

# Interrogating the Post-Political: The Case of Radical Climate and Climate Justice Movements



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**In Memory of my Dad**

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## Abstract

Between mid-2006 and late-2010 the UK experienced a parabola of spectacular protests relating to climate change, ranging from the occupation of airport taxiways through to the blockade of coal power stations. Mobilizing thousands of people, this ‘radical climate movement’ was distinguished from a popular concern with climate change by its general commitment to direct action, widely-held anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian beliefs, and a stated focus of tackling the ‘root causes’ of climate change. Written from within this ‘radical climate movement’, this thesis is an investigation into the praxis of the movement, exploring the extent to which participants contributed to the emergence of a ‘radical’ knowledge of climate change, and thus assessing the appropriateness (and effectiveness) of the movement’s methodologies.

Driven by an internal debate regarding the movement’s tendency to depart from its radical political roots, the theoretical core of this thesis draws upon the concept of the ‘post-political condition’, a condition of the liberal consciousness that forecloses the very possibility of a political praxis on the climate. It is contended that a specific post-political discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ emerged in the late-1980s which, defined by an apocalyptic discourse that placed a ‘carbon fetishism’ at the core of its rationale, evacuated the space for political discourse in favour of a general humanitarian effort to forestall “the greatest danger we’ve ever faced”.

It is suggested that despite the efforts of many to confront the problem, the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’ broadly failed to escape this liberal discourse. The research thus turns to the international mobilizations around the COP15 in 2009, concluding that the emergence of a discourse of ‘climate justice’ was a partial attempt to overcome this post-political discourse. From the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC) in Bolivia, to the continued organization of the Climate Justice Action (CJA) network, it is suggested that ‘climate justice’ diverged according to two separate discourses - one around ‘climate debt’ and another around anti-capitalist critique. It is finally concluded that a true *politicization* necessitates celebrating the death of the environmental movement, instead placing our social-reproduction at the core of any claim to an ecological politics.

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## List of Acronyms

- AGW - Anthropogenic Global Warming
- ALBA - Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas
- CaCC - Campaign Against Climate Change
- CAN - Climate Action Network
- CfCA - Camp for Climate Action
- CJ - Climate justice
- CJA - Climate Justice Action
- CJN! - Climate Justice Now!
- CO<sub>2</sub> - Carbon Dioxide
- CO<sub>2e</sub> - Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
- CONAMAQ - National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu
- COP - Conference of Parties
- COP15 - The 15th Conference of Parties
- CMPPC - World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, (acronym from the Spanish, *Conferencia Mundial de los Pueblos sobre el Cambio Climático y los Derechos de la Madre Tierra*)
- DEFRA - UK Government Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- DOA - Day Of Action
- ECX - European Climate Exchange
- EDA - Environmental Direct-Action
- GCCA - Global Campaign for Climate Action
- HTP - Hit the Production of Climate Chaos!
- IPCC - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- PPM - Parts Per Million
- ICSU - International Council of Scientific Unions
- IEN - Indigenous Environment Network
- IMF - International Monetary Fund
- MAS - *Movimiento al Socialism - Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* (Movement Towards Socialism - Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples)
- MST - *Movimentos dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement)
- NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
- NTAC - Never Trust A Cop
- RP! - Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice!
- SCC - Stop Climate Chaos

TWN - Third World Network

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme

WCA - Workers Climate Action

WMO - World Meteorological Organization

WSF - World Social Forum



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### *1.0 Introduction*

At around 10pm on August 11th 2007, myself and eight others sat nervously in the back of a van filled with scaffolding poles, empty oil-barrels, thermos flasks and coils of rope. Most of us had never met each other before, and despite having crumpled photocopied maps of the area surrounding Heathrow airport, we weren't exactly sure of our destination. An hour and a half later, in a field just outside the village of Sipson, we had erected a series of 'tripods' upon which a few brave individuals were balanced, blockaded the field-entrance with barrels, and hurriedly set up a series of precarious gazebo-esque structures. Around fifty of us had successfully secured the site for the 2007 Camp for Climate Action (CfCA), a week-long action camp that would bring together more than 2000 people and gain international media coverage.

Emerging out of the ashes of the anti-G8 Dissent! network that had been at the core of the anti-capitalist mobilizations against the Glenagles G8 in 2005, the CfCA would become one of the more prominent aspects of an amorphous 'radical climate movement'. Over the following five years, this movement would become constituted through hundreds of actions - ranging from thousands descending on Ratcliffe-upon-Soar power-station (see *Photo 1.1*), through to the blockading of the train-line at Ffos-Y-Fran opencast mine or the wide-spread occupation of airport taxi-ways - mobilizing thousands of people. These actions would go on to inspire a wave of similar actions in Europe and beyond, ranging from the halting of coal trains in Newcastle, Australia to the blockading of a coal power station in the heart of Washington DC.



