

Against Nature

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Abstract

Much to the horror of our liberal colleagues, it appears that actual rising tides are less than helpful for those without boats. In this paper I critique the newest and greenest iteration of capitalism, appropriately termed green capitalism, and its proponents' dangerous desire to fashion a manageable economic crisis out of planetary ecological catastrophe. The economic (il)logic and ontological hubris of green capitalism, I argue, spurs only anthropocentric and imaginatively impoverished market-based solutions that fail to comprehend the fundamentally interrelated nature of social, economic, and ecological systems. Champions rather than challengers of unfettered accumulation and production, proponents of the 'new green economy' predictably offer neoliberal and depoliticized narratives of corporate social responsibility and green individual consumption as potential solutions. Combined, corporate social responsibility and the individualization of responsibility are driving profoundly anti-democratic and depoliticized approaches to social, economic, and ecological threats. What results, in other words, is the opposite of a social movement — an anti-social movement of pseudo-activity. Pseudo-solutions and pseudo-activities, I argue, must be rejected in order to cultivate necessarily political, democratic, and collective responses to the ongoing social, economic, ecological catastrophe.

Lay Summary

Nearly two decades into the twenty-first century, author and popular environmentalist Naomi Klein warns we are witnessing a great clash between our economic system and life on Earth. Although the planetary climate is changing, and rapidly degrading, the challenges we face are more than ecological: they are also social, philosophical, and economic. Unfortunately, many of our approaches to resolving the ongoing economic, social, *and* ecological catastrophe are committed to fixing capitalism. The most appropriate name for this approach is green capitalism, which advocates purchasing environmental ('green') products as a solution to our ecological problems. In this paper I critique green capitalism, in particular how governments defer responsibility by allowing corporations and individual consumers to bear the responsibility of addressing climate change. Rather than consume our way to sustainability, I argue, we need social movements that are political and community-based in nature, which will help us mitigate climate change *and* address social and economic inequality.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished work of the author, Anthony Matarazzo.

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Dedication

For GESM, Joel Kovel (1936-2018).

“when we cannot panic appropriately, we cannot take fittingly radical action. Dare to feel the panic. Then choose between the two main options: commit to the most militant and unwavering opposition to this system, or sit watching as it all goes down the drain.”

— Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (2017)

Section One: Against Nature

Among others, novelists Amitav Ghosh and Roy Scranton have called climate change a wicked problem. As storytellers, Ghosh and Scranton are well-acquainted with narrative's ability to imbue our relations and the world around us with a sense of meaning. The stories we tell ourselves about where we have been and where we are going overwhelm our sense of the present. Approaching ecological catastrophe in general, and climate change in particular, it is worth taking seriously Donna Haraway's advice: "It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories."¹ Unfortunately, the wickedness of climate change is heightened by a perceived lack of time. "For all the organic groceries, the energy efficient lightbulbs, appliances and buildings, the carbon trading and carbon taxes," Richard Smith writes, "the global ecology is collapsing faster than ever."² Responses to the escalating global environmental catastrophe, of which climate change is one manifestation, are more confused than ever.³ Anticipating the Sixth Extinction, for example, environmental activist Bill McKibben suggests "[w]e're running Genesis backward, decreating,"⁴ yet he warns that "we cannot wait for structural change. It takes too long and we simply cannot risk delay, not with the atmosphere furiously warming."⁵ In broad strokes, McKibben's fears frame the current debate on

¹ Donna Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene," in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason Moore (PM Press, 2016), 35.

² Richard Smith, "Green Capitalism: the God that Failed," *Real-world Economics Review* no. 56 (2011): 115.

³ The ongoing global ecological catastrophe includes, but is not limited to, climate change, deforestation, biodiversity and species-loss, ocean acidification, chemical and plastic pollution, and industrial farming.

⁴ Bill McKibben qtd. in Smith, "Green Capitalism," 115-116.

⁵ Bill McKibben qtd. in Ted Steinberg, "Can Capitalism Save the Planet?: On the Origins of Green Liberalism," *Radical History Review* no. 107 (2010): 8.

responses to the escalating global environmental catastrophe: *there is clearly a problem, but there is no clear solution.*

Nearly two decades ago, Michael Maniates observed,

At a moment when we should be vigorously exploring multiple paths to sustainability, we are obsessing over the cobblestones of but one path. This collective obsessing over an array of ‘green consumption’ choices and opportunities to recycle is noisy and vigorous, and thus comes to resemble the foundations of meaningful social action. But it isn’t, not in any real and lasting way that might alter institutional arrangements and make possible radically new ways of living that seem required.⁶

In 2005, Paul Wapner and John Willoughby similarly argued that the crises of capital, consumption, and collective action run parallel with problems of thought. It is necessary, they argue, to interrogate Western, and increasingly global, “notions and practices of development. The idea of progress is deep within our liberal bones and, since at least the Enlightenment, many of us expect things always to get better. The problem is that we usually measure such progress in terms of expanded productive capacity; [. . .] how many more goods we can produce, acquire, and consume. We need not do so.”⁷ The ongoing ecological catastrophe is more than a problem of economics and ecology: attempts to reinvigorate capitalism under the guise of the ‘green economy’ reflect our inability to imagine anything *qualitatively different*. Greening development and greening consumption — the twin peaks of green capitalism — has little if anything to do with “saving the planet,” finding collective political responses, and alternative forms of social

⁶ Michael Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?” *Global Environmental Politics* 1, no. 3 (2001): 38.

⁷ Paul Wapner and John Willoughby, “The Irony of Environmentalism: The Ecological Futility but Political Necessity of Lifestyle Change,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2005): 85.

arrangements, I argue, and everything to do with *saving capitalism*.⁸ Theorizing alternative ways of thinking and being, Scranton provocatively argues, entails “[l]earning to die as a civilization[:]
. . . letting go of this particular way of life and its ideas of identity, freedom, success, and progress.”⁹ Contrary to McKibben’s surprisingly conservative claim that began this discussion, which suggests that the appropriate response to the escalating global environmental catastrophe is *to make do with what we’ve got*, we must think big and we must think clearly:

the usual free market assurances — A techno-fix is around the corner! Dirty development is just a phase on the way to a clean environment, look at nineteenth-century London! — simply don’t add up. We don’t have a century to spare for China and India to move past their Dickensian phases. Because of our lost decades, it is time to turn this around now. Is it possible? Absolutely. Is it possible without challenging the fundamental logic of deregulated capitalism? Not a chance.¹⁰

In the first section of this paper I expound the ontology of green capitalism and engage with its proposed solutions to the escalating global environmental catastrophe. Building on critiques of capitalism and its incompatibility with planetary ecology by Brett Clark, John Bellamy Foster, Joel Kovel, and Karl Marx, I offer a critique of capitalism’s ontology; that is, how capital organizes the world and what capital presupposes about the world’s human and nonhuman things. In the second section of this paper I establish linkages between capitalism’s ontology and two of the predominant responses to the ongoing social, economic, and ecological

⁸ Anneleen Kenis and Matthias Lievens, “Greening the Economy Or Economizing the Green Project? When Environmental Concerns are Turned into a Means to Save the Market,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 48, no. 2 (2016): 221.

⁹ Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 2015), 21.

¹⁰ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. (New York, Penguin Books, 2015), 24.

catastrophe: corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the “individualization of responsibility.”¹¹ Individualizing responsibility, which I discuss at length, shifts environmental responsibility from governments and corporations to individual consumers, thereby “making climate change the problem of the ‘individual’ rather than . . . making governments or regulators effect significant policy changes through production and distribution.”¹² More attention must be given to the relationship between capitalism’s ontology and the ways in which CSR and the individualization of responsibility render alternative forms of economic, social, ecological production impossible. Combined, I argue, CSR and the individualization of responsibility are driving profoundly anti-democratic and depoliticized approaches to social, economic, and ecological threats. What results is not merely social movements “resembl[ing] the foundations of meaningful social action” that fail to “alter institutional arrangements and make possible radically new ways of living.”¹³ Worse, we are left with the opposite of a social movement — an anti-social movement of pseudo-activity. Political solutions recognizing the interrelations among economics, ecology, and our collective ways of producing our livelihoods are needed. From the premises in which green capitalism proceeds it cannot help but fail. Much to McKibben’s chagrin, green capitalism is not better than nothing. It is worse than anything. Although this paper is divided into two sections, three questions frame the larger discussion. What is green capitalism’s ontology and how does it operate in the world? How might we explain the insistence on reinventing capitalism, not only by unapologetic capitalists, but also, more confusingly, from the ranks of

¹¹ Maniates, “Individualization,” 33.

¹² Jo Littler, *Radical Consumption: Shopping for Change in Contemporary Culture* (New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2009), 95.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

academic and everyday environmentalists? And, lastly, how are political responses to the escalating global environmental catastrophe shaped by our long-held yet seldom interrogated assumptions about the relationships among social, economic, and ecological thinking?

