
WILD DEMOCRACY

A biodiversity of resistance and renewal

Samuel Alexander
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1. Introduction

With characteristic insight, the great American philosopher, John Dewey, once wrote: 'Every generation has to accomplish democracy over again for itself.'¹ 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 a recent federal election (in Australia), 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 I offer an outline of a new political orientation, sensibility, and practice – a position I call 'wild democracy'. In a global tide that seems to be drifting enthusiastically toward 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, but also beyond (and yet between) the antagonistic but enriching poles of anarchism and Marxism. As I will explain, wild democracy is a localised politics with a global perspective, positioning itself 'in the wild' beyond the state and yet, at times, pragmatically engaged with the state. In short, wild democracy is a revolutionary politics without a Revolution, as such – a paradox I will unpack and defend below.²

* Dr Samuel Alexander is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Melbourne and co-director of the Simplicity Institute. The author would like to thank Dr Peter Burdon for helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this essay and for many conversations with Johnny Rutherford about these issues.

¹ John Dewey, *The Later Works: Volume 13*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981-90, p299.

² Although the focus of this essay is on how individuals and communities might best contribute to democratic (self)governance in today's world, there is a broader crisis of democracy underpinning this inquiry, including the deepening attacks on freedom of assembly, concentration of media, corporate influence on governments, increasing surveillance, etc. Those broader concerns about contemporary democracy provide a backdrop to the analysis but space does not permit a detailed examination as such. I acknowledge also that there is vast literature exploring, critiquing, and attempting to radicalise democracy. Rather than attempt to review existing literature, however, this essay focuses instead of presenting a line of argument in the simplest terms possible.

1.1. *Is this even a coherent theoretical project?*

Readers would be right to suspect that the project indeed risks incoherency. I hope to show, however, that by drawing on the resources of both anarchism and Marxism, without adopting the encrusted ideologies of either, wild democracy has the potential to highlight deep allegiances between these rich and necessary schools of radical politics, enriching democratic practice without degenerating into theoretical incoherency.

Indeed, I will argue that the prospective allegiances become especially apparent when both anarchism and Marxism are infused with a deep green environmentalism that, first, recognises the reality of severe environmental limits to growth, and secondly, appreciates the radical implications of those limits to growth on any coherent conception of a just and sustainable society.³ The framing question is: how can seven billion people (and counting) live sustainably on our fragile planet? The framing answer is: surely not by globalising consumer lifestyles via continuous global economic growth. More than anything else, it is this 'limits to growth'⁴ perspective that demands a contemporary re-evaluation of tradition political and economic ideologies and strategies, and this re-evaluation, I will argue, demands that we reinvent democracy – that we 'rewild' democracy in order to 'accomplish' democracy.

To state one of my key perspectives upfront: the open and often fierce conflict between anarchists and Marxists – a conflict that is now centuries old – has been, to my mind, one of the greatest shortcomings of both camps, and continues to be an obstacle on the path to change.⁵ While I do not wish to deny that there have been moments of solidarity between these camps, it would be fair to say such moments have been the exception rather than the rule. At its most ambitious, the following analysis seeks to resolve that conflict, or, less boldly, to *accommodate it* or at least *defer it*. By creating space for potential alliances between these antagonistic and often opposing schools of radical politics, the project of wild democracy represents a strategic re-evaluation of political strategy and outlook, which, if it were able to unite the diversity of radical imaginations, has the potential to engender collaborative activism and thereby advance the causes of justice and sustainability. However, that first requires a coherent exposition or unveiling of those hidden political allegiances, which is the purpose of this work-in-progress.

I acknowledge at once, of course, that there will forever be an *irresolvable* conflict between classical anarchists (e.g. Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, etc.), who categorically reject the instrument of the state, and conventional Marxists, who regard the state as a necessary instrument for the proletariat to wield on the path to the communist utopia. Nevertheless, I will maintain that *here and now* – which is the most important geographical moment in politics – there is so much groundwork to be done establishing a politically engaged post-capitalist consciousness that the disagreements between revolutionary imaginations are less important than the agreements. I will argue that it is

³ For strong statements of eco-anarchism, see Murray Bookchin (1990), *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future*. Boston: South End Press; and Ted Trainer (2010) *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just World*. Sydney: Envirobook. For strong statements of eco-socialism, see Saral Sarkar (1999), *Eco-socialism or Eco-Capitalism: A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices*. London: Zed Books; and Hans Baer (2016) *Toward a Democratic Eco-socialism as the Next World System*. Report to The Next World System Project, 28 April, 2016. See also, John Bellamy Foster (2000) *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

⁴ See generally, Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows (2004) *Limits to Growth: The 30-year Update*. White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing.

⁵ For a review of historical clashes between anarchists and Marxists, see Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, Ch. 3.

strategically flawed for radical movements to expend time and energy fighting amongst themselves when what is needed more than anything is for a united opposition to the existing reality of dehumanising and unsustainable capitalism. In short, let there be one 'no' and many 'yeses.'