Photo 1.1  
Source: CfCA website

Whilst other campaign groups - such as the Campaign against Climate Change (CaCC) and the Stop Climate Chaos coalition - mobilized marches upwards of 50,000 people, often to lobby governments to take 'fair, ambitious and binding' steps towards stopping climate change, the 'radical climate movement' could be differentiated both through its commitment to taking direct-action, and a general underlying orientation towards anarchist, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives. Indeed, the 'radical climate movement' should be understood not as an isolated phenomena, but as having emerged with a heritage in the alter-globalization 'movement of movements' and, before that, the UK's anti-roads and reclaim the streets movements (Plows 2008). The 'radical climate movement' was not therefore a straightforward environmental movement against climate change; rather, the participants were arguably 'united in a feeling of belonging to a broader, and global, anti-capitalist social movement' (Schlembach 2011: 197).

Whilst the movement grew exponentially in the size, profile and frequency of the actions, there were nonetheless voices within the movement which warned as early as 2007 of a tendency towards becoming 'a dramatic single-issue mass lobby for punitive state intervention. Friends of the Earth with D-locks' (Archer 2007)<sup>1</sup>. In other words, there was an active concern amongst some in the movement of maintaining a distinction between the 'radical' movement and those in a wider environmentalist movement, and of seeing the latter as in some way flawed or lacking. As a participant in the 'radical climate movement' with anti/post-capitalist desires, this concern went to the core of my activism, forcing me to ask questions of both myself and others. This thesis thus began as an extended response to these concerns, an attempt to explore the limits of the praxis of the 'radical climate movement', pursuing questions of what constituted a 'radical' approach to climate change.

Through utilizing a *militant ethnographic* research method that demands becoming 'entangled with complex relations of power' through having lived 'the emotions associated with direct-action organizing and transnational networking' (Juris 2008: 20), this research thus moves from the direct organizing of the UK's 'radical climate movement' to the 18 months of 'climate justice' mobilizations surrounding the COP15 climate summit occurring at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark. Given the overwhelming focus on 'climate change' in the build up and during the COP15, the

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<sup>1</sup> 'D-locks' refers to a direct-action tactic in which individuals use bicycle d-locks to lock themselves on - often to a piece of machinery such as a JCB digger, a coal-conveyer belt, or one another - in an effort to directly prevent the operation of something.

radical ‘fringe’ of the environmental movement - which broadly incorporated the two climate justice networks of ‘Climate Justice Action’ and ‘Climate Justice Now!’ - was operating within an altogether different political environment. The research thus extends the critique that had emerged from within the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’, exploring the extent to which the mobilizations towards the COP15 offered a different discourse on climate change that distinguished it from the dominant discourse on climate change.

With the COP15 widely recognized as a failure according to any standard of measurement, the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, announced the organization of the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC), to be held in Cochabamba during March 2010. This conference offered the opportunity to further trace both the development and divergence of the discourse of ‘climate justice’, contributing to the broader attempt to establish a politicized praxis on climate change that could be placed at the core of anti-capitalist ecological politics.

### *1.1 A politics of climate change?*

Paraphrasing Karl Marx’s assertion in 1844 that ‘religion’ is the ‘opium of the people’ (Marx 1982: 131), Slavoj Žižek rather cryptically suggested in 2008 that ‘ecology’ had become a ‘new opium for the masses’ (Žižek 2008: 42). The suggestion follows that the ‘ecological’ consciousness - the content of which Žižek does not expand upon - serves to foreclose the possibility for *political* contestation, instead producing a fundamental ‘consensus’ regarding how we know the ‘ecological’ problem and how we experience the problem. The ‘opiate’ effect is thus to zero-out the possibility for any antagonism over the nature of ecological problems, instead refocusing contestation into a depoliticized milieu where difference exists only at the level of how we ‘manage’ the problem.

