despite key differences, there is much for those engaged in reinventing democracy to sympathize with in Marxist and anarchist political theory. First, both recognize, unlike reformist political movements, that capitalism cannot be reformed but must be replaced; secondly, they recognize that any coherent politics today must transcend growth economics; and, thirdly, both recognize the importance of creating alternative structures and systems within which society can develop. If we can change or reimagine societal structures in line with environmental goals, new ways of living and being will emerge and become possible.

Moreover, while Marxists and anarchists have different views concerning the role of the state in a radical transition, it is not necessary for most people to adopt a one-size-fits-all perspective. It is the purpose of our exploration to carve out such a space between (and sometimes against) Marxist

“If it turns out you are alone building the new world, or the social movement is too small to achieve its ambitions, then at least you are living out your values with integrity and authenticity.”

“The starting point of wild democracy is simply that *voting does not end one’s civic duty*, which itself is a radical statement in today’s largely apolitical cultures.”

and anarchist theory. With the background theoretical groundwork complete, a preliminary statement of wild democracy can now be made, which weaves together the threads of the preceding analysis.

Let us acknowledge, first, that voting itself is not much of a burden. It typically takes less than an hour, once every three or four years, so we propose that even radicals who have lost faith in representative democracy should still vote as strategically as possible (which is always a context-dependent issue) and to take that act as the ‘starting gun’ of political participation, not the finish line. While some anarchists will object that voting implicates one in an illegitimate form of government, others like Noam Chomsky have argued that voting is a legitimate strategy in attempts to keep reactionary candidates like Donald Trump from office. In this example, while voting is not a moral duty, it might have a material impact on people’s lives and provide a better foundation to advance radical politics (Halle and Chomsky, 2016).

With this in mind, the starting point of wild democracy is simply that *voting does not end one’s civic duty*, which itself is a radical statement in today’s largely apolitical cultures. For the foreseeable future, at least, and possibly forever, a citizen’s most important political contributions can only take place *in the wild*, beyond the mechanisms of representative democracy.

Now, having voted (or having conscientiously objected to voting), one is again faced with the question: how should one contribute now to a radical politics in the most strategically effective way? This seems to present a fork in the road, at which eco-anarchists and eco-socialists might part company: eco-anarchists should set out to live the new world into existence, while eco-socialists should establish a political party or attempt to influence existing political parties to push an eco-socialist agenda through parliament.

Each side of this divide currently accuses the other of pursuing the wrong strategy, and the in-fighting begins. In an attempt to stem that in-fighting, we contend that there is so much work to be done raising

cultural consciousness about the need to transcend capitalism and move beyond the ecocidal economics of growth that both camps should proceed as allies, at least for the foreseeable future. Certainly, it is too early to try to get eco-socialist ideas through parliament because there is not yet anything near a mandate for such ideas. That would be to put the cart before the horse. Recent elections in Australia and overseas are campaigned primarily on the issue of which party could grow the economy best, while climate change, for instance, is almost never mentioned (Milman, 2016). Obviously, the culture shift must get well underway in advance of any culturally digestible political campaign for eco-socialism.

In fact, such a culture shift may even begin (and only begin) in the soil of subjectivity – in a *politics of the subject* – implying that we are being called to resist or refuse the apolitical, consumerist subjectivities which capitalist culture has tried to impose on us – and to create someone new. That is, we must rewild our subjectivities in order to be better citizens of and for an ecozoic era.

Therefore, we contend that the primary task today, for both eco-anarchists and eco-socialists, is to provoke a cultural revolution in consciousness. First and foremost, this can take the form of consciousness-raising and educational activities and strategies; but, in line with traditional anarchist strategies, it should also take the form of resistance and renewal. That is, resisting the most egregious aspects of the status quo (*e.g.* by protesting, direct action, civil disobedience), and also by engaging in acts of prefigurative politics that create or demonstrate small-scale examples of new post-capitalist modes of existence.