The essence of my argument, then, is that our new collective goal – that is, the goal of eco-anarchists, eco-socialists, and even what might be called 'radical reformers' – should be to work collaboratively, not so much to establish our diverse and no doubt incommensurable utopias, but simply to resist, transcend, and transform the destructive capitalist dystopia that lies in the way of *any* ecozoic or humane political economy. That is the unambitious ambition of the following political analysis: not to achieve utopia but simply to transcend dystopia – which, of course, is quite ambitious enough. But, as will be seen, transcending dystopia is not intended to mean simply living in *deconstructive resistance* to the status quo. First and foremost, it also means living in the utopian spirit of *creative 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, 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'.⁶

One final note of justification: I was driven to formulate this deep green or 'ecozoic'⁷ politics of wild democracy due to the inadequacies of inherited political categories and distinctions, which left me unable to orientate myself in the space of existing political theory and practice. I did not know where I stood, because nowhere seemed quite right. Perhaps some readers similarly dissatisfied with the crude tripartite division of liberal parliamentary democracy, Marxism, and anarchism, might appreciate this 'opening up' of a more nuanced political space in a way that better reflects the intricacies of political existence in our own times. In this most preliminary statement, I put forward wild democracy as a political tool that might help carve out such a space.

2. Reinventing democracy in the Anthropocene

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 Gaia, a license 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.

⁶ On the notion of democracy 'to come', see Jacques Derrida (2010) *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. London: Routledge. Chapter 2, especially pp. 73-83.

⁷ The term 'ecozoic' was coined by Thomas Berry. See Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme (1994) *The Universe Story*. New York: HarperCollins.

Is it not reasonable to think that we might need to rethink politics, especially liberal democratic politics, in and for the Anthropocene?⁸ This is especially so, I would argue, given that the nations making the heaviest and most unsustainable demands on the planet are the hyper-consuming capitalist economies of the democratic West.

And yet, despite the fact that humanity is colliding dangerously with environmental limits, even the richest nations, including Australia, remain firmly entrenched in a growth paradigm that is the root cause of the ecological predicament. This state of affairs is partly driven by consumerist cultures that demand ever-rising levels of affluence, but more insidiously, there are also various structures and vested interests within capitalism that lock us on to the treadmill of growth, influencing political decision-making in undemocratic ways. For example, the fear or threat of 'capital flight' in a globalised economy means that corporate interests shape domestic politics in ways that benefit capital and marginalise any non-capitalistic interests. The concentration of privatised mass media also bestows an undemocratic influence on a few mega-rich elites. These and many other influences of capital on democracy are diverse and powerful, and often go unnoticed. The consequence is that the cold logic of profit-maximization maintains hegemony, as if it were the 'natural' order of things, beyond question. Business as usual more or less prevails.

Whatever the drivers of growth may be, it is perfectly clear that political parties across the spectrum today are unquestioningly committed to maintaining the growth economy, seemingly oblivious to the catastrophe that this out-dated development agenda holds in store for people and planet – a catastrophe that, in some respects, has already arrived.⁹ In short, a universal 'growth fetish'¹⁰ defines representative democracies today, essentially enforced by a crude liberalism that presumes interference in the so-called free market is illegitimate. Regulatory tinkering, at most, is permitted. Empire marches on.

A worrying aspect of this political blindness and paralysis is that it may be built into the very structure of representative democracies. Unable or unwilling to look beyond the short-term horizon of the next election, politicians are essentially prohibited from taking a geological view of things, which is necessary for the preservation of our biosphere. To avoid making hard decisions, environmental costs are pushed into the future, all glossed over by a techno-optimism that promises ecological salvation through technology, innovation, design, and market mechanisms. From this perspective, there is no need to question affluent lifestyles or conventional modes of development. One consequence of this non-confronting myth is that the voices of future generations fall on deaf political ears – rendering our democracy decidedly 'unrepresentative' in this glaring way.

In this context, democracy as we know it today seems to be a deeply flawed – or, at least, grossly incomplete – mode of political organisation and practice, unable to deal with the defining challenges of our times. For those people who are uncomfortably aware that limitless growth is a recipe for ecological (and thus humanitarian) disaster, the idea of

⁸ I am hardly the first to be asking these questions. See, for example, Jedediah Purdy (2015) *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*. Boston: Harvard University Press; Philipp Pottberg and Fariborz Zelli (eds) *Environmental Politics and Governance in the Anthropocene: Institutions and Legitimacy in a Complex World*. London: Routledge; Frank Biermann, *Earth System Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

⁹ For example, over the last 40 years alone, the populations of invertebrate species have declined by 52 per cent. See World Wildlife Fund, 'Living Planet Report' (2014).

¹⁰ See Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish* (2003) Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.

trusting our growth-orientated ‘representatives’ to lead the way to a just and sustainable economy seems a delusion too large to swallow. Like Kafka, we will be waiting a long time.