Section Two: Ontologies

2.1. Green Capitalism and its (dis)Contents: The Logic of Green Capitalism

“I’m not denying that industrial processes, including manufacturing, transportation, and food production, are improving somewhat as governments regulate and corporations pledge sustainability. Nor am I disputing the efficiency gains from smart packaging, recycling, or smart buildings. . . . [H]owever, efficiency gains and savings from corporate sustainability are going straight back into churning out more nondurable and disposable products, building more big-box stores, and producing more billionaires.”¹⁴

Green capitalism retains capitalism’s ontology. At its core, the world of capitalism is imagined as the dual “interaction of independent units — Nature and Society.”¹⁵ The ontological dualism of nature and human society, and its corollary compartmentalization of systemic problems into discrete and individually manageable units, is fundamentally at odds with ecosystemic thinking. The logic of green capitalism, however, elides this reality by “stress[ing] the capacity of the market to deliver sustainability, and to reconcile economic, environmental, and social goals.”¹⁶ Green capitalism shares a number of affinities with ecological modernization, which Peter Dauvergne emphasizes is the expectation “that appropriate market-based environmental regulations can increase the competitiveness of industry and foster socioeconomic development. The theory assumes it is possible to stimulate green economic growth by creating incentives to promote markets and innovative technologies that increase efficiency, use less energy, deplete fewer resources, and recycle more waste.”¹⁷ Rather than advocate zero/degrowth economies with an emphasis on localized production and limited waste,

¹⁴ Peter Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2016), 146.

¹⁵ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York, Verso, 2015), 35.

¹⁶ Kenis and Lievens, “Greening the Economy,” 218.

¹⁷ Peter Dauvergne, “The Problem of Consumption,” *Global Environmental Politics* 10, no. 2 (2010): 8.

which might also require redistributive mechanisms to replace the promise of rising tides, theories of ecological modernization and the green economy remain committed to the global capitalist logic of accumulation by advocating for the incremental “restructuring of global capitalism into a global system of sustainable economic growth.”¹⁸ *Green growth*, in other words, promises that economies will expand while ecological footprints shrink.

Green growth and the creation of green markets are two indispensable components of green capitalism.¹⁹ Green growth and green markets promise to mobilize economies to protect social and ecological goods. More economic growth, the argument runs, is the “solution to every social problem, from poverty to power shortages and even ecological destruction.”²⁰ While green market critics like Ted Steinberg suggest that it is “hard to imagine that a system so good at producing wealth and so poor at distributing it . . . is likely to be turned around to save the earth without a great deal of reform,”²¹ green market evangelists contend that “[m]ore growth . . . will generate more income, and those with higher incomes will have the purchasing power to choose the more expensive environmentally friendly products or energy sources.”²² Importantly, economic growth is coupled with, and dependent upon, consumer choice and the individualization of responsibility. The political implications of the shift from collective to individualized responses to social, economic, and ecological problems cannot be overstated and will be discussed shortly. For now, however, it must be noted that the individualization of

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ Annaleen Kenis and Matthias Lievens, *The Limits of the Green Economy: From Re-Inventing Capitalism to Re-Politicising the Present* (London, Routledge, 2015), 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 61.

²¹ Steinberg, “Origins of Green Liberalism,” 9.

²² Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 61.

responsibility and the faith in (and growth of) green markets was part and parcel of broader neoliberal economic reforms during the 1980s:

green technology, green taxes, green labeling, [and] eco-conscious shopping . . . could ‘align’ profit-seeking with environmental goals, even ‘invert many fundamentals’ of business practice[.] [. . .] This turn to the market was an expression of broader trends from the 1980s in which activists retreated from collective action to change society in favor of individualist approaches to trying to save the world by embracing market forces — “shopping our way to sustainability.”²³

Implied in the logic of market fetishization is potentially ceaseless economic growth through the ever-expansion of existing markets, the creation of new ‘green’ markets (such as carbon markets), and the production of green commodities.

Advocates of green capitalism argue that there are two possible means to “steer the market” towards green ends: through government subsidization and taxation to ensure “products are “correctly priced,” and through “soft forms” such as labelling and certification systems.²⁴ Hard and soft market corrections, it is argued, will induce companies and consumers “to make environmental friendly choices on the market.”²⁵ Thus, the market’s malleability offers a potential *win-win-win* scenario: green choices are good for businesses, consumers, and for the environment. The green market concept, however, entails the dissection of nature into discrete exchange equivalents. The capitalization of nature, proponents claim, will incentivize economic actors to *care about the environment*, as the environment itself becomes the newest profitable

²³ Smith, “Green Capitalism,” 112-113.

²⁴ Kenis and Lievens, “Greening the Economy,” 219.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.

market. Clark and Foster argue that the capitalization of nature, “in mainstream economics[,] [is] the favorite response to the current environmental problem[:] to find ways to price nature, to turn natural resources into natural capital, and to turn the climate into a market (via emissions trading). The assumption is that private accumulation is efficient.”²⁶ The goal is to reduce the *ontologically externalized* natural world to exchange-value equivalents and, “within the capitalist system[,] . . . by privatizing nature[,] people learn to care for [nature] as their property.”²⁷ The green capitalist economy, as it remains a fundamentally capitalist system of production, separates part from whole in the process of *green capital accumulation*, which is not merely the act of accumulation, but also the process of turning nature into capital. The problem with this conception of nature, however, “is that, being made property, nature is *a priori* severed from its ecosystemic ways of being. Thus the ceaseless rendering into commodities, with its monetization and exchange, breaks down the specificity and intricacy of ecosystems.”²⁸

2.2. Ontologies of Modernity

*“True environmentalism demands nothing less than the rejection of modernity itself.”*²⁹

Modernity in the Western tradition since the European Enlightenment, I argue, contains two fundamental features: the first is temporal, the second is ontological, and both are related to the ongoing planetary ecological catastrophe. The first hazard of modern thinking is a linear

²⁶ Brett Clark and John B. Foster, “Marx's Ecology in the 21st Century,” *World Review of Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 153.

²⁷ Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: the End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* (London, Zed Books, 2007), 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁹ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000), 35.

temporal orientation towards the future that is inextricably bound to the ideas of progress and overcoming crisis. To be modern in this tradition of thought, and to be oriented towards the future, entails binary hierarchies inflected with power: past/present, backward/forward, archaic/modern.³⁰ Modernity, Bruno Latour argues,

carries with it [the] idea . . . of emancipation from some stagnant, archaic and stifling past, so that ‘modern’ is always a way to orient action according to an arrow of time that distinguishes the past from the future. [. . .] To modernize is to distribute agencies along a gradient that allows the orientation of action in such a way that those who resist . . . are beaten into submission.³¹

The *modernity-capitalism* assemblage proceeds towards (false) universality, in the form of globalization, by generating and overcoming crisis, so that “to be modern is to envision time as . . . a progression that is forever propelled forward by revolutionary rupture.”³² Ecological crises, therefore, do not reveal fundamental limits, but are barriers to be transcended on the path of progress. What is essentially a formulation of time and progress in the tradition of Hegelian theodicy functions to externalize social, economic, and ecological crises: a tweak here, a tweak there, and we’ll find ourselves back on the path to *the Good*.³³ Time conceived as progress flows from rupture to rupture, so the green capitalist fails to interpret the ongoing social, economic, and ecological catastrophe as “final proof of the damage done by techno-industrial hubris,” and instead hopes to internalize socio-ecological contradictions as “opportunit[ies] for humans [to]

³⁰ Latour, Bruno, “Fifty Shades of Green,” *Environmental Humanities* 7 (2015): 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

³² Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 121.

³³ Clive Hamilton, “The Theodicy of the ‘Good Anthropocene’,” *Environmental Humanities* 7 (2015): 235.

finally come into their own.”³⁴ More directly, the Western faith in modernity in the form of theodicy furnishes attempts to greenwash capitalism. Treading the path of least resistance, greenwashing alters the facade while leaving the structure intact. “Deep within our liberal bones,” to recall Wapner and Willoughby, “many of us expect things [to] always get better.”³⁵ We are now somewhat nearer to understanding why, as Maniates’ wondered, “we are obsessing over the cobblestones of but one path.”³⁶

The second hazard of modern thinking is its onto-epistemology: what the world is made of, what we know of the world, and the thought-structures we employ in relating with the world we’ve narrated to ourselves. Cartesian dualism and ontological compartmentalization are two abstractions from reality undergirding all historical and present forms of capitalism. Cartesian dualism partitions human society from nature, and as such human beings approach nature as an external “set of objects [to] act upon.”³⁷ Partitioning humans from nature epitomizes “a strict and total division not only between mental and bodily activity, but between mind and nature and between human and animal. As mind becomes pure thought [. . .] or thinking substance, mental, incorporeal, without location, bodiless — body as its dualised other becomes pure matter, [. . .] materiality as lack.”³⁸ The human/nature dichotomy sets in motion an entire host of corollary dualisms: mind/matter, presence/absence, telos/lack, subject/object, agent/resource. Each of the preceding binaries functions to objectify and strip nature of agency, intention, and telos, while

³⁴ Ibid., 233.

³⁵ Wapner and Willoughby, “The Irony of Environmentalism,” 85.