Writing in 2009 - during which time I was submersed in organizing for the COP15 conference taking place in Copenhagen - Erik Swyngedouw elaborated upon Žižek’s suggestion, arguing that the *apogee* of the ecological opiate was to be found in the contemporary discourse on climate change. It was suggested that in the popular understanding of climate change, humanity is framed as facing an apocalyptic environmental collapse - a ‘scientific consensus... translates into a political consensus’ resulting in ‘the emergence and consolidation of a postpolitical

condition' (Swyngedouw 2009: 602, 604). This is not a claim, as John Urry mistakenly interprets, that is ignorant of the social movements focused on climate change, nor the 'immense differences... in terms of argument, authority, evidence, worldview and proposed solutions' (Urry 2011: 93). Rather, the thrust of the critique is that the dominant discourse on climate change engenders a 'post-political' consciousness, one which suspends the *very potential* for contestation over the fabric of society in favour of a consensual humanitarian project to 'save humanity/the environment'.

This critique appeared to posit a direct challenge to those in the 'radical climate movement'; on the one hand, there was a fundamental concern with preventing climate change, yet on the other there was the stated desire to pursue an anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian praxis. The potential implication was that these two elements were not only mutually exclusive, but that the former concern with climate change served to *extinguish* the potential for pursuing the broader anti/post-capitalist trajectories that would constitute properly political forms of struggle. Whilst it appeared that this critique of the 'post-political' could easily be directed towards those organizations that uncritically rallied around demands that politicians 'do something now!', it appeared less straight-forward to apply this critique to the radical fringe of the climate movement - not least because there were those on the radical fringe who appeared to be consciously attempting to prevent the praxis of the movement becoming a 'Friends of the Earth with d-locks', and were thus to some extent aware of this depoliticizing tendency.

This research thus emerged out of this initial consideration of what could be considered a 'radical' praxis on the climate; could a line of distinction be drawn between those mainstream NGOs who asked politicians to secure binding legislation, and those on the radical fringe who practiced forms of direct action as a form of intervention? As Raphael Schlembach has suggested, the CfCA's 'foundations in anarchist and anti-capitalist protest gives rise to a particular outlook that aims to combine perspectives on climate change with commitment to social justice' (Schlembach 2011: 212), but to what extent did the very nature of our 'ecological' concern act as an opiate, foreclosing the potential for political contestation?

## *1.2 Thesis themes*

The aims of this thesis are somewhat unconventional, in the sense that I did not begin with a set of preformed questions, derived from a fabled ‘hole in the literature’ which I sought to plug through extended research into a social movement. Rather, a series of themes emerged organically to help guide my engagement as a constitutive participant in the movement(s), existing more as ‘problematics’ of the movement that I sought to reflexively engage with (see *Section 2.3, 2.4 & 2.5*). To that extent, the following questions must be understood as having emerged during the research, revealing the gradual development of an engaged critique that looked to both learn from and contribute to the radical movement(s) in which I was acting. The research questions which guided this project are thus:

1. To what extent does the popular narrative on climate change iterate a post-political consciousness, reinforcing broader liberal forms of power and consciousness? What are the features of this discourse?
2. In what ways did the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’ iterate this consciousness, and what attempts were made to escape the problematic?
3. To what extent did the ‘climate justice’ mobilizations leading up to the COP15 reflect the post-political narrative on climate change, and how did their actions seek to reveal and surpass this discourse?
4. Equally, to what extent did the CMPCC iterate and/or surpass the post-political narrative?
5. To what extent did the radical climate and climate justice movement(s) rupture the liberal epistemic framework, and develop a properly political engagement with the climate?
6. What can these experiences contribute to the broader project of developing effective anti-capitalist ecological politics?

This period of engaged research within the radical climate and climate justice movement(s) thus preempted Erik Swyngedouw’s ‘appeal to rethink the properly political [and] to re-establish the horizon of democratic environmental politics’ (Swyngedouw 2010: 2), attempting to do so through an engaged practice within movement(s) themselves. It is hoped that, rather than ‘generating sweeping strategic and/or political directives’ (Juris 2007: 165), the contributions of this thesis can thus be

part of a broader strategic reflection towards producing an effective radical ecological politics.

### *1.3 Thesis outline*

The thesis is structured into nine chapters. As suggested in the following chapter (*Chapter 2*), the structure of a thesis is problematic to the extent that it challenges the reader, giving a false image of the processes by which the knowledge was produced. The constraints of a manageable thesis format suggests that I had surveyed the existing literature, conducted research appropriate to addressing a ‘hole in the literature’, before providing analysis and conclusions based on this objective research. On the contrary, this research necessarily began from ‘within’ the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’, and it was through this practice that the problematic of the ‘depoliticizing’ tendencies within the movement emerged, not as a fully fledged and informed critique, but rather as a process of self-reflection within the movement.