Furthermore, one only needs to watch a single session of ‘question time’ in parliament to become convinced beyond doubt that democratic debate today has degenerated into shallow, often juvenile, power-hungry bickering, expressed in simplistic sound bites – a televised manifestation of ‘fiddling while Rome burns’. It tempts one to despair. Certainly, one has to turn away.

Accordingly, wild democracy begins with the premise that the ‘normal’ party politics of representative democracy lies, for the foreseeable future, at least, beyond hope and redemption. Voting cannot possibly complete our civic duty, because our range of representatives is depressingly limited – Shorten or Turnbull? Clinton or Trump? – a political ‘Sophie’s choice’. Whether we look to the parliamentary Left or the parliamentary Right – both poles shaped by the growth paradigm – we are guaranteed to lose.

We must, therefore, reinvent democracy for our moment in history. We must explore the democratic ‘wild’ beyond the ballot box, and beyond the increasingly obsolete Left-Right distinction, in order to make political contributions to governance or self-governance in some more coherent and significant way.¹¹

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

3. Marxism: a sympathetic critique

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.

Marx famously argued, with some plausibility, that the state under capitalism is merely an instrument or tool of the capitalist class, meaning that politicians (knowingly or unknowingly) would only enact laws and policies that furthered the narrow interests of that class.¹² To think that political representatives would advance the genuine interests of the working class was dismissed by Marx as ‘false consciousness’. Capitalism, he argued, could not be reformed. It had to be replaced.

From this perspective, what is needed is a revolutionary movement, driven by the working class, which would overthrow the capitalist state, abolish private property, and establish state socialism (i.e. social control of the means of production). To oversimplify

¹¹ To call the Left-Right distinction ‘increasingly obsolete’ is to make the point that traditionally, and for the most part today, both poles of the political spectrum still operate within an ecocidal growth paradigm. At the same time, I would not wish to deny that there is another sense in which the Left must be reinvented not rejected, and this essay can be interpreted as contributing to that task.

¹² In those cases where it seems as if ‘democratic’ capitalism is being reformed to advance the interests of the working class – for example, by introducing elements of a welfare state – Marx argued that this was merely the capitalist class allowing some steam of discontent to dissipate in order to stabilise the status quo. In fact, Marx sometimes objected to attempts to ‘reform’ capitalism partly *because* it let off steam – steam which he felt needed to be directed toward revolutionary activity and mobilisation with the aim of shattering (not reforming) capitalism.

in the extreme, this new political economy would be defined by the Marxian slogan of distributive justice: 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.' Marx believed that he had uncovered the 'laws of history' and that the inherent contradictions of capitalism would inevitably lead to a communist utopia.

And then the 20th century happened. Various socialist revolutions indeed took place, marching under the banner of Marxism (and Leninism), but in their wake the state was essentially captured by gangs of murderers that employed strategies (e.g. the purges, the gulags, etc.) which neither Marx nor any genuine Marxist would have condoned.¹³ That is, *actually existing socialism* was far from the practice of Marxist theory. Certainly, there was no post-revolutionary communist utopia, and ultimately, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it seemed the great socialist experiment had demonstrably failed. Capitalism proudly (but no doubt prematurely) declared itself the supreme mode of societal organisation.

What, then, are we to make of Marxism today? Is it still relevant? Don't the representative democracies of free market capitalism represent the proper 'end of history'? Or at least the best we can hope for? These questions require some unpacking.

First, there is a somewhat abstract philosophical point to make. Marx, as noted, claimed that he had uncovered the laws of history – the one and only true way to understand the unfolding of political economy throughout time. Such theoretical confidence may have seemed plausible, even expected, so soon after the Age of Enlightenment, but for us post-Nietzscheans, philosophical times have changed. Today it is said that we live in a postmodern or post-Enlightenment age, defined by 'incredulity toward metanarratives.'¹⁴ This implies a deep scepticism towards 'absolutist' or 'foundationalist' theories of truth or politics, a scepticism informed by philosophical movements such as post-structuralism, neo-pragmatism, and deconstruction.

Without getting into the complexities, these anti-foundationalist philosophical perspectives expose how the world can accommodate various, mutually enriching but not always commensurable interpretations, descriptions, or narratives, each of which conceal as they reveal. In that light, the theoretical dogmatism or 'grand narrative' of Marx needs to be dropped if his theories are to be read with critical eyes, but this can be achieved without most of his ideas losing their force. A political, economic, or social theory does not need to be the one and only truth to be shed light on the human condition.

So, if we drop the theoretical overstatements, what insight can Marx offer those of us today who are in search of a coherent, radical politics? His critique of capitalism, to begin with, arguably remains as relevant as ever, even if it needs updating for the 21st century.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Indeed, under globalised capitalism today, the richest 62 people now own more than the poorest half of

¹³ I will not herein explore the debate about the role of violence in the Marxian revolutionary strategy. While Marx did presume that a violent revolution almost certainly would be necessary, on the grounds that the capitalist class would not voluntarily give up its power, that position can be distinguished from an endorsement from Stalinism. For now, however, I will assume rather than defend that distinction.