³⁶ Maniates, “Individualization,” 38.

³⁷ Moore, *Web of Life*, 33.

³⁸ Val Plumwood qtd. in Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene*, 84.

ascribing these qualities solely to (specific) human beings. Nature, and thus natural resources, are ends for human progress, rather than ends in themselves, as natural resources lack telos *a priori*. Undoubtedly, if we recall that both capitalism and modernity (as a socio-political orientation) attempt to (re)make the world in their own image (we call this globalization via steam-engines, steam-rollers, chains, chainsaws), reducing nature to capital entails the destruction not only of ‘natural environments’, but the humans and nonhumans living in and with these ecosystems.

The (green) capitalist’s Cartesian ontology is one of “humanity *and* nature,” that is, human society and nature *as discrete units of analysis*.³⁹ More conducive philosophically to calls for sustainable living, however, is an ontology of human society as ecologically-embedded or, in Jason Moore’s terms, a “humanity-in-nature” ontology.⁴⁰ This form of socio-ecological being requires thinking relationally and thinking-with nonhuman and inanimate natures as an additive rather than subtractive ontology of socio-ecological relations. In clearer terms, what we naively consider *human societies*, partitioned from nature, are in fact intricate assemblages “made up not only of people, but also of wood, fields, gardens, animals, and commodities.”⁴¹ The ontology of modernity, however, constructs the world oppositely through *compartmentalization*: a way of knowing, organizing, and relating in the world that “deliberately excludes things and forces (‘externalities’) that lie beyond the horizon of the matter at hand.”⁴² Compartmentalization is the basis for mistaking ecosystemic challenges for isolated problems, as compartmentalization disaggregates ecological issues like climate change into bite-size components such as carbon

³⁹ Moore, *Web of Life*, 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, U of Minnesota, 1987), 385.

⁴² Ghosh, *Great Derangement*, 56.

emissions. Car pollution, for example, captures the public's attention, while greenhouse gas emissions from trickier sources, such as global trade and transport networks or industrial farming, evade widespread scrutiny.⁴³

With the tools of Cartesian dualism and compartmentalization at hand, in the remainder of this section I will demonstrate that Cartesian dualism and compartmentalization are endemic to the logic of capitalism. As the newest iteration of capitalism — *only greener* — green capitalism retains the ontology of capitalism, and thus is incapable of distancing itself from its antecedents. Greening the production and consumption of market commodities, in other words, will not alter capitalism's underlying ontology, which requires as much attention as its financial institutions, trade regimes, advertising campaigns, and consumption patterns.

Capital crystallizes Cartesian thinking in the form of an expropriative social, economic, and ecological system. In *Grundrisse*, Marx writes:

Capital creates the bourgeois society, and the universal appropriation of nature. [. . .] For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate it under human needs, whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production.⁴⁴

⁴³ See Klein, *This Changes Everything*, on the contradictions between growing climate awareness and new trade regimes in the 90s. She writes: "What is most remarkable about these parallel processes — trade on the one hand, climate on the other — is the extent to which they functioned as two solitudes. Indeed, each seemed to actively pretend that the other did not exist, ignoring the most glaring questions about how one would impact the other. Like, for example: How would the vastly increased distances that basic goods would now travel — by carbon-spewing container ships and jumbo jets, as well as diesel trucks — impact the carbon emissions that the climate negotiations were aiming to reduce?" (76). She also notes the warming effects of industrial agriculture and global food systems, which she estimates currently account for roughly 19-29% of greenhouse gas emissions (78).

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London, Allen Lane, 1973), 409-410.

Rendering nature into a single extractable pool of resource equivalences requires setting human society apart from nature. Visualizing this relationship, we might call to mind the image of a pipeline, with nature's free gifts flooding society's pockets. As I have suggested, partitioning Nature from Society is a form of Cartesian dualism and compartmentalization. Disaggregating society, economy, and ecology relations, which is only possible in an ideological sense, prepares nature as a vast abstraction of natural means for human ends. Capitalism's compartmentalized ontology only perceives "the value of an ecosystem . . . [as] the sum of the (financial) values of its parts."⁴⁵ Qualitative differences in energy sources, therefore, are irrelevant to the capitalist, as profits are measured in quantitative terms. Annaleen Kenis and Matthias Lievens refer to the capitalist economic logic of disaggregation as "a quantitative logic of equivalence[.][. . .] To put it bluntly, X quantities of forest equals Y quantities of ocean. This results in forms of abstraction and blindness for qualitative differences that are typical of capital's way to represent the world."⁴⁶ Just as non-green economic markets render overpriced or undesirable commodities obsolescent, the quantitative logic of equivalence, in conjunction with green capitalism's market-driven solutions, guarantees the species-extinction of *quantitatively useless* (i.e., exchange valueless) flora and fauna.

Unfortunately, ecosystems do not function like markets, as quantitatively useless things have qualitative value in biotic communities. Klein captures well the juxtaposition of this ecological reality with capital's absurd ontology:

⁴⁵ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

The mantra of the early ecologists was ‘everything is connected’ — every tree a part of an intricate web of life. The mantra of the corporate-partnered conservationists, [operating under the laws of profit], in sharp contrast, may as well be ‘everything is disconnected,’ since they have successfully constructed a new economy in which the tree is not a tree but rather a carbon sink used by people thousands of miles away to appease our consciences and maintain our levels of economic growth.⁴⁷

The ontology of disaggregated, compartmentalized nature — nature as a series of atomized units — produces “a kind of system blindness: it continues to produce and pollute, regardless of the actual state of the ecosystems.”⁴⁸ System blindness, or what I am referring to as compartmentalization, perhaps more than any other term, captures the problematic onto-epistemology of green capitalism. The larger web of life is broken down into ecosystems that are further dismembered into discrete and exchangeable units, which results in the interpretation of ecological crises as independent events.⁴⁹ By failing to recognize the interrelatedness of climate change, forest degradation, species-loss, ocean acidification, and so forth, “[s]olutions for one ecological problem sometimes risk making other problems worse. For instance, agrofuels are presented as a solution to climate change . . . but also often lead to deforestation and undermine biodiversity.”⁵⁰ Such *pseudo-solutions* mistake social, economic, and ecological catastrophes for merely isolated *ecological* events and perpetuate a cycle of crisis displacement resembling globalization’s race to the bottom. A clear example of a *pseudo-solution* in recent years is the

⁴⁷ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 224.

⁴⁸ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

“burning down tracts of the Amazon rainforest in order to plant sugarcane to produce organic sugar for Whole Foods or ethanol to feed cars instead of people, . . . [or] burning down Indonesian and Malaysian rainforests to plant palm-oil plantations so Britons can tool around London in their obese Landrovers.”⁵¹ It should be clear by now that the tools with which we approach a problem shape the potential range of solutions. Unfortunately, just as integrated solutions are needed to face structural challenges — “advertising, economic growth, technology, income inequality, corporations, population growth, and globalization” — the dominant ontology in advanced capitalist societies is one of Cartesian and compartmentalized disaggregation.⁵² Instead of solving *big problems*, such as reining in global trade, curbing expansion and production by multinational corporations, and scaling back the corporatization of states, “the talk is of the value of partnering with business, of cause marketing and leveraging markets. Of eco-certification and eco-tourism. Fair trade logos and green products. Recycling and composting. Rewilding and wilderness preservation. Carbon offsetting and green technology. And the charity of billionaires and celebrities.”⁵³

⁵¹ Smith, “Green Capitalism,” 128.

⁵² Dauvergne, “Consumption,” 1.

⁵³ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 145-146.

Section 3: Problematics

3.1. Green Capitalism's Pseudo-solutions

“Better to do nothing than engage in localized acts whose ultimate function is to make the system run more smoothly. [. . .] The threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to ‘be active’, to ‘participate’, to mask the Nothingness of what goes on.”⁵⁴

In *The Limits of the Green Economy: From Reinventing Capitalism to Repoliticising the Present*, Kenis and Lievens identify four major components of the green capitalist economy. The first, faith in market solutions, was taken up in the first section of this paper. In this section, I build on the preceding discussion of green capitalism's ontology and branch out to the three remaining components of the green capitalist economy articulated by Kenis and Lievens: corporate social responsibility (CSR), individual (green) consumption, and green technological innovation.⁵⁵ The previous section, I hope, has clearly identified the ideological principles circumscribing the potential range of solutions to the escalating global environmental catastrophe offered by proponents of green capitalism. Unwavering faith in economic progress and market-based solutions, coupled with an anti-ecosystemic ontology, such as capitalism's, promotes highly individualized and neoliberal responses to social, economic, and ecological catastrophes. This section begins with a brief discussion of CSR as it pertains to the individualization of responsibility.

Present efforts to reconcile global capitalism with planetary ecology, under the banner of green capitalism, are the most recent example of capitalism's ability to create new areas of expansion during times of crisis. Green capitalism, above all else, is an attempt to address

⁵⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism* (New York, Melville House, 2014), 199.