Not only do those small-scale demonstrations function to begin the dauntingly large task of building the new world within the shell of the old, they can also be justified on the grounds of being a practical form of education. After all, being exposed to new experiments in living can be one of the most effective ways to engage people with the issues

motivating the experiments. Nothing persuades, inspires or educates quite like a real-world example of a new mode of living and being, even on a small scale. And eco-socialists and eco-anarchists are likely to share a great deal in terms of what a prefigurative politics should look like (e.g. non-consumerist, egalitarian, community-orientated sustainable experiments that challenge capitalist economic relations as far as possible).

From the anarchist perspective, these three (infinitely diverse, context-dependent) practices of education, resistance and renewal, are the most defensible strategies to adopt. But we argue also that *at this early stage* of the post-capitalism transition, it makes sense for eco-socialists to adopt, support and encourage these same strategies, in the hope of building a social movement that, in time, could provide the mandate for an eco-socialist agenda in parliament. Indeed, anarchists should not be bothered by eco-socialists advocating their bold legislative agendas because (even if one rejects centralized government) the visions of eco-socialism can help people see that other worlds are possible.

This opening or rewilding of the imagination is not an insignificant precondition of transformative change. There will be no deliberate transition beyond capitalism – whether eco-socialist, eco-anarchist or another way – until more people see that other worlds are possible. In that light, visions of alternative modes of living should be encouraged in order to help ignite people’s revolutionary imaginations. We need a flourishing biodiversity of resistance and renewal.³ The real problem today isn’t so much getting the alternative vision or visions *correct*. The real problem is figuring out how to open up people’s imaginations to the *very possibility* of alternative modes of existence (Haiven, 2014). Too often today we hear that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. All radical imaginations must unite to overcome or deconstruct this tragic, powerful but invisible obstacle – or all else is lost.

Furthermore, we need to think carefully about how a successful transition might transpire. Eco-anarchists might well argue that we will never need a state-driven eco-socialism, because by the time there is enough social support for an eco-socialist agenda to be passed through parliament, the grass-roots social movement should already have been able to create the new world. That is a perspective worth taking seriously; however, it risks jumping from a completely capitalist culture to a completely eco-anarchist culture too sharply. The transition, after all, is likely to take some time, and as the eco-anarchist movement grows, it is quite possible that the emerging social movement – midway through, for example – could influence parliamentary politics (and certainly local politics) in ways that actually advance the eco-anarchist cause. We maintain that it would be better to achieve anarchism with the partial and temporary support of the state than not achieve anarchism at all. For these reasons, if an eco-anarchist movement were to emerge strongly in culture, it may find it expedient, at some stage, to use the state (or some other polycentric system of governance) to advance the eco-anarchist agenda (Ostrom, 2010).

In this light eco-anarchism and eco-socialism can be conceived of as being two sides of the same coin of wild democracy. On the eco-anarchist side, the political task is to get active building the new world, raising consciousness about the necessity of degrowth, and resisting the most egregious aspects of the status quo, in order to build a new, engaged, post-capitalist consciousness. On the eco-socialist side of the coin, the task is to assist and support in the building of this grass-roots post-capitalist movement through similar acts of education, resistance and renewal, while at the same time developing a legislative agenda that, when the social movement is strong enough, could coherently restructure society in ways that could would more easily *permit* and *encourage* local, highly self-reliant eco-communities to govern themselves – beyond a centralized state.

“There will be no deliberate transition beyond capitalism – whether eco-socialist, eco-anarchist or another way – until more people see that other worlds are possible. In that light, visions of alternative modes of living should be encouraged in order to help ignite people’s revolutionary imaginations.”

Of course, this form of radical politics will not satisfy those who believe that nothing but violent revolution can bring about a just and sustainable post-capitalist society. In response, we argue that the approach to transition outlined above is more coherent and defensible than calls for violent revolution. After all, revolution today should not be conceived of as some future event where a mobilized citizenry storms the Bastille, so to speak – for Empire has no Bastille to storm anymore. Its nodes of politico-financial power are so widely dispersed and decentralized that the system can evade a centralized confrontation of the old revolutionary kind.