¹⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, xxiv.

¹⁵ See, for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000) Boston: Harvard University Press.

¹⁶ Thomas Piketty (2014) *Capital in the Twenty First Century*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

humanity.¹⁷ No fancy theorising by liberal ‘free marketeers’ can possibly justify this indigestible disparity of wealth. It *demand*s a political response, driven by an outraged citizenry.

Furthermore, as implied above, 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 privatised, corporate interests, in ways that entrench the underlying policy aim of profit-maximisation in undemocratic ways. For these reasons, among others, Marx was right to reject capitalism as unjust and undemocratic, and the position of wild democracy expounded and defended in later sections rest, in part, upon this Marxian critique of capitalism.

But what of Marx’s revolutionary strategy? And his communist alternative?

To begin with his revolutionary strategy, the reality of the 20th century – culminating in Stalin – must give everyone cause for doubt. Partly as a result of Marx’s overblown philosophical rhetoric about having discovered the necessary laws of history, the revolutionary proletarians (especially the leaders) proceeded with religious conviction. They believed they had possession of the Truth and, no matter the cost or compromise, set out to impose it upon the world in the belief (experienced as knowledge) that they were serving the higher cause of justice.

There can be no doubt that ‘absolutist’ or ‘foundationalist’ political movements are phenomena of the deepest concern, for the simple but terrifying reason that no ‘means’ are prohibited if they are rationalised as achieving the desired ‘end’. Fundamentalist terrorism, though difficult to define, takes this rationalisation to the logical extreme. Whether political acts are done in the name of God, the Revolution, Free Markets, or the Flying Spaghetti Monster, the very idea of a ‘vanguard party’ violently taking control of the state and imposing their One True Vision of Utopia on the rest of the world is inherently subject to abuse. 20th-century socialism attests to that with harrowing results.

This is not to say, of course, that Marxist revolutionary strategy *inevitably* leads to Stalinism, only that it *risks* Stalinism, and I would say most people today, including me, consider this a risk too great to take. If state socialism is to be established – an open question for now – the more defensible strategy for transformative change is first to create a politicised culture that desires and demands socialism, and then introduce it via parliamentary democracy. We will critically evaluate this strategy of ‘democratic socialism’ below, as it informs wild democracy while being distinct from it.

In any case, as noted above, the post-structuralist critique of Truth with a capital T has kicked the epistemological foundations out from beneath any One True Vision of Utopia and thus also from beneath the epistemological foundations of the traditional Marxist revolutionary strategy. Capitalism may be unjust, but there is not one, single conception of a just alternative that should be imposed upon society by an enlightened, revolutionary vanguard party. Again, there may be one ‘no’ but there are and should be many ‘yeses’, both in terms of a just, sustainable and flourishing ‘ideal society’ and in terms the best strategy for moving toward it. Everything, always, is context-dependent, which calls for theoretical humility and warns against universalist political statements

¹⁷ Deborah Hardoon, Sophia Ayele, and Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva (2016) ‘An Economy for the 1%: How Privilege and Power in the Economy Drive Extreme Inequality and How this can be Stopped’ Oxfam Briefly Paper, 210, 18 January 2016.

or strategies. For even if a global moral or political code emerged, this would still require interpretation and application in context-specific ways.¹⁸

With respect to Marx's vision of a communist alternative, he did not provide much detail, other than the obvious fact that private property would be abolished and the means of production would come under social control. For present purposes, the critical point to make is that his vision was embedded, regrettably, in the 'productivist' growth paradigm almost as much as capitalism was and is. We can hardly blame Marx for this blind spot, however, because he was writing at a time when the environmental effects of industrialisation were only just beginning to show themselves. That is, he wrote in an age before climate change, peak oil concerns, topsoil erosion, biodiversity loss, etc. were factors 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 (and socialism more broadly) must undergo a deep revision in order to remain relevant in our era of overlapping environmental crises.¹⁹ 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 recent years.²⁰

The essential logic of eco-socialism can be easily summarised: if capitalism has a 'growth imperative' built into its structure, and limitless growth is environmentally unsupportable, then capitalism is incompatible with sustainability.²¹ Therefore, if sustainability is to be taken seriously – and we are all environmentalist now, aren't we? – capitalism must be replaced with a post-growth or steady-state form of eco-socialism that operates within planetary limits. In the most developed regions of the world, this environmental 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. This line of reasoning informs wild democracy and will be examined more closely below.