Chapter 2 thus begins as a discussion of the methodology employed during this research. The chapter is split into seven parts; it begins through providing some grounding reflections on the nature of knowledge production, drawing on feminist and post-structuralist critiques to ground the claim that it is necessary to adopt radical research methods that aim to dissolve the distinction between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’. The chapter thus moves to outline my position within this research, revealing myself as directly invested in the topic of the research through my historical and active engagement within the UK’s ‘radical climate movements’. Given this prerogative, the chapter outlines a methodology Jeffery Juris termed *militant ethnography* (Juris 2007), exploring the theoretical orientation of the methodology, and exploring what this meant in practice with respect to this research. With the methodology established, it explains the ‘emergent’ nature of the aims of this thesis, and the contingent ‘ethics of care’ that demands prioritizing the relationship between myself and others.

Chapter 3 is a theoretical overview of the concept of the ‘post-political condition’. This is the first of three theoretical chapters that were developed as a response to the problematic which emerged from within the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’. Noting Swyngedouw’s suggestion that the dominant discourse on climate change contributes to ‘the making and consolidation of a post-political and post-democratic condition, one

that actually forecloses the possibility of a real politics of the environment' (Swyngedouw 2007: 12-13), the chapter undertakes a conceptual analysis of the concept of the 'political'. Through the work of Carl Schmitt and Chantal Mouffe, it is suggested that the 'post-political' is a function of the liberal consciousness, one in which a 'consensus' is paradoxically claimed as the basis of a liberal politics. The chapter continues by suggesting this consciousness has a specific historical lineage, emerging fully-fledged with the end of the Cold War, signified in Fukuyama's statement that we had reached 'the end of history' (Fukuyama 1989). It is suggested that we can thus see the place of Kantian ethics as part of the core functioning of the post-political condition, one in which contestation is suspended in favour of transcendental principles.

Chapter 4 builds upon the concept of the 'post-political', associating its function with the concept of the 'biopolitical'. It begins through considering the work of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, suggesting that they had both identified a transformation in the operation of power which occurred with the realization of liberalism during the French Revolution. It continues through suggesting that this power ceased to operate through a distinct inside/outside relationship that characterized Schmitt's concept of the political, introducing the concept of 'population' as essential to this new liberal modality of power. Furthermore, it suggested that this 'biopower' reached its ideal form in the rationale of 'political economy', which both assumed and projected a specific economic subjectivity onto a homogenous humanity. The chapter concludes by assessing how the 'post-political' condition is thus a function of a specifically liberal modality of power, which reached its apogee with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and thus the ultimate extension of liberal governance.

Chapter 5 serves to trace the construction of the dominant discourse on climate change, understanding how it functions in inducing the 'post-political' condition. The chapter begins through tracing the emergence of an understanding of 'dangerous climate change', illustrating how a series of discursive moves were made - not least introducing a 'globalized' concept of danger - that constructed a discourse according to the liberal arrangement of power/knowledge. It is suggested that the discourse came to fruition as a (partial) substitute for the East/West arrangement of knowledge/power at the end of the 1980's, whilst the 'scientized' concept of danger - grounded in the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) - led to the emergence of a 'carbon fetishism'. The chapter continues through illustrating how an apocalyptic discourse, a moral imperative, the constitution of emergency and 'fear', and an individualization

process are all contributory factors in constituting a single 'eschatology' - thus corroborating Žižek's identification of the similarities between 'religion' and 'ecology'.

Chapter 6 looks to document the prevalence of the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' within the radical climate movement. The chapter initially sketches the emergence of the 'radical' fringe, and suggests the principles - such as a commitment to anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives - that differentiate it from mainstream environmental concerns. The chapter then assesses a broad range of those actions that constituted the movement and argues that despite an 'aesthetic' of radicalism, the overwhelming focus of the movement became a discordance between 'the science' and the lack of 'action' on climate change. Suggesting that this resulted in the depoliticization of the movement, it recognizes the attempts from within the movement to address this problem - such as the focus on the Royal Bank of Scotland or the Vestas solidarity campaign - but suggests that these attempts amounted to a 'liberal anti-capitalism', constrained by the liberal discourse of 'dangerous climate change'.