Consequently, the new revolutionary politics must be brought into the moment – into the present tense. We should not aim to destroy capitalism in the future but rather stop creating it, here and now, as best we can, knowing full well that we are too often locked into reproducing it against our wishes. But we must try to break free and swim against the tide, no matter how futile it seems. Revolution should be conceived of as a way of life rather than a goal to be achieved, and this revolution makes sense no matter what our prospects of success are.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to provide an introductory statement of wild democracy. To achieve this, we drew specifically on resources from both Marxism and anarchism and sought to find points of similarity and cooperation. There are certainly some factions which will be dissatisfied: first, those who advocate violent revolution as the only coherent strategy to bring an end to capitalism; secondly, ‘reformists’ who think that capitalism can be regulated to advance the causes of justice and sustainability; and, thirdly, those strict anarchists who reject any political strategy that entails working through the mechanisms of parliament (even if engagement with the state is for the sole purpose of advancing anarchist causes).

One point on our mind throughout has been the troubling fact that mainstream culture today tends to be instinctively put off by both the terms ‘anarchism’ and ‘socialism’ – let alone ‘degrowth’! This is partly owing to a conscious effort by the powers that be to undermine any sense of there being an alternative to capitalism. This should prompt us to think seriously about how best to share our ideas and perspectives with others. Wouldn’t it be foolish, for example, to ignore the fact that the term ‘anarchism’ has been so misleadingly presented in mainstream culture that using it could often do more harm than good, at least to some audiences? The same goes for eco-socialism and degrowth, two terms that also have huge public relations challenges. If a mass movement is what is needed and desired by these various radical imaginations, then recognizing the importance of ‘marketing’ or ‘presenting’ our visions in the best way possible is an issue that cannot be dismissed as unimportant or tangential.

It may seem theoretically unnecessary, even lacking in intellectual integrity, to think about how best to ‘brand’ one’s political perspectives. Shouldn’t we just be as clear as possible, even if culture isn’t ready for us? Plausible though that sounds, such an approach is arguably pragmatically or politically naive. We can’t just be *right*. We also need to be *heard*, and that means being cognizant of the diversity of audiences, and the differing vocabularies that may need to be used to maximize our engagement with them. Admittedly, this is not theoretically or conceptually neat – there is a tendency to desire a single banner under which the Great Transition should march, in the hope of unifying diverse threads of opposition. But the position of wild democracy holds that our broad post-capitalist cause may be best served by using a multitude of vocabularies. Indeed, this is part of why wild democracy is ‘wild’. It defies and resists singular expression.

In fact, we see this diversity of expressions already in existence today.

“Wild democracy holds that our broad post-capitalist cause may be best served by using a multitude of vocabularies. Indeed, this is part of why wild democracy is ‘wild’. It defies and resists singular expression.”

Just think of the range of activities and movements that could easily be considered elements of wild democracy:

- transition towns;
- the divestment movement;
- sharing networks;
- intentional communities and ecovillages;
- permaculture groups;
- the Occupy movement;
- manifestations of the gift economy;
- the voluntary-simplicity and tiny-house movements;
- deliberative democracy activities;
- community energy projects;
- activist hubs;
- artist hubs;
- alternative journalism websites;
- volunteer groups;
- farmers' markets;
- reskilling workshops;
- charities;
- progressive non-profit enterprises and worker cooperatives;
- the ever-expanding network of radical environmental and social justice groups that exist across the cultural landscape.

The list could go on.

Although beyond conventional political classification, wild democracy, in these various forms, can be seen already growing out of the ever-widening cracks of a globalized capitalism in decline, as yet unaware of its potential to re-enchant the political spirit of our times.