⁵⁵ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 6.

ecological degradation without “moving beyond the confines of the capitalist economy.”⁵⁶ Employing Antonio Gramsci’s concept of passive revolution, Kenis and Lievens suggest that capitalism has internalized the critiques lobbed by environmentalists and reduced them to “a new motor for accumulation.”⁵⁷ The new motor of accumulation, and the production of green commodities, green appetites, and green consumption, I argue, is driven by transnational corporations operating under the tenets of CSR.

Oliver Falck and Stephan Hebllich define CSR “as voluntary corporate commitment to exceed the explicit and implicit obligations imposed on a company by society’s expectations of conventional corporate behavior.”⁵⁸ Notably, and I will return to this shortly, self-enforced corporate social commitments exist largely in place or in excess of state regulations. CSR, proponents argue, enables corporations to perform a regulative function in society as “a way of promoting social trends in order to enhance society’s basic order, [. . .] [and] consist[s] of obligations that cover both the legal framework and social conventions.”⁵⁹ Practically speaking, CSR ranges from “selling sustainable products or services and setting up labelling systems for such products, to adding environmental messages on product packages and engaging in initiatives for sectorial self-regulation.”⁶⁰ According to David Vogel, however, CSR’s impact on a corporation’s bottom-line is less than clear, as “[f]or virtually all firms . . . CSR performance and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁸ Oliver Falck and Stephan Hebllich, “Corporate Social Responsibility: Doing Well by Doing Good,” *Business Horizons* 50, (2007): 247.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 247.

⁶⁰ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of Greening the Economy*, 125.

reputations remain largely irrelevant to their financial performance: They neither improve it nor detract from it.”⁶¹

Jo Littler identifies widespread disagreement “over whether [CSR] even exists; or if it is simply a contradiction in terms.”⁶² The main tension in the discursive terrain of CSR is whether or not corporations can or ought to (*an important distinction*) drive social good.⁶³ Milton Friedman, on the one hand, claims that a corporation’s fiduciary responsibility *is its only responsibility*:

There is but one ‘social responsibility’ for corporate executives [. . .]: they must make as much profit as possible for their shareholders. This is their moral imperative. Executives who choose social and environmental goals over profits are, on the contrary, following muddled thinking, meddling with ‘externalities’ and producing a ‘fundamentally subversive doctrine’ that interferes with the free rein of market forces.⁶⁴

It is not necessarily the case that corporations *cannot/will not* contribute to the social good, according to Friedman, but rather that focussing on social goods above financial obligations detracts from what corporations do best: stimulating the economy, providing jobs, generating tax revenues, circulating money, and so forth. If it does not make good business sense, in other words, it is not the business of corporations.

Kenis and Lievens, again adopting Gramsci’s account of the passive revolution, on the other hand, argue that CSR or corporate environmentalism “has developed over the last 40 years

⁶¹ David Vogel, “The Private Regulation of Global Corporate Conduct: Achievements and Limitations,” *Business & Society* 49, no. 1 (2010): 82.

⁶² Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁴ Friedman qtd. in Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 52.

in response to increasing social criticism of corporations' environmental impact."⁶⁵ Central to corporate environmentalism are claims that "economic growth and ecological well-being are mutually supportive" and corporations can "do well by doing good."⁶⁶ Friedman and Vogel, from this perspective, have missed the mark: CSR is the cost of doing business in the new green economy. Corporations, however, have not missed this point: green is the new black, and "becoming green' [is] as an economic opportunity . . . [that] would be stupid to miss."⁶⁷ Few corporations indeed have been stupid enough to miss this opportunity, as a number of transnational corporations, "such as ArcelorMittal, BMW, Opel and Alstom, even became official partners of COP 19."⁶⁸ It is nearly impossible today, Dauvergne writes, "to find a brand company not promising a future of 'zero deforestation,' '100% recycling,' 'zero waste to landfill,' 'carbon neutrality,' '100% renewable energy,' 'zero water footprint,' and '100% sustainable sourcing'."⁶⁹ Across the board, "from big banks to multinationals, from marketing companies to media corporations," Kenis and Lievens argue, "the evidence that the business world is embracing the environmental cause seems to be overwhelming. There is no big bank or multinational which does not sponsor some environmental project."⁷⁰ For the world's most socially exploitative and ecologically pollutive corporations — Shell in particular — CSR is as a mechanism for responding to widespread social anxiety regarding corporations' ethically and morally

⁶⁵ Daniel Nyberg and Christopher Wright, "Creative Self-Destruction: Corporate Responses to Climate Change as Political Myths," *Environmental Politics* 23, no. 2 (2014): 209.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁷ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁹ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 45.

⁷⁰ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 20.

reprehensible actions.⁷¹ Thus, Littler argues, many of the “most controversial and wealthy companies . . . ‘excel’ at CSR. The way their profit is made comes under fire, and so it becomes profitable for them to rebuild their image. In this sense, CSR might be thought of as the PR equivalent of a carbon offset.”⁷²

Corporations significantly shape environmentalist discourses and practices in the twenty-first century. There are two related phenomenon worth considering that fall under the umbrella of *responsibility*: the gradual hollowing out of the increasingly corporate neoliberal state and the displacement of corporate responsibility onto consumers. Contrary to popular misconception, neoliberal governance “doesn’t mean that that ‘markets’ are ‘freed’ from state intervention; it means that the state is ever more involved in organising corporate dominance.”⁷³ Neoliberalization, in other words, is a particular form of *government action* that is conducive to state corporatization. By “actively push[ing] social democracy and the welfare state into decline,” and by dissolving governments of responsibility for environmental well-being, CSR operates as an instrument of neoliberal governance.⁷⁴ More specifically, CSR drives the “process of ‘[d]eregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision’.”⁷⁵ We might think of CSR, therefore, within the broader context of the neoliberal turn during the 1980s

⁷¹ Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 61.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷³ Richard Seymour, *Against Austerity*, (London, Pluto Press, 2014), 11.

⁷⁴ Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 67.

⁷⁵ David Harvey qtd. in Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 61.

in which re-energized, politically conservative forces in the US promoted the rhetoric of returning power and responsibility to the individual, while simultaneously curtailing the role of government in an economy that was increasingly characterized as innately self-regulating and efficient. Within this context, responsibility for creating and fixing environmental problems was radically reassigned, from government, corporations, and the environmentally shortsighted policies they were thought to have together fostered, to individual consumers and their decisions in the marketplace.⁷⁶

These concerted forces render CSR little more than the price of doing business in a world where dissent is not only anticipated and incorporated into the logic of (green) capitalism, but is commodified and sold back to consumers.⁷⁷ With the remainder of this paper, therefore, I theorize the implications of shifting environmental responsibility from the public arenas of government and citizen engagement to the private sphere of individual consumption. Why is it, we should ask, “[a]s sales rise and markets continue to globalize, the eco-business of the world’s leading corporations is doing little to lower global energy or resource consumption[?]”⁷⁸

3.2. Green Objects at the End of the World

“If each person makes these ‘little changes,’ folksy CEOs are telling customers, multinational corporations can ‘save the planet’ and still protect jobs, enhance financial security, and respect cultural diversity. This optimistic business message of the combined power of corporate social responsibility and eco-consumerism to advance sustainability

⁷⁶ Maniates, “Individualization,” 33.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁸ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 41.

is pulling increasing numbers of middle-class consumers into the orbit of environmentalism of the rich."⁷⁹

The individualization of responsibility,⁸⁰ or simply "responsibilization," is a product of "the new green order."⁸¹ Part of the neoliberal order, the new *green order* pursues continue[d] market-led corporate expansion; to ramify divisions between economically powerful and weak countries; and to seek to gain approval and endorsement for these strategies by making climate change the problem of the 'individual' rather than by making governments or regulators effect significant policy changes through production and distribution.⁸²

Green consumption is the proposed crux of the green capitalist economy, which sidesteps calls to challenge global capitalism as a system of production and ontology of disaggregation. To *green* the *capitalist* economy is to "transform the culture . . . *without transforming the economy.*"⁸³ Media influences consumers to identify themselves as drivers of environmental degradation, as "newspapers present us with images of 'dead seas' filled with garbage; television programmes air anxieties about plastic bags and patio heaters; journalists report that new power plants are being opened every week to cater for global production" to meet increasing consumer demand.⁸⁴ The causal mechanism in this scenario, however, inverts reality: "it's not the culture that drives the economy so much as, overwhelmingly, the economy that drives the culture: It's the insatiable

⁷⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁰ Maniates, "Individualization, 33.

⁸¹ Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 95.

⁸² Ibid., 95.

⁸³ Smith, "Green Capitalism," 141.

⁸⁴ Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 92.

demands of shareholders that drive corporate producers to maximize sales, therefore to constantly seek out new sales and sources in every corner of the planet.”⁸⁵ Capitalism’s ceaseless accumulation process, in other words, demands the creation of desires *ex nihilo* for capitalists to sell ever-increasing quantities of goods. It is imperative to understand, I argue, that capitalism’s ontology distorts reality (relations between the social, economic, and ecological) and, as a result, shapes our attempts to resolve the catastrophes it precipitates. By advancing the myth of endless accumulation, production, and consumption — only greener — green capitalism hails human beings, in an Althusserian sense, as consumer-objects.