Chapter 7 looks to document the 'climate justice' mobilizations that occurred in the 18 months prior to the COP15 conference in Copenhagen, and their attempts to both actively contest the post-political and seek a properly political discourse. The chapter begins through outlining the initial emergence of the discourse of 'climate justice', and its manifestation in the formation of the Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) network in 2007. Tracing the development of the Climate Justice Action (CJA) network, it is suggested that the two networks shared a handful of principles - such as the rejection of carbon trading - but were predominantly unified through a shared desire to 'politicize' the dominant discourse of 'dangerous climate change'. It is summarized that a clear distinction could thus be made between those under the 'climate justice' banner, and the dominant mobilizations coordinated by groups such as WWF, Oxfam and 350.org. Nonetheless, it is claimed that by the end of the COP15 conference it had become clear that there was not a single coherent discourse of 'climate justice', but perhaps two divergent accounts.

Chapter 8 thus continues through tracing this divergence in the discourse of 'climate justice'. Firstly, it suggests that CJA had become committed to producing a politicized praxis of climate justice, one which recognized the climate crisis only as a symptom of the increasing ordering of life by capital. On the other hand, it traces a separate thread - built upon the concept of 'climate debt' - which broadly framed the outcomes of the World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. It is

suggested that at the time of the writing this thesis, there had been no successful attempts to turn these two discourses into a commensurate and effective political discourse, and as a result a division between a class analysis and ‘climate debt’ as a form of spatial justice was perpetuated.

Chapter 9 serves as both a discussion and conclusion to the thesis, but is perhaps best thought of as a tentative pausing-for-breath and taking stock of an intense few years of ethnographic research. Firstly, it provides a summary of the methodology, drawing confluences between the limits of militant ethnography and the movement(s) own contributions as to who/what is the effective subject of a politicized discourse on the climate. A theoretical summary argues that the critique of the ‘post-political’ was an effective lens for engaging with the praxis of the ‘radical climate’ and ‘climate justice’ movement(s), recognizing that there were those within these movement(s) who were consciously attempting to overcome this problematic. It is suggested that an apocalyptic carbon-fetishism broadly determined the actions of many within the radical climate movement(s), and that it was precisely the ‘opiate’ effect of the liberal post-political discourse that stifled attempts to generate any *political* praxis.

The chapter continues through making a number of suggestions regarding the collapse of the ‘climate justice’ movement(s), in part suggesting that despite best efforts, it was the collective inability to produce a coherent politicized praxis of ‘climate justice’ that led to the cessation of movement(s). On the other hand, it is suggested that the effort of these movement(s) has opened up the potential for new fields of struggle - and thus appropriate new fields of research - not least in unearthing alternative ecological discourses that place our social-reproduction as the centre of concern. It is finally argued that we should celebrate the death of the ‘environmental’ movement, realizing that the discourse of ‘being green’ is not some politically indeterminate commitment to ‘saving the environment’, but rather serves to iterate a specifically liberal epistemic framework that forecloses the potential for a radical politics of the environment.

#### *1.4 A disclaimer on writing conventions*

As a final disclaimer of sorts, throughout this thesis I have adopted the convention of referring to organizations, networks and movements such as ‘CJA’ or the ‘Camp for Climate Action’ in the third person. It must be noted that in many cases, it would have been more appropriate to write ‘we’ or ‘us’, and I am acutely aware that much of the

critique contained within - both positive and negative - must equally be directed at myself and my role within these movements. To this extent, it must be recognized that this is as open about the failures and limitations of my own participation in these movements as it is about others; I thus hope this contributes as much to affecting the political praxis of others as it has my own.





## **Chapter Two: Researching Power, Knowledge and Radical Movements**

### *2.0 Introduction*

Emerging from a history of personal involvement in confrontational environmental movements, this thesis is a process of knowledge production within and for radical climate movements. Driven by my earlier knowledge and experience of radical-left politics and of using ‘direct-action’ methods in confronting climate change, between late 2008 and mid-2010 I conducted a process of militant ethnography within the UK’s Camp for Climate Action (CfCA) and the international Climate Justice Action (CJA) network. This research was not conducted as an ‘outsider’ with the intent of producing knowledge ‘about’ these movements, but as a continuation of my participation through an engaged praxis that facilitated critical yet committed reflections for our movement(s). As became clear through the conduct of the research, this process of knowledge production was not relevant solely to those friends or comrades who have been taking direct action on climate change in the UK, Europe and worldwide, but hopefully to a much broader audience of those seeking to understand the relationship between knowledge, power and radical social change.