Although far from being a homogenous body of work, the emerging body of eco-socialist and degrowth scholarship provides some of the most coherent political platforms on offer today, although, admittedly, both the movements remain marginalised and almost insignificant political forces, despite their coherency and potential. It also remains an open question whether eco-socialism and degrowth should attempt to be established democratically 'from above' via the apparatus of the state, or driven into existence democratically 'from below' via grassroots movements. This question provides a smooth segue into a consideration of the politics of anarchism, which will provide further resources to draw upon when times comes to sketch an outline of wild democracy.

4. Anarchism: a sympathetic critique

Anarchism is a political worldview and practice that rejects, not rules, but rulers. Despite being a diverse school, it is defined, if through nothing else, by its rejection of

¹⁸ To reject universalism, of course, does not imply a crude relativism or conservatism accepting that any politics is as good as any other. This is not the place, however, to explore that thorny issue.

¹⁹ Marx was not oblivious, however, to environmental concerns. See Foster (2000), above, n 3.

²⁰ See, e.g., Sarkar (1999), Foster (2000), and Baer (2016) above, n 3.

²¹ See Richard Smith (2016) *Green Capitalism: The God that Failed*. London: College Publications.

the state, of all governmental claims to authority. To speak generally, anarchists believe that governments are inherently illegitimate concentrations of political power and that the ideal form of societal organisation is stateless, without centralised or 'representative' government. Many or most anarchists choose not to vote in elections out of principle, not wanting to be complicit in, or confer a sense of legitimacy on, a representative mode of government they reject.

But far from advocating 'chaos' – as mainstream media too often portray the anarchist agenda – the meaning of anarchy can be understood as *order, security, justice, and freedom through cooperative self-governance*. Anarchists believe that human beings do not need to be governed, as such. Instead, anarchists believe that we are capable of working together to govern ourselves, by way of local, participatory political engagement. In its broadest terms, this is the basic anarchist vision of an ideal society, and it implies that the best strategy for moving toward 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).

Given that anarchists do not recognise the legitimacy of the state, they are often prepared to engage in acts of civil disobedience if the laws in question strike their considered moral conscience as being unjust. In the words typically attributed to Thomas Jefferson: 'When injustice becomes law, rebellion becomes duty.' There is a long and honourable tradition embracing this right to civil disobedience, inspired by revered figures such as Henry Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, Emma Goldman, and Martin Luther King, Jr (not all of whom identify as anarchists of course).

This is not the forum to present a detailed definition, history, critique, or defence of anarchism. The primary purpose of addressing anarchism presently is to highlight its theoretical and practical antagonism with Marxism and, through that analysis, highlight the core issues relevant to wild democracy.

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 – at least, anarchists of classical disposition – 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 decentralising the state out of existence. That is, capture the state for the purpose of abolishing the state.

It is worth noting that, even under Marxism, the communist utopia is assumed, eventually, to be without need of a state. In the words of Engels, eventually the state under advanced communism will 'wither away' and be replaced merely with an 'administration of things'.²² This is important, because it shows that there is no necessary clash between Marxists and anarchists in their conception of the ideal society – both are stateless. The defining antagonism is with respect to the state's role in the transition.

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'. This involves engaging in direct action, in order to 'build the new world within

²² Frederick Engels (1969), *Anti-Duhring*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

the shell of the old', as the anarchist slogan goes – infusing daily life and interactions with the ethics of mutual respect, freedom, and non-coercion.

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.

One of the most common objections to anarchism is framed in terms of 'human nature'. The criticism is that anarchism sounds nice in theory, perhaps, but it would not work in practice, over the long term, at least, because generally human beings are too weak, selfish, or lazy to be able to function without a government that structures the world with laws, deterrents, and incentives. Of course, there have been successful 'anarchist moments' in history (e.g. the Spanish experiments) that provide some support for anarchism functioning well in practice, but the fact that these anarchist societies have tended to be short-lived also means the case is inconclusive. Indigenous societies arguably provide more interesting examples of the long-term functionality of societies without a state, but obviously the application of those modes of existence to the 21st-century world is no straightforward matter.

Many anarchists indeed have a very positive view of human nature, embracing some conception of 'basic goodness'. They argue that the apparent flaws in human nature are actually just a result of capitalism spoiling our basic goodness, by incentivising competition, celebrating greed, and creating social anxieties and insecurities through manipulative marketing strategies. When an anarchist society is established, it is argued, people will see that human beings are inherently capable of living co-operatively without state coercion. Indeed, there is evidence from evolutionary biology indicating that those species (or societies) based on cooperation rather than competition are most likely to prevail in the long term.

In any case, anarchists can turn the human nature objection on its head, arguing that if human beings *are* inherently weak and greedy, that is all the more reason not to create a centralised and powerful state, because flawed humans inevitably must run that state! Better to minimise the concentrations of power.

I think, however, there is a more sophisticated response to the human nature objection, and that is to deny that there is such a thing as a fixed 'human nature' that we are born with. Granted, human beings are products of a long evolutionary history that doubtless shapes our psychological constitution, but ultimately we are free, as the existentialists argued, to *choose our nature* through our decisions (which means we have no pre-determined nature, as such – humans are neither inherently good nor inherently bad). Our 'existence precedes our essence'.