The individualization of responsibility, through a distorted emphasis on individual consumption, hails human beings as objects rather than subjects of change by conceptualizing solutions to environmental degradation through “mechanisms and causes” as opposed to “motivations and reasons.”⁸⁶ The object/subject differentiation is closely linked to Maniates’ distinction between consumers and citizens, and the above distinctions are significant: to steer the masses (through advertising and directing consumer-choice by making green choices popular through shame campaigns or certification programmes) implies a top-down, elitist vision of social change and a cynical sort of “behaviourism which does not consider people as conscious citizens.”⁸⁷ By this point the problem should be clear: if *economic* solutions to *social, economic, and ecological* crises are (1) disaggregated from production and social organization at large, and (2) obsessed with recuperating capitalism, then there is little hope. Political solutions that recognize the interrelations among economics, ecology, and our collective ways of producing our

⁸⁵ Smith, “Green Capitalism,” 141-142.

⁸⁶ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 117.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

livelihoods are needed. Instead, however, we are left with a perverse form of green governmentality in which “the individual [is] governed and steered in such a way as to make her experience herself as a free and responsible subject.”⁸⁸ The green capitalist economy is bifurcated into “those ‘who steer’ the transition to a green economy and those ‘who have to be steered’ [—] between the Al Gores of the green economy project and the rest.”⁸⁹

Kenis and Lievens’ conceptualization of the subject-object dichotomy of the green capitalist economy serves as a useful proviso to Maniates’ distinction between consumers and citizens. For Maniates, mobilization against environmental threats requires an informed, active, and conscious body politic, and “calls . . . for individuals to understand themselves as citizens in a participatory democracy first, working together to change broader policy and larger social institutions, and as consumers second.”⁹⁰ The green capitalist economy, conversely, produces object-consumers who “imagine themselves as consumers first and citizens second.”⁹¹ Reframing the citizen/consumer dichotomy as citizen-subject/consumer-object emphasizes the lack of agency ascribed to objects, and the necessity of conceiving politics as collective action-oriented. If we recall the epigraph to this section, the ‘act’ of green consumption is not an expression of political agency, but merely expresses the individual’s affectability; it is not an activity, but the illusion of activity — *a pseudo-activity*: dissent deferred, while consumption accelerates with a green veneer. Buy more. Recycle more. Plant a tree. Ride a bike.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁰ Maniates, “Individualization,” 34.

⁹¹ Ibid., 34.

In their isolated consumption, the object-consumer produces their own isolation above all else, and the possibility of collective action ends before the process begins. Isolation-via-consumption is produced by individualized responses to ecological threats, such as contaminated water, air, and food. Andrew Szasz refers to this novel phenomenon as the inverted quarantine — the newest form of the quarantine society.⁹² The contemporary quarantine, he writes, inverts our traditional understanding of quarantine:

What if we inverted the dyadic opposition — healthy overall conditions / diseased individuals — upon which the logic of traditional quarantine rests? The new dyadic opposition would be diseased conditions / healthy individuals. The whole environment is toxic, illness-inducing. The threat is not discrete, is not just here or there, not just these persons and not others, so it is not possible to separate off the threat.⁹³

The inverted quarantine, “a strange, new, mutant form of environmentalism,” as aggregate individualized responses to collective threats in the form of self-imposed ‘isolation’, poses serious problems for political and democratic responses to social, economic, and ecological catastrophe.⁹⁴ Isolation, to reiterate, is achieved by purchasing green (e.g., organic foods) or ‘healthy’ commodities (including goods sold as alternatives to social undesirables, such as free trade coffee or uncertified seafood products). The problem with isolated forms of consumption is that they are utterly useless in addressing the root causes of concern associated with the ‘green’ commodities consumed. As Dauvergne argues, “asking consumers to act sustainably must not

⁹² Andrew Szasz, *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

substitute for firms and governments regulating and changing production.”⁹⁵ Proponents of *greening consumption* fail to recognize that acts of consumption are neither collective action solutions nor apolitical acts, but are, in fact, *depoliticized individualized engagements*. In simpler terms, the belief that enough *aggregate individual action* constitutes *politics* is a legacy of neoliberal ideology. Here, once more, we see neoliberalism and CSR converge to disaggregate collective responsibility and redirect it onto individuals. Rather than identify collective environmental threats, “join with like-minded folks, try to raise public awareness about the issue, try to get the political system to acknowledge it and deal with it,” individual consumers who “[drink] bottled water or [use] natural deodorant . . . [are] not trying to change anything. All they are doing is trying to barricade themselves, individually, from toxic threat, trying to shield themselves from it. Act jointly with others? Try to change things? Make history? No, no. I’ll deal with it individually. I’ll just shop my way out of trouble.”⁹⁶

There are two significant effects of the inverted quarantine that foreclose the political organization necessary for addressing social, economic, and ecological challenges. The first effect, “political anesthesia,” is an ideological product of neoliberal governmentality: “the important unintended consequence of mass practice of inverted quarantine.”⁹⁷ The bizarre world of the individualized and isolated consumer is the realization of Thatcher’s idiotic neoliberal *anti-society* society, and political anesthesia is the product of, and reciprocally reproduces, pseudo-activity and nihilism. The consumption acts of the inverted quarantine are pseudo-activities insofar as the predominant (if not only) effects produced are to alter one’s “perception

⁹⁵ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 149.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

of [the] situation” and lessen one’s “sense of being at risk.”⁹⁸ Consuming organic foods does not challenge the use of petroleum products in factory-farming, nor does consuming bottled water drive support for improved public water infrastructure. In fact, the opposite effect is produced, as consumers who can afford to *shop green* effectively valorize neoliberal market-solutions over collective political action: “When people believe they can deal with an environmental health threat simply by barricading themselves individually with acts of consumption, *rather than by trying to confront the threat through activism*, the process of politicization never starts.”⁹⁹

The second effect of the inverted quarantine relates to capitalism’s compartmentalized ontology and the separation of ecology, society, and economy (production). The individualizing effects of inverted quarantine consumption, in particular the foreclosure of political mobilization, exacerbates existing class inequalities, shames the poor, and accentuates the neoliberal disintegration of public life. This is what Felix Guattari refers to as **an ecosophical paradox**.¹⁰⁰ An ecosophical paradox “occur[s] because there is a disjunction between the types of environmental and social ecologies at play. In other words, buying green products may encourage healthy environmental ecologies, but they might also – intentionally or unintentionally – promote destructive social inequalities.”¹⁰¹ The purchase of green commodities in the green capitalist economy is the price of consumer-ship (citizens-become-consumers). The *choice* to reduce one’s ecological footprint, insofar as the metric for the reduction of one’s ecological footprint is consumption choices, is the privilege of a privileged class: the consumer-class (i.e., a

⁹⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 211. Emphasis added

¹⁰⁰ Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 100.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 101.

class defined by consumption patterns). The pseudo-action of purchasing green commodities is “made conditional upon having enough purchasing power. [. . .] [T]hose who have the capacity to buy organic food, for instance, can contribute to the transition to a green economy, others cannot.”¹⁰² Let’s refer to this paradox as the “privatisation of environmental morality.”¹⁰³ Unfortunately, but hardly surprising, the outrageous pricing of many green commodities precludes lower income segments of the population — local and global — from *doing their part to save the environment*. We might return once more to the narrative and the subject-object relations of green capitalism. Implicit in the privatization of environmental morality is contempt for the poor, and in the narrative of environmental protection qua green consumption is a “strategic choice which often remains implicit in green economy discourses, but is of great political importance: it is a choice to primarily engage with economically powerful actors . . . and turn them into the protagonists of a sustainability transition.”¹⁰⁴ The problem is not only displaced onto the poor: *the poor are posed as the problem*.

The discourse of green capitalism frames poverty, like ecological degradation, as an *isolated problem* to be overcome through accelerated industrial and technological development, rather than as a manifestation of structural violence that systemically (re)produces wealth inequality. Hence, I argue, solutions are not geared towards redressing the systematic reproduction of poverty, which would require redistributive mechanisms at the national level, and mass technological and financial transfers from the global North to the global South, but rather approach poverty as a naturally occurring condition. Indeed, as Dauvergne points out, “[a]t

¹⁰² Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 122-123.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

the start of 2015, the richest 42 corporate executives were worth roughly what one-third of humanity earns each year. Such inequality and wealth concentration is deeply problematic for global sustainability.”¹⁰⁵ Population growth receives similar theoretical treatment: more population = greater environmental strain. Incorrect. Identifying population and population growth as root causes of environmental degradation, exemplified by the IPAT formula (Impact = Population * Affluence * Technology), is problematic for two reasons. IPAT’s first shortcoming is that it grossly oversimplifies matters, which threatens the construction of meaningful social movements.¹⁰⁶ There is no room within the IPAT formula to challenge the anthropocentric beliefs presently undergirding human/extra-human relations. Human communities, in this formula, are disembodied from the wider *ecosystemic communities* in which they take part. Society, more simply, becomes a mere collection of human individuals partitioned from the absent signifier ‘Nature’.