The thread running through the research is a concern with the de-politicizing tendencies of the prevailing knowledge of ‘dangerous climate change’. Rather than assuming our knowledge of climate change is somehow ‘neutral’, this research comes to examine how this knowledge was historically constructed and consensually adopted, the political implications for the practices of radical climate movements, and the attempts to recognize and overcome these limitations and reinvigorate the radical-critical currents within these movements. Whilst this research is thus about the radical politics of climate change, its contribution is concerned with exploring the unavoidably political nature of knowledge. Its relevance is thus, hopefully, not limited to those with a concern with climate change, but those looking to construct a radical oppositional politics appropriate to the present neoliberalism-in-crisis.

This research is unconventional in its rejection of scientific method, its disavowal of ‘objective’ research procedures, its critique of academic knowledge production, and conversely in its commitment to a process of partisan knowledge production. Such a departure from convention is critically necessary, and is grounded in a commitment to feminist and post-structural understandings of the nature of knowledge and knowledge

production. The unconventional methodology is thus consistent with the ‘content’ of the research itself, namely a concern with the unavoidably political nature of knowledge, necessitating a deep commitment to questioning the production of knowledge and the social forms that knowledge reproduces. This chapter thus begins (section 2.1) with some brief and accessible fore-thoughts on epistemology, bringing together elements of feminist and post-structural critiques to reveal why precisely it is ‘necessary’ to explore and practice unconventional methodologies.

Having begun to establish the necessity for exploring radical research methods, the following section (section 2.2) outlines my personal situation at the outset of this research. Contra any assertions of ‘navel-gazing’, through revealing both the position of myself as committed researcher and the milieu within which I am acting, this process helps to indicate the ‘starting point’ or ‘impetus’ behind the research. The third section (section 2.3) builds upon these reflections through a discussion of ‘militant ethnography’ as an approach to knowledge production that responds to the feminist and post-structural critiques, specifically to questions about how a ‘researcher’ relates to the ‘researched’ - a problematic which has been central to those attempting to conduct politically-committed research (cf. Routledge 1996; Blomley, 1994; Fuller 1999; Maxey 2004; Mitchell 2004; Chatterton 2006, 2008). This section also acts as the ‘intersect’ between epistemology, methods and methodology.

Shifting from an emphasis on ‘theoretical’ to ‘practical’ considerations, the following section (section 2.4) provides an account of what ‘doing militant ethnography’ means in the context of my research within radical climate movements. It provides an outline of my engagements in the field during three rough phases of research; mobilization within the CfCA and CJA throughout 2008-9, on the ground in Copenhagen during the COP15, and a ‘post-COP’ phase that included continued attendance in the CfCA and CJA along with an extensive participation in the CMPCC as part of the *Building Bridges Collective*. This practical account should thus be read alongside the following section (section 2.5), which explores the interwoven and emergent nature of the ‘aims’ of this research. It is suggested that, emerging from a militant engagement in the field, these ‘aims’ are better thought of as ‘problematics’ which emerge from my participation and which fold on to my continued critical engagement. If Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet were correct in suggesting that ‘the art of constructing a problem is very important: you invent a problem, a problem-position, before finding a solution’ (Deleuze and Parnet

2006: 1), then this research can be understood as a critically engaged process of opening-up political problematics and attempting to pursue their resolution.

Lastly, this chapter (section 2.6) outlines what has been termed an ‘ethics of care’ (Noddings 1984), detailing the importance of a ‘moral decision making based on the value for relationship, not the value for principle’ (Pressie 2007: 517). An ethical outlook wholly consistent and indeed partly characteristic of any militant methodology, an ‘ethics of care’ creates unavoidable contradictions between the contingent and situated solidarities involved in militant knowledge production and the detached demands of objectivist ethical committees. This section details what an ‘ethics of care’ meant in the context of this research, along with the resulting contradictions..

### *2.1 Fore-thoughts on epistemology*

The development of feminist accounts of epistemology and knowledge production over the past three decades has had paradigmatic implications, not just in terms of reconsidering the role of women and gender within research, but on the very concept of research and the nature of knowledge (Jones, Nast et al. 1997: xxii). Indeed, it’s perhaps no exaggeration to suggest that any research that makes claims to having ‘critical’ or ‘radical’ credentials must take account of these feminist critiques and the philosophical developments from which these critiques developed. With respect to Sandra Harding’s distinction between methods, methodology and epistemology (Harding 1987), this section will thus begin by outlining a feminist/post-structural account of epistemology and knowledge production, foregrounding the subsequent sections.