None of these movements or approaches have all the answers but arguably all of them will need to play a role moving beyond the dystopia of capitalism. Of course, they risk being easily accommodated and subsumed by the existing order of things. The important point is for each of these movements for change to continually reflect on the question of *strategy*: the question of how can we best direct our limited energies, time and resources to advance the necessary causes of justice and sustainability. That question, however, does not allow for a generalizable answer. Political engagement is always relative to our contexts and relative to our unique set of skills, limitations, connections

and responsibilities. We are left with no firmer ground to stand upon than the potential of our imaginations to creatively engage the present as we move forward together into an uncertain future. But that is ground enough to proceed without despair. Our greatest fear should be that our modes of resistance and renewal become conservative or reactionary rather than progressively transgressive (Robin, 2013). ■

Notes

- 1 Our analysis is indebted to David Harvey's interpretation of Marx. See Harvey (2010: 189–212) and Harvey (2011: 126–30).
- 2 Under Marxism, the communist utopia is assumed, eventually, to be without need of a state. In the words of Engels (1969), eventually the state under advanced communism will “wither away” and be replaced merely with an “administration of things.”
- 3 The phrase ‘biodiversity of resistance’ is from Arundhati Roy.

References

- Baer H (2016) *Toward Democratic Eco-socialism as the Next World System*. Available at <https://is.gd/YjjFeo> (accessed April 2017).
- Bookchin M (1990) *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future*. South End Press, Boston, MA, USA.
- Bookchin M (2001a) *To Remember Spain: The anarchist and syndicalist revolution of 1936*. AK Press, Oakland, CA, USA.
- Bookchin M (2001b) *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years 1868–1936*. AK Press, Oakland, CA, USA.
- Breines W (1989) *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962–1968: The Great Refusal*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, USA.
- Cornell A (2011) *Oppose and Propose: Lessons from Movement for a New Society*. AK Press, Oakland, CA, USA.
- Derrida J (2010) *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Routledge, London, UK.
- Devall B and Sessions G (2001) *Deep Ecology: Living as if nature mattered*. Gibbs Smith, Layton, UT, USA.
- Dewey J (1981–90) In: Boydston JA, ed. *The Later Works: Volume*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL, USA: 299.
- Engels F (1969) *Anti-Duhring*. Progress Publishers, Moscow, Russia.
- Foster JB (2000) *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and nature*. Monthly Review Press, New York, NY, USA.
- Haiven M (2014) *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, creativity and the commons*. Zed Books, London, UK.

“Although beyond conventional political classification, wild democracy can be seen already growing out of the ever-widening cracks of a globalized capitalism in decline.”

- Halle J and Chomsky N (2016) *Noam Chomsky's 8-Point Rationale for Voting for the Lesser Evil Presidential Candidate*. Available at <https://is.gd/MmwCwL> (accessed April 2017).
- Hardoon D (2017) *An Economy for the 99%*. Available at <https://is.gd/xCAGie> (accessed April 2017).
- Hardt M and Negri A (2000) *Empire*. Harvard University Press, Boston, MA, USA.
- Harvey D (2005) *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge, London, UK.
- Harvey D (2010) *A Companion to Marx's Capital*. Verso, New York, NY, USA.
- Harvey D (2011) *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Lahey G (2012) *Toward a Living Revolution: A five-stage framework for creating radical social change*. Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR USA.
- Marx K (1992) *Capital – A Critique of Political Economy: Volume 1*. Penguin Classics, London, UK.
- Milman O (2016) Why has climate change been ignored in the US election debates? *The Guardian*. Available at <https://is.gd/TkXBpT> (accessed April 2017).
- Ostrom E (2010) Beyond markets and states: Polycentric governance of complex economic systems. *American Economic Review* **100**: 641–72.
- Piketty T (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press, Boston, MA, USA.
- Purdy J (2015) *After Nature: A politics for the Anthropocene*. Harvard University Press, Boston, MA, USA.
- Robin C (2013) *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*. Oxford University Press, London, UK.
- Sarkar S (1999) *Eco-socialism or Eco-capitalism: A critical analysis of humanity's fundamental choices*. Zed Books, London, UK.
- Smith R (2016) *Green Capitalism: The god that failed*. College Publications, London, UK.
- Trainer T (2010) *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just World*. Envirobook, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

Advertisement

ECOLOGISTICS

Creating a resilient and healthy community for the residents of the California Central Coast that is environmentally and economically sustainable

Education for Action • Deep Ecology •
Central Coast Bioneers • Incubating Activism

www.ecologistics.org