From this perspective, it is a manoeuvre of 'bad faith' to talk of a pre-determined nature because that just deflects attention away from our inescapable responsibility to shape ourselves. Nevertheless, insofar as we are 'socially constructed' beings, shaped by our cultural and institutional contexts – which cannot be denied – it still remains open for us to 'reconstruct' ourselves and our contexts according to our own visions of what

humanity could become. As Jean-Paul Sartre once said: 'you can always make something out of what you've been made into.'²³

Like classical socialism, classical anarchism needs to be revised in light of the environmental 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 and Ted Trainer.²⁴ 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 localised grassroots activity, where individuals and communities essentially create the new society themselves, without state support.

While the anarchist imperative to 'build the new world within the shell of the old' has much to recommend it, there are many deep and powerful structures and vested interests that obstruct that strategy. Eco-anarchists believe those obstacles can be overcome without need of the state. Eco-socialists argue that transforming those structures requires state action. This is the key debate that will now be examined more closely.

5. Beyond (and between) anarchism and Marxism

Let me focus this critical analysis by reiterating the strengths of democratic eco-socialism. There is much with which to sympathise in this emerging political theory. First, it recognises, unlike reformist political movements, that capitalism cannot be reformed but has to be replaced; secondly, it recognises that any coherent socialism today must transcend growth economics; and, thirdly, it avoids the dangers inherent in revolutionary Marxism (or Leninism) by rejecting the need for a 'vanguard party' to capture the state through violence, instead calling for the democratically mandated institution of eco-socialism via the mechanisms of parliament.

Moreover, democratic eco-socialism recognises the reality that structures and systems within which we live deeply shape and influence the forms of living that are available to us. It is all well and good for anarchists to try to ignore the state to death, or ignore capitalism to death, but from the perspective of democratic eco-socialism, that may be naïve. Any anarchist movement may well find itself structurally locked into ways of

²³ Jean-Paul Sartre (1965) *Situations*. New York: George Braziller. 9:101. The 'social construction' of human nature, however, does give rise to a 'chicken and egg' problem for anarchists. In short, an anarchist society would create the social conditions conducive to positive and cooperative human relations, but we must begin from where we are, within a capitalist society that socially constructs human nature in selfish ways that may make anarchist modes of social organisation unworkable or at least more challenging. Put otherwise, which comes first: the anarchist society that shapes a cooperative human nature? Or the cooperative human nature that creates the functioning anarchist society? Socialists face the same problem.

²⁴ In this paper I am defining eco-socialism in terms of *state-instituted* eco-socialism. It is important to acknowledge however that most anarchists are 'socialists' too, in the sense that they believe the most important means of production should be under 'social control' (primarily if not exclusively) rather than be held as private property. So the distinction between eco-socialist and eco-anarchism in this paper is primarily for the purpose of highlighting differing views on the role the state should play in the transition beyond capitalism.

living that do not accord with anarchist values, leaving activists with little time, energy, or capacity to engage in acts of resistance and renewal. Change the structures, however, in line with an eco-socialist agenda, and new ways of living and being may emerge or be possible. New eco-socialist structures may even *permit* anarchism to flourish.

The urgency with which change needs to occur is another strength of the eco-socialist position. Even if it would be more desirable for grassroots movements to progressively 'build the new world within the shell of the old', a case can be made that the depth and urgency of the transition needed requires centralised state action. Establishing things like new public transport networks or bike lanes, or new energy systems, or new banking, monetary, or property systems, while conceivably achieved in a developed anarchist society, are arguably more readily achievable in the short term via state policy.

Similarly, in a crisis or collapse situation – far from being an unrealistic scenario – it could also be the case that the state is needed simply to maintain and administer the most basic social services and infrastructure (e.g. electricity, water, hospitals, food rationing etc). What Brendan Gleeson calls a 'Guardian State'²⁵ may be required in such times to avoid complete societal breakdown and the suffering that economic or ecosystemic collapse would bring. Such a crisis could also be a (tragic) opportunity to re-draw the contours of the economy, informed by eco-socialist values. Obviously, it would be better to plan and design such an economy *in advance* of collapse, but in cynical moods one can easily think that the conditions of instability needed for genuine change will not come about until the crises of capitalism deepen and intensify further. Of course, what is produced in the wake of such deep instability can take any number of forms – the challenge being to make the best of it, and above all to protect democracy.

There are also global structures – such as international trade agreements – which could be influenced more coherently via an eco-socialist government than via the strategies of eco-anarchism. For example, the Transpacific Partnership agreement, currently being negotiated, is threatening to impoverish democracy and further entrench the neoliberal agenda. If this comes into force, it will be that much harder for eco-anarchists (and eco-socialists) to advance their cause. There are many such examples that could be provided, suggesting that anarchists ignore the state at their own peril.