IPAT’s second shortcoming is related to Maniates’ claim that it internalizes “an underlying set of assumptions . . . that reinforce an ineffectual Loraxian flight from politics.”¹⁰⁷ IPAT abstracts population from politics as a driver of environmental degradation and, therefore, unwittingly reverts to classist (and frequently racist) Malthusian arguments. In a truly bizarre twist, by focussing on population, the IPAT formula implicitly “shift[s] responsibility for our current predicament from the global North to the global South,”¹⁰⁸ despite evidence to the contrary: “[b]etween 1980 and 2005, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 18.5% of the global

¹⁰⁵ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Maniates, “Individualization,” 45.

¹⁰⁸ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 115.

population growth, but only 2.4% of the growth in emissions. The proportion of the US in global population growth in that period was 3.4%, whilst the US contributed 12.6% to the increase in greenhouse gas emissions.”¹⁰⁹ The irony, of course, is that the major drivers of climate change historically are global North countries with declining population rates. Technology, as a last respite, is finally offered as the panacea to ecological degradation and the growing strain of (some) human societies on planetary ecology: the techno-fix, proponents reassure, will ultimately curb the effects of humankind’s population and affluence. Technology, in other words, is central to green capitalism’s *win-win*. As with arguments about population and affluence, however, we must politicize technological discourses by acknowledging the relationships among science and power. “There are,” Klein writes, “a lot of losers in the win-win strategy. A lot of people are sacrificed in the name of win-win.”¹¹⁰

To be weary of technological evangelicalism is *not* to reject the significant role green technologies must play in resolving the ongoing social, economic, and ecological catastrophe. On the relationship between politics, ecological degradation, and technology, Vijay Prashad writes, “[i]t is not that new technologies — wind turbines, solar panels — will not be valuable, it is that capitalism as a social system will be unable to transform itself from the needs of profit to the needs of society.”¹¹¹ It is necessary, in other words, to politicize technology: that is, to bring technological solutions out of expertise’s echo-chambers, and to recognize that science and technology *do not* operate outside power and politics. Ecology, economics, politics, and technology are inseparable, and to separate these interrelated spheres is to commit the fallacy of

¹⁰⁹ Angus and Butler qtd. in Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 112.

¹¹⁰ Klein qtd. in Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 25.

¹¹¹ Vijay Prashad. “Introduction.” *Will the Flower Slip Through the Asphalt* (New Delhi, Leftword, 2017), 18.

modernity: to compartmentalize by treating technology-as-externality. To acknowledge how power and politics are hidden within scientific discourses is crucial, in particular when the technological solutions offered promise to reproduce capitalist productive and social relations.

Science divorced from an historical sensibility inevitably privileges the status quo by mistaking the existing state of affairs with a value-neutral position: “a focus on technology often remains blind to the political stakes underpinning specific technologies and it tends to lead to strategies which remain within the fundamental parameters of what currently exists.”¹¹² What exists is often mistaken for objectivity, necessity, or what ought to be; such an epistemological misstep recalls Latour’s conceptualization of modernity as an orientation towards the future at the expense of the past or premodern.¹¹³ Influenced by Carl Schmitt’s theorization of the post-political, Kenis and Lievens argue that removing technical language and scientific issues from the realm of political discourse dangerously limits the democratic participation necessary for resolving socio-ecological problems: “presenting oneself as taking a ‘scientific’ or ‘technical’ view does not amount to transcending conflict, but to engaging in conflict in a very particular way. Indeed, such a self-representation entails a specific type of polemic, whereby the opponent is delegitimised from the very start, as she is ideological, merely political or non-scientific.”¹¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, opponents of compartmentalizing techno-fixes from politics are portrayed as naive or impractical; proponents, wedded to the status quo, on the other hand, lay claim to

¹¹² Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 26.

¹¹³ Latour, “Fifty Shades,” 221.

¹¹⁴ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 26.

pragmatism, which is precisely the goal of ideological thinking: to “presen[t] itself as the opposite of ideology [—] as natural, logical, [or] evident.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 26.

Section Four: Conclusions

4.1. Green Capitalism at the End of the World and the Defence of Conflict

“[I]f we aspire to a more just and sustainable future, then one of the great tasks before us is to make clear to the wealthiest people in the wealthiest countries in the world [who] think they are going to be OK, that their privilege, their fortunes, and their physical safety are not predestined. Our task is to use all means available to us, at all levels of activism, hacktivism, sabotage, and violence if necessary, to ensure the obliteration of their impunity.”¹¹⁶

Combined, political anesthesia and eco-social paradoxes are driving profoundly anti-democratic, individualized, and depoliticized responses to social, economic, and ecological challenges. What we have, in other words, is “the opposite of a social movement” — an anti-social movement of pseudo-activity.¹¹⁷ Richard Seymour, in his 2014 book *Against Austerity*, argues that “a crisis of capitalism is not just an economic crisis,” but also a crisis of politics and ideology.¹¹⁸ Like Europe’s austerity crisis, the ongoing catastrophe occupying these pages is multi-dimensional. The impediments to collective political mobilization against the intensifying regime of green capitalism are structural and ideological holdovers from Cold War politics and the surge of neoliberalism during the 1980s. How, Klein asks,

could societies invest massively in zero-carbon public services and infrastructure at a time when the public sphere was being systematically dismantled and auctioned off? How could governments heavily regulate, tax, and penalize fossil fuel companies when all such measures were being dismissed as relics of ‘command and control’ communism?

¹¹⁶ Susan Abulhawa, “Before the Last River.” in *Will the Flower Slip Through the Asphalt*, edited by Vijay Prashad (New Delhi, Leftword, 2017), 110.

¹¹⁷ Szasz, *Shopping our Way*, 3.

¹¹⁸ Seymour, *Austerity*, 4.

And how could the renewable energy sector receive the supports and protections it needed to replace fossil fuels when ‘protectionism’ had been made a dirty word?¹¹⁹

The name of the game for radical environmentalism is to change the narrative: to recognize that pragmatism is a privilege of the privileged; to denaturalize the philosophy of capitalism; to refuse palliatives and techno-fixes; to reject the seductive *win-win*; to throw out the language of green capitalism that crystallizes human sovereignty over the nonhuman world; “to learn to die as a **[capitalist]** civilization.”¹²⁰

What does it mean in the midst of climate change and the Sixth Extinction to suggest that it is “easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism?”¹²¹ This frequently cited proposition, often attributed to Jameson or Žižek, misses a crucial point: capitalism already exists at the end of the world(s). Capitalism, including its newest green iteration, produces two types of crisis that end human and nonhuman worlds.¹²² The first type of crisis is ecological and its manifestations appear as challenges to capital or what Marx, Foster, and Kovel, among others, refer to as capital’s *barrier/boundary problem*: “capital is equivalently intolerant of necessity [. . .]. The boundary/barrier ensemble then becomes the site of new value and the potential for new capital formation, which then becomes another boundary/barrier, and so forth and on into infinity – at least in the logical schemata of capital.”¹²³ These sites of crisis are crises for *individual capitalists*, but not the system as such: there are winners and losers, but

¹¹⁹ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 19-20.

¹²⁰ Scranton, *Learning to Die*, 21.

¹²¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative* (London, Zero Books, 2009), 2.

¹²² Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 65.

¹²³ Kovel, *Enemy of Nature*, 42.

the “treadmill of accumulation” rumbles on.¹²⁴ In some cases, as Kovel demonstrates, environmental catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina offer fantastic new opportunities for capitalist development “to make a lot of money out of destruction.”¹²⁵ The second type of crisis “is [a] crisis of the quality of the ecosystem as such, and therefore[,] of human life[.] [. . .] Millions of people are suffering its consequences: climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, all kinds of health problems. This crisis is not periodic but permanent.”¹²⁶ The relationship between these two forms of crisis is what I am referring to as *green capitalism at the end of the world*. Capitalism’s increasingly clear ecological limits are revealing themselves in every crevice and corner of the Earth, yet “[c]apitalism can survive for a long time in the middle of an ecological wasteland. In principle, it does not need to take account of the deteriorating state of the ecosystems, just as it does not necessarily need to guarantee access to affordable and decent health care for the mass of the people.”¹²⁷ Each time a language dies, or an island washes under the waves, or a species goes extinct, capitalism exists at the end of a world. For this to stop, as Marx might say, the expropriators must be expropriated.¹²⁸

Marx remarks that “all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice[:] . . . the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.”¹²⁹ As countries, cultures, and civilizations are washed away or sink under the waves, those who survive will be our

¹²⁴ Clark and Foster, “Marx’s Ecology in the 21st Century,” 145.

¹²⁵ Kovel, *Enemy of Nature*, 21.

¹²⁶ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 65.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹²⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York, Penguin, 1992), 929.