Reflecting in 1972 on the epistemological problems of conducting ethnographic research, Pierre Bourdieu suggested that ‘the anthropologist’s particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place... inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices’ (Bordieu 2003 [1972]: 1). In other words, Bourdieu was suggesting that there exists a fundamental problematic in presuming that, in conducting ethnographic research, the researcher provides an ‘objective’ account of the ‘researched’. The researcher is not some form of *tabula rasa*, an indifferent and content-less sensor, that is capable of simply ‘relaying’ their experiences to an audience. On the contrary, a piece of research is liable to say just as much (if not more) about the researcher’s values, perspective,

aims, biases and assumptions - and the culture/society in which these were produced - as it does about the researched.

Published in the same year, the influential author and art critic John Berger suggested that 'the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe' (Berger 1972: 8), such that seeing the world is neither an unproblematic nor objective process but one that is necessarily caught up in systems of power and knowledge. Take the example of a photograph: conventional perspectives - such as the researcher who believes they are uncovering, documenting and disseminating 'truths' - would hold that a photograph provides an unquestionably objective account of the world, and thus research should strive to minimize variables so as to come as close as possible to 'taking a photo'. The focus on establishing 'methodological rigour' (cf. Baxter and Eyles 1997) within research is a testament to this preoccupation with neutralizing variables in the name of relaying near-objective 'truths'. Yet 'photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. This is true even in the most casual family snapshot. The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject' (Berger 1972: 8, 10).

All feminist critiques thus begin similarly with the question "who is taking the photograph?", or perhaps more accurately, "what are the predispositions of the photographer?". The most elementary principle of feminist critique(s) follows that a refusal to recognize the importance of this question leads to research that is systematically blinded, as the patriarchal characteristics of society are reproduced (to a greater or lesser extent) in the subjectivity of the researcher. This researcher thus erroneously believes he is undertaking a process of relaying objective 'truths' of the world - a series of 'unquestionable' photos - without recognizing that conscious and/or subconscious processes of selection and exclusion, adjudication of what counts and what doesn't, weighting of different elements of the research etc., produces a highly nuanced account of the world. Although the researcher may or may not realize it, in not considering why they are 'pointing the camera' at a specific subject matter or considering what 'lens' and 'filters' they use to render it, they are producing a highly partisan account, which from the immediate concern of feminist critique is often one that produces a patriarchal account of the world that passes for objective fact.

An initial response to this problematic is thus to make visible the subjectivity of the researcher, insisting that 'the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as

the overt subject matter... [such that] the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests' (Harding 1987: 9). This initial move to account for the researcher's subjectivity is a necessary step in revealing the researcher as a constitutive part of the research process, however the thrust of any radical feminist critique is not to force researchers to 'own up' to the impacts of their commitments on the research. Such a reductive understanding implicitly suggests that the researchers interests are somehow an 'undesirable interference' in the scientific method of truth-relaying, and that the development of 'good practice' should be enough to all-but eradicate the researcher from the process such that 'objectivity' can still be claimed.

In contrast, radical feminist critiques do not look to eradicate the researcher, but rather reconceptualize research as a process of active and partisan knowledge *construction* as opposed to the *relaying* of objective facts (cf. McDowell 1992; Moss 2002; Nagar & Ali 2003). A radical feminist methodology is thus not a set of 'off-the-shelf' techniques which can be applied to research, but rather a fundamental rethinking of what it means to be 'doing research' (Sharp 2005). As Felix Guattari suggested;

'People in therapeutic systems, or in the universities, who consider themselves to be mere depositories or channels for the transmission of scientific knowledge, have already made a reactionary choice. Despite their innocence or goodwill, they really occupy a position that reinforces the systems of production of the dominant subjectivity. It does not have to be this way' (in Guattari and Rolnik 2008: 41).

Rather than conceptualizing researchers as intellectual elites who are deemed to have some form of privileged access to the 'truth', and whose function in society is therefore to produce authoritative and normative accounts of the world, researchers must be understood as being engaged in the active *production of knowledge*. We must approach knowledge production as the construction of situated theoretical perspectives that are unavoidably *partisan*, not in the sense that this knowledge is 'incomplete' or lacking, but that it provides a specific account of the world that affects our capacity to act in it (Haraway 1988). As such, we should approach these constructed partisan knowledges 'exactly like a toolbox', in the sense that the production of theory is *literally* the production of tools that modify, enhance, or create new ways in which we are able to affect the world. Paraphrasing Proust, knowledge(s) should be approached and used 'like a pair of glasses to view the outside, and if it isn't to your liking, find another

pair, or invent your own, and your device will necessarily be a device you can fight with' (Deleuze and Foucault 2004 [1980]).