Traditional anarchists, of course, would reject this state-driven transition strategy, first, because it requires working with and through the (allegedly illegitimate) mechanisms of the state; and second, eco-anarchists tend to argue that a centralised state simply cannot adequately manage the diversity of local contexts sufficiently well to meet and address local needs. From this perspective, only self-governing local communities can know the particular needs and features of their community, so centralised planning must be rejected as being too blunt an instrument to be effective or efficient. In fact, the defence of eco-socialism above could even be inverted in defence of eco-anarchism, that is to say, in a context of crisis or collapse, we may not be able to rely on state administration of the situation, and thus we must learn the art of self-governance today.

Furthermore, eco-anarchists question the very possibility of a post-capitalist transition driven by the state. We live in a globalised capitalist economy, in which it has never been easier for capital, with the tap of a few computer keys, to move from nation to nation. This means the moment any government seems to be mobilising for an eco-socialist agenda, this will most likely induce 'capital flight' and/or provoke economic turmoil or collapse by scaring the stock market. There is also the geopolitical problem, as being the first to initiate a eco-socialist degrowth transition would likely imply a state having less

²⁵ Brendan Gleeson (2015) *The Urban Condition*. London: Routledge.

funds available for military forces, weakening a nation's relative power globally. Can we imagine a state voluntarily weakening its geopolitical position of power?

One eco-socialist response would be that the transition must be *global*, but this gives rise to the problem of being the 'first mover'. For example, it may be that globalised eco-socialism could avoid capital flight – there would be nowhere to fly to! – but this would require a near-simultaneous global transition, which, for the foreseeable future, seems breath-takenly implausible.²⁶

A related anarchist criticism of democratic eco-socialism is that by the time any mass movement for eco-socialism had emerged, the post-capitalist transition would have or should have already been completed, or mostly completed. That is, by the time there is a broad culture that wants eco-socialism, the social movement would have already created the new society via grassroots participatory action. This strategy also provides one way to deal with the critical issue noted in the previous paragraph. Rather than risk capital flight or economic collapse, or wait for a globalised eco-socialist movement to take root, the anarchist strategy would involve building the New Economy B under and within Old Economy A, in such a way that could avoid the destabilising effects of a 'top down' implementation of eco-socialism.²⁷

Even from this cursory critical review, it is clear that there are tensions – perhaps irresolvable tensions – between eco-socialists and eco-anarchists. Does that mean we have to choose one or the other? Do the points in conflict require these two forms of radical politics to oppose each other? Or, despite the points of conflict, can we reorientate ourselves in political space in such a way that somehow acknowledges and at the same time accommodates these theoretical and practical tensions?

It is the purpose of wild democracy to carve out such a space, and with the background theoretical groundwork complete, a preliminary statement of wild democracy can at last be made, which weaves together the threads of the preceding analysis.

6. Wild democracy: a biodiversity of resistance and renewal

In a politico-cultural context gripped by growth fetishism, it would be a dereliction of duty to think that voting in elections consummates one's political or civic duty. It would be different, perhaps, if our representatives were acting with wisdom, integrity, and foresight – clearly serving the causes of justice and sustainability – but they are in fact doing the opposite, despite what wonderful-sounding things they might say. Thus, we find ourselves within a regressive representative democracy, which is where we must begin. So be it. How then is one to contribute to a radical democratic politics today?

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 I 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

²⁶ Granted, a large-scale eco-anarchist social movement seems equally implausible at present, but eco-anarchism has the advantage of getting immediately to work trying to establish new, localised, and more self-sufficient and collaborative modes of economy, rather than making demands of the state. Even if this eco-anarchist strategy fails to produce a sustainable society, it may at least help increase resilience.

²⁷ See Trainer (2010), above n 3.

political participation, not the finish line. I should think that most democratic eco-socialists would agree with this.

Hard-nosed anarchists may object that voting implicates one in an illegitimate form of government and is therefore an inappropriate means of political change, but less dogmatic and more pragmatic anarchists may accept that voting for the 'least evil' of competing political parties could help provide a modestly better starting place to advance anarchism and therefore voting should be considered *one tool* in the anarchist tool belt (even if it is an almost insignificant tool).

Furthermore, a pragmatic anarchist may defend voting on the grounds that in a more enlightened socio-cultural context, there is scope for an anarchist politics to actually push state governments toward a policy of decentralisation, which would be a step in the right direction, potentially culminating in the state 'withering away' in line with the shared desires and visions of anarchists and Marxists. Indeed, the idea of (one day) taking control the state in order to dissolve the state is a coherent political position,²⁸ one that I feel pragmatic eco-anarchists should share with eco-socialists. And even if the stateless utopia is never achieved, I would argue that transcending the dystopia of centralised state capitalism is still a worthy goal.