¹²⁹ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (Selections),” ed. Lawrence H. Simon. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1994), 188.

storytellers. What is presently tragic will become utterly farcical if the survivors of the capitalist world-ecological disaster believe green capitalism to be their saviour. There are different paths. To imagine alternative social, economic, and ecological arrangements to green capitalism, such as an ecosocialist politics concerned primarily with reducing carbon dependence, “advanc[ing] policies that dramatically improve lives, close the gap between rich and poor, create huge numbers of good jobs, and reinvigorate democracy from the ground up,” demands refusing the liberal compromise of reconciling our present modes of production and consumption with an increasingly dystopian future.¹³⁰ It’s time to rethink the value of conflict.

To be clear, I am *not* calling for polite debate within the framework of liberal environmentalism, and certainly not creeping incrementalism that attempts, at best, to alter the facade of capitalism while leaving its core intact. The first challenge for those of us on the left must be to leave behind what Seymour refers to as “consolatory ideologies,”¹³¹ that is, a sense of moral superiority furnishing an unstated faith in poetic justice.¹³² Capitalism, in other words, “will not simply ‘collapse’ due to ecological destruction.”¹³³ Mikhail Bakunin realized in the nineteenth century that states and privileged classes are neither suicidal nor prone to self-sacrifice, and it’s high time we realize the same of multinational corporations hiding behind carefully crafted CSR discourses.¹³⁴ Dauvergne is correct that “[m]oving toward global sustainability will require the rich to confront the violent, unjust, and risky sources of their

¹³⁰ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 9.

¹³¹ Seymour, *Austerity*, 151.

¹³² Trump couldn’t possibly win, we told ourselves. He’s a racist and a sexist.

¹³³ Kenis and Lievens, *Limits of the Green Economy*, 65.

¹³⁴ Mikhail Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, compiled by Grigori Makismov (Illinois, Free Press, 1964), 217.

wealth[.]” but important questions remain: who is going to force this confrontation?¹³⁵ What is to be done with those who refuse to acknowledge the bloody source of their dirty money? Considering the stakes for multinational corporations and carbon-based economies, these are indispensable questions moving forward. McKibben warns us, “we have five times as much oil and coal and gas on the books as climate scientists think is safe to burn. We’d have to keep 80 percent of those reserves locked away underground to avoid that fate. Before we knew those numbers, our fate had been likely. Now, barring some massive intervention, it seems certain.”¹³⁶ Fossil fuel levels *safe to burn*, an oxymoron emblematic of the times, means maintaining rising temperatures within 2 degrees celsius — the “official position of planet Earth.”¹³⁷ It should be noted that such a number is already “a prescription for long-term disaster”¹³⁸ and a political determination reflecting the relative worth of nations: “At the Copenhagen summit, a spokesman for small island nations warned that many would not survive a two-degree rise: ‘Some countries will flat-out disappear.’ When delegates from developing nations were warned that two degrees would represent a ‘suicide pact’ for drought-stricken Africa, many of them started chanting, ‘One degree, one Africa’.”¹³⁹ Even *if* we choose the paradoxically ambitious yet implicitly racist target of two degrees, limiting GHG emissions from oil and natural gas profiteering “will mean forcing

¹³⁵ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 144.

¹³⁶ Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,” www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719, (July 19, 2012).

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, no page.

¹³⁸ Hansen qtd. in McKibben, no page.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, no page.

some of the most profitable companies on the planet to forfeit trillions of dollars of future earnings by leaving the vast majority of proven fossil fuel reserves in the ground.”¹⁴⁰

With the help of American Civil War historians, Christopher Hayes draws provoking parallels between the amount of wealth that must be forfeited today by some of the world’s wealthiest people, corporations, and states with nineteenth-century slavery abolition movements. Economic historian Gavin Wright reports that “slaves represented nearly half the total wealth of the South on the eve of secession,”¹⁴¹ while Civil War historian Eric Foner reiterates that, “[i]n 1860, slaves as property were worth more than all the banks, factories and railroads in the country put together.”¹⁴² He continues, “think what would happen if you liquidated the banks, factories and railroads with no compensation.”¹⁴³ Hayes’s argument is most instructive in its engagement with the likelihood, perhaps necessity, of both violent and nonviolent conflict:

th[e] liquidation of private wealth [during abolition] is the only precedent for what today’s climate justice movement is rightly demanding: that trillions of dollars of fossil fuel stay in the ground. It is an audacious demand, and those making it should be clear-eyed about just what they’re asking. They should also recognize that, like the abolitionists of yore, their task may be as much instigation and disruption as it is persuasion. *There is no way around conflict with this much money on the line, no*

¹⁴⁰ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 452.

¹⁴¹ Gavin Wright qtd. in Christopher Hayes, “The New Abolitionism,” www.thenation.com/article/new-abolitionism/, (July 6, 2015).

¹⁴² Eric Foner qtd. in Hayes, no page.

¹⁴³ Eric Foner qtd. in Hayes, no page.

*available solution that makes everyone happy. No use trying to persuade people otherwise.*¹⁴⁴

My argument is *not exactly* that we lob the heads off of CEOs of fossil fuel companies and other Fortune 500 mega-polluters. It is, however, a demand that we recognize the history of globalization is largely one of states and corporations, frequently in tandem, engaging in violence against people, their environments, and their ways of life.¹⁴⁵ Let's have no illusions: each day the world warms, "building a new coal-fired power plant, or continuing to operate an old one, or drilling for oil, or expanding an airport, or planning for a highway is [an] irrational violence."¹⁴⁶ Although I am neither advocating for physical violence *per se*, nor am I conceiving violence as merely one option among many, and while I categorically reject indiscriminate, unthinking, and random acts of violence, I also believe it is important to warn against an unconditional dismissal of physical violence that betrays the belief that we've reached the end of history: everything worth fighting for has already been won. There are examples in history, most clearly the case with slavery abolition, where two ways of life are nothing short of mutually exclusive, and this is precisely Klein's point about global capitalism and planetary ecology in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Are we prepared to risk the hypothesis that when the waters rise to critical levels, and borders are shut, governments won't respond with armed-lifeboat ethics? How many more parts per million, how many more conferences of the parties, how many more lost elections, and how many more failed climate targets before activists have

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., no page. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁵ See Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich*, on the assassination of environmental activists. Dauvergne cites Global Witness's findings that "over 900 recorded murders of environmental activists [occurred] from 2002 to 2013, with the average number of killings each year more than doubling after 2009" (96).

¹⁴⁶ Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (New York, Verso, 2017), ebook edition, introduction: no page.

no choice but to adopt *strategic violent sabotage* — not against people — but against coal-fired power plants, industrial development projects, pipelines, open-pit tar sands, and fossil fuel infrastructure? Hoping that transnational fossil fuel companies and oil exporting countries will leave 80% of their potential revenues in the ground, to recall Bakunin and the developing-nation advocates, is suicidal. If we are foolish enough to think that our governments will swoop in and save us at the last minute, then it's quite clear we need to exorcise the little bourgeois(e) deep inside all of us who secretly believes our problems will be solved in a parliamentary setting over polite discourse and a quick vote. In reality, we have Janus-faced leaders who declare themselves to be leaders *against* climate change, as if climate change were a monster *not of our own making*, while purchasing pipelines. In short, there's no time for this brand of polite debate, and to assume that the rich and powerful will somehow, someday get their shit together is a bit like watching the band while the ship sinks.

Debate focussed on reconciling capitalism with planetary ecology, I argue, is no longer an option for radical environmentalism, for the options we need to avert further planetary ecological disaster are not truly on the table. Attempts to *green* the capitalist economy, as I have argued, are firmly within the logic of global capitalist accumulation and, therefore, necessarily entail modes of production and forms of consumption that are untenable with anything resembling ecological sustainability. Klein puts into simple terms the fundamental incompatibility of global capitalism and planetary ecology:

the bottom line is what matters here: our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in

humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.¹⁴⁷

Unfortunately, proponents of green capitalism stubbornly disagree with Klein, as they confusedly cling to the IPAT formula, champion *more* growth, displace blame onto consumers, and kneel at the altar of green technology. The finger is pointed everywhere *other than at capitalism and its ontology*. So long as reinventing and reinvigorating capitalism is the point of departure, so long as attempts to 'fix the environment' are framed within this hegemonic discourse, debate is worse than worthless — it's actively part of the problem.

Skepticism of debate, in this sense, is hardly a new idea, as Gramsci understood that in times of crisis "the 'traditional ruling class' is at a considerable advantage over opponents because of its existing power. Its control over the dominant institutions, its loyal cadres of supporters in think-tanks and the media, its economic and political strength, all enable it to adapt better to the crisis and propose solutions which meet its interests."¹⁴⁸ With such a view of crisis, it is unsurprising that responses to ecological degradation are so frustratingly entrenched in dominant thought paradigms. Dauvergne's problematizing of *environmentalism of the rich* importantly bridges Gramsci's theoretical insights with the cooptation of mainstream environmentalism by money and power. Environmentalism of the rich — "where growth in production remains the top priority[,] . . . where 'sustainability' is defined as the 'eco-business',"¹⁴⁹ where NGOs like the Environmental Defense Fund are bought by corporations like

¹⁴⁷ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Seymour, *Austerity*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 4.