Whatever the case, the first premise 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, whereby eco-anarchists and eco-socialists must 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 infighting, which I consider a waste of oppositional energy, I want to suggest that if this fork in the road exists, *we are not yet at such a fork*. That is, here and now, 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 eco-anarchists and eco-socialists can and should proceed more often 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 anywhere near a mandate for such ideas. That would be to put the cart before the horse.²⁹ After all, the recent Australian election was campaigned primarily on the issue of which party could grow the economy best. Obviously, the culture-shift must get well underway in advance of any culturally digestible political campaign for eco-socialism.

²⁸ See, for example, Takis Fotopoulos (1997) *Towards an Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the need for a New Liberatory Project*. London: Cassell.

²⁹ Some eco-socialists accept this and argue that attempts to win political power should be deferred 'until pressure for change in the direction of eco-socialism ha[s] built up in several countries'. Saral Sarkar (1999), above, n 3, p. 230.

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, I contend that the primary task today, both for 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 education 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 (protesting, direct action, civil disobedience, etc.) as well as 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 about the issues motivating the experiments. Nothing persuades, inspires, or educates quite like a real world example of 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 I would 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, I think that anarchists should not be bothered by eco-socialists advocating their bold legislative agendas because (even if one rejects centralised 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 other way – until more people see that other worlds are possible. In that light, all 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.³⁰ The real problem today isn’t so much getting the alternative vision or visions *correct* (although, of course, that should always be the aim). The real problem, I contend, is figuring out how to open up people’s imaginations to the *very possibility* of alternative modes of existence. 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, as noted above, 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 grassroots social movement should already have been able to create the new world. That is a perspective worth

³⁰ I borrow the phrase ‘biodiversity of resistance’ from Arundhati Roy.

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. I 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 all these reasons, I am again inclined to suggest that the ongoing conflict between eco-anarchists and eco-socialists may be, to a large extent, misconceived. In other words, it seems to me that if an eco-anarchist movement were to emerge strongly in culture, it may find it expedient, at some stage, to use the state to advance the eco-anarchist agenda, and at that point eco-anarchists may well be grateful that there is a developed tradition of democratic eco-socialism that has thought deeply about the best ‘policies’ for eco-socialism. Indeed, if this approach was successful, we can imagine the policies for eco-socialism first decentralising the state and then allowing, even encouraging, the state to ‘wither away’.

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 grassroots 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 more easily *permit* and *encourage* local, highly self-reliant, eco-communities to govern themselves – beyond a centralised state.

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 I would argue that the approach to transition outlined and defended 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 mobilised citizenry or vanguard party 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 decentralised that the system can evade a centralised confrontation of the old revolutionary kind.³¹

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 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 our prospects of success.

7. Conclusion

This purpose of this scoping paper has been to try to carve out a space for cooperation between radical, post-capitalist schools of political thought and practice that both historically and today tend to conceive of themselves as opposed. There are certainly

³¹ See Hardt and Negri (2000) above n 15.

some factions which will be dissatisfied: first, those who advocate violent revolution as the only coherent strategy to bring an end to capitalism; second, '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).

Another potential point of contention more broadly might be a claim that wild democracy, as outlined, can actually be accommodated within eco-anarchism and/or eco-socialism as they exist. To that objection I say: good! We are on the same page. The analysis, even so, would not have been redundant. By unpacking the tensions and antagonisms between these two necessary schools of radical politics, and highlighting the different challenges facing each perspective, it is hoped that the relationship between them is better understood and the potential for collaborative activism clearer.

One point on my 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 doubtless 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 recognising 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? Despite being theoretically sound, that perspective is pragmatically or politically naïve. We can't just be 'right'. We also need to be 'heard', and that means being cognisant of the diversity of audiences and the differing vocabularies that may need to be used to maximise our engagement with differing audiences. 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. 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; Occupy; manifestations of the gift economy; the voluntary simplicity and tiny house movements; deliberative democracy; community energy projects; activist hubs; artist hubs; alternative journalism websites; volunteer groups; farmers' markets; re-skilling workshops; charities; progressive non-profit enterprises and worker cooperatives; and 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 globalised

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 best can we direct our limited energies, time, and resources to advance the necessary causes of justice and sustainability. That question, however, does not allow for a generalisable answer. Political engagement is always relative to our contexts; 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 become conservative rather than transgressive.

There is obviously much more to be said on all these issues. Let me close by simply acknowledging that now, when asked whether I am an eco-anarchist or an eco-Marxist, I can say I am at once *both* and *neither*. Or, less paradoxically but more boldly, *we* radicals can say, in the spirit of solidarity, that we inhabit that heterogeneous space beyond 'normal' politics – sojourning passionately and compassionately in the democratic wild – where futures are unfolding experimentally in the present flow of revolt.

In the words of Henry Thoreau: "This world is but a canvas to the imagination."³²

³² Henry Thoreau (1983) *The Portable Thoreau* (ed, Carl Bode). London: Penguin.