Wal-Mart¹⁵⁰ — “is having insidious consequences[:] weakening the power of environmentalism as a whole to function as a counternarrative and counterforce to consumer capitalism, while opening up opportunities for ruling elites to coopt aspects of the movement to enhance the legitimacy of business as usual.”¹⁵¹ Radical environmentalism, in contrast to environmentalism of the rich, must be as stubborn as its opponents: it must reject debate that does not *begin* with immediate, rapid decarbonization of economies and decoupling from fossil fuel use. Indeed, radical environmentalists ought to be *suspicious* of ‘compromise’ and *skeptical* of gains conceded by elites that function within the status quo. If you’re pushing for a carbon tax, as many environmentalists are, and you find the CEOs of ExxonMobil and Duke Energy on board, you’ve probably taken a wrong turn.¹⁵² Radical environmentalism requires a zero-sum, non-compromising attitude towards defending not only *what is easy to defend*, “what is good about the status quo,” but also, more importantly, towards defending “what is new and radical, and . . . what is *not yet popular*.”¹⁵³ Radical change, in other words, is likely to be extremely unpopular in the present,¹⁵⁴ but “[i]f we attempt to ground our agenda in terms of the dominant criteria of *what is good for capitalism*, we cannot win.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 207.

¹⁵¹ Dauvergne, *Rich*, 141.

¹⁵² Smith, “Green Capitalism,” 122.

¹⁵³ Seymour, *Austerity*, 159. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁴ If it were popular, we could hardly call it radical.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

4.2. Conclusions: Ideology, Stories

If not more polite debate, then how should the left proceed? In his most recent book, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*, Andreas Malm writes: “the only salubrious thing about the election of Donald Trump is that it dispels the last lingering illusions that anything else than *organised collective militant resistance* has at least a fighting chance of pushing the world anywhere else than head first, at maximum speed, into cataclysmic climate change.”¹⁵⁶ In the first place, the left needs to *initiate and win battles*. Militant resistance, in a non-violent sense, must take the form of collective, action-oriented ideological and political conflict. In 2005, David Foster Wallace began his commencement speech at Kenyon College with a story about “these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, ‘Morning, boys, how’s the water?’ And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, ‘What the hell is water?’”¹⁵⁷ As social beings born into ideology, Foster’s short fable demonstrates, the battle against seemingly natural and intractable ideologies must be front and centre of any meaningful social movement. In large part, this begins with pushing back against the social, economic, and ecological project of neoliberalism, which “has taught us to see ourselves as little more than singular, gratification-seeking units, out to maximize our narrow advantage, while simultaneously severing so many of us from the broader communities whose pooled skills are capable of solving problems big and small.”¹⁵⁸ How, to recall my earlier assessment, might we avoid perpetuating an anti-social movement, the opposite of a social

¹⁵⁶ Malm, *This Storm*, introduction, no page. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁷ David Foster Wallace, “This Is Water” (Gambier, Ohio, Kenyon College, 2005).

¹⁵⁸ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 460.

movement, which is so obviously the ideological project of neoliberalism? Fortunately, as Klein forcefully argues, existing social movements focussed on Indigenous land claims, decolonization, environmental racism, and sex, gender, and sexuality, just to name a few, might rally around the escalating global environmental catastrophe “as the furthest-reaching crisis created by the extractivist worldview, and one that puts humanity on a firm and unyielding deadline[.] [C]limate change can be the force — the grand push — that will bring together all of these still living movements.”¹⁵⁹ It is important to be clear here that the battle against neoliberal ideology, (green) capitalism, and the escalating global environmental catastrophe is not about dissolving differences in favour of some new, amorphous, master category. Social, political, economic, and ecological goals, and grievances against extractivist, imperialist, patriarchal, and racist settler-states (and their corporate counterparts), must be articulated in a language that is intersectional and complementary rather than divisive and contradictory. It is for these reasons that a critique of capitalism’s ontology occupied many of these pages. Undoubtedly, moving forward, this will require mutual solidarity, which is an opportunity as much as a hurdle. The severity of the escalating global environmental catastrophe, and the widespread reach of its effects, provides us with the chance to be responsible *to* and *for* one another, and to remake our societies around Marx’s famous principle: “from each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] needs!”¹⁶⁰ Nothing short of macro-social change will suffice:

when major shifts in the economic balance of power take place, they are invariably the result of extraordinary levels of social mobilization. At those junctures, activism

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 459.

¹⁶⁰ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2009), 11.

becomes something that is not performed by a small tribe within a culture, . . . but becomes an entirely normal activity throughout society[.][. . .] During extraordinary historical moments — both world wars, the aftermath of the Great Depression, or the peak of the civil rights era — the usual categories dividing ‘activists’ and ‘regular people’ became meaningless because the project of changing society was so deeply woven into the project of life. Activists were, quite simply, everyone.¹⁶¹

The new location of ideological conflict for radical environmentalism must be sought in novel *mass articulations* — that is, new forms of associations — between modes of production (how we produce), forms of social organization (how we organize), and modern lifestyles (how we live). In his “theory of articulation” Ernesto Laclau adopts Plato’s allegory of the cave in which “[m]en who, since childhood, have had their backs to the entrance of a cave, [and] cannot see the outside world. On the wall inside the cave are projected the shadows of other men, and by linking the voices of these men to their shadows, the inhabitants of the cave conclude that the first derive from the second.”¹⁶² For Laclau’s purposes, the allegory illustrates false causality (misarticulations) between the shadows and voices; the latter, the cave-dwellers *assume*, emerge from the former. For environmentalists today, however, it must be a top priority to dispel the *misarticulations* — like those of the cave — between industrialization, modernization, capitalism, and our conceptualization of the good life. The green capitalist and ecological modernist camps have recognized the value of articulation in the terrain of ideological warfare. The *Ecomodernist Manifesto* claims, for example,

¹⁶¹ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 459.

¹⁶² Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London, New Left Books, 1977), 7.

[m]odernization has liberated ever more people from lives of poverty and hard agricultural labor, women from chattel status, children and ethnic minorities from oppression, and societies from capricious and arbitrary governance. Greater resource productivity associated with modern socio-technological systems has allowed human societies to meet human needs with fewer resource inputs and less impact on the environment. More-productive economies are wealthier economies, capable of better meeting human needs while committing more of their economic surplus to non-economic amenities, including better human health, greater human freedom and opportunity, arts, culture, and the conservation of nature.¹⁶³

Numerous academics, rightly so, have critiqued the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* for drawing false causality between industrialization, modernization, and some vague sense of ‘universal’ progress.¹⁶⁴ Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg go so far as to suggest that “[m]odernity, which includes liberal ideas of universal justice, is built on displaced and dead bodies. [. . .] [T]he manifesto dismisses this history while masking the unequal distribution of modernity’s benefits.”¹⁶⁵ Modernity is a narrative, and it’s time we tell a different story.

The stories needed today must disarticulate the social benefits of modernity from industrial, carbon-based, capitalist modernity itself, and rearticulate a more holistically social, political, and ecological sense of *the good life* that emphasizes not only important (*re*)*politicized* virtues such as public life, inter- and intra-community solidarity, and civic duty, but also

¹⁶³ Asafu-Adjaye, John. et al., *An Ecomodernist Manifesto*, <http://www.ecomodernism.org/manifesto-english/>, (2015), 27-28.

¹⁶⁴ Among others, Rosemary-Claire Collard, Eileen Crist, Peter Dauvergne, Jessica Dempsey, Clive Hamilton, Bruno Latour, and Bronislaw Szerszynski.

¹⁶⁵ Collard, Rosemary-Claire. et. al., “The Moderns’ Amnesia in Two Registers,” *Environmental Humanities* 7 (2015): 228.

reciprocity with nature's metabolism.¹⁶⁶ In simpler terms, mass social movements and political mobilization are prerequisites for living in the "warming condition," and they must be bolstered by a widespread sense of reciprocal collaboration in and with nature and the *sustainable and renewable* forms of energy it has to offer.¹⁶⁷ Changing how we think ourselves in relation to nature and natural resources is half the battle:

"this need to adapt to nature is what drives some people mad about renewables: even at a very large scale, they require a humility" that bourgeois habits of owning the earth cannot quite stomach. "The power of the sun, wind, and waves can be harnessed, to be sure, but unlike fossil fuels, those forces can never be fully possessed," and so a turn to them would usher in "a fundamental shift in power relations between humanity and the natural world."¹⁶⁸

Shifts in production away from fossil fuels must be coupled with an ontological shift away from anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. If not, the necessary global shift towards socially-directed economies, driven by sustainable and localized production based on true renewables such as wind, water, and solar, seems impossible. We must resist the seductive but ultimately unattainable promises of green capitalism. The narrative of green capitalism — its grandiose promises and marginal gains — is not better than nothing. It is worse than anything.

¹⁶⁶ Clark and Foster, "Marx's Ecology in the 21st Century," 145.

¹⁶⁷ Malm, *This Storm*, conclusion, no page.

¹⁶⁸ Naomi Klein qtd. in Malm, *This Storm*, conclusion, no page.

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