Crucially, the fact that knowledge is always partisan does not lead to a postmodern 'relativism' that suggests one way of seeing/acting in the world is as legitimate as another. The feminist perspective does not maintain that 'sexist' and 'antisexist' claims are equally legitimate ways of seeing and thus shaping ones actions in the world (Harding 1987: 10). On the contrary, it's important to recall that these new knowledges are devices 'you can fight with'; they are inherently political and designed to change the way we act in the world. The very reason for their creation is to come into conflict and replace other ways of knowing that are deemed responsible for producing injustice and suffering; one of the driving principles of critical feminist critique(s) is to *destroy* the phallogocentric way of knowing and acting in the world.

Given that newly produced 'ways of seeing' unavoidably have concrete effects on how and why we act - irrespective of whether we claim 'impartiality' or not - it is crucial that researchers eschew any claims to objectivity and instead make clear their intentions and allegiances. Knowledge is political, and researchers must have 'no qualms about rejecting 'value-neutrality' and taking sides' (Roseneil 1993: 179) but instead be clear about what sort of 'tool' they hope to produce, how they hope this tool can be used, and for whom the tool is intended. Indeed, one of the central ethical imperatives of radical perspectives is thus that researchers should look to act 'in solidarity' with the field of research, which in a restricted feminist interpretation means conducting research that is 'of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women' (DeVault 1996: 33-4). Expanding this principle to what has been more broadly termed 'solidarity action research' (Chatterton, Fuller et al. 2007: 219), this means that any form of critical radical research must look to 'make strategic interventions collectively with the social movements we belong to' (Chatterton, Hodkinson et al. 2010: 246), eschewing objectivity and being clear about the intention to produce knowledge with and for movements. As Fraser has noted, any form of critical research should look to orientate:

'its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of the oppositional movements with which it has a partisan, though not uncritical identification (1989, 113, cited in Routledge 1996: 406).

If we accept that research is the act of knowledge production as opposed to ‘truth relaying’, and that knowledge production is a necessarily partisan (and thus political) act in which the researcher plays a central role, then it is crucial that the predispositions of the researcher are stated from the outset. In what Dorothy Smith and others have termed a “standpoint approach” (Smith 1987; Reinherz 1983; Collins 1990; McDowell 1992), ‘the feminist sociologist, in her formulation, must refuse to put aside her experience and, indeed, must make her bodily existence and activity a “starting point” for inquiry’ (DeVault 1996: 39). This is not to make the claim that the researcher’s positionality does not change over the process of conducting research - that working with (as opposed to ‘on’) movements will not shape the researcher in the process - but that there is nonetheless a ‘start-point’ for the researcher. As Shukaitis and Graeber suggest, critical militant research necessarily ‘starts from the understandings, experiences, and relations generated through organizing as both a method of political action and as a form of knowledge’ (Shukaitis and Graeber 2007: 9). Revealing the desires and commitments of the researcher is not therefore a moment of aimless soul-searching, nor is it a matter of academic over-complexification. In contrast it returns as the most readily understandable of principles; the researcher is not a valueless machine, but a real person with a series of commitments, desires, biases, and personal aims. If you want to understand the purpose of the research, then you need to have some understanding of the relevant bearings of the researcher.

## *2.2 Myself and the milieu*

At around midday on June 13th 2008, I found myself aboard a stationary coal-delivery train which had been bound for Drax power station in North Yorkshire. Along with 28 others, I was taking part in a direct-action climate protest focussed on the contribution of coal-based energy production to anthropogenic global warming. The train was stopped for around fifteen hours in total, as several of the group suspended hammocks between bridge girders, whilst others ‘locked-on’ to each other with the intention of preventing coal from being delivered to the power station for as long as possible. Neither the inevitable arrest and court-case, the fear of police harassment, nor the unknown reactions of friends and family detracted from what appeared as the self-evident rationale for taking what - in other circumstances - would appear to be a reckless, irresponsible and irrational action.

*Prima facie* it could be contended that we were perhaps mistaken in our calculations that the threat posed by climate change legitimated this sort of drastic action, but we were certainly not alone. A series of comments on the activist news-site Indymedia showed their support:

*“I've seen plenty of support as I spread the news, so way to go all of you, wish I was there.”*

*“fucking beautiful. More of this sort of thing.”*

*“Absolutely fucking wicked guys!”*

*“SO MUCH RESPECT FOR THESE GUYS!!!! Attention to the severity of climate change is essential and these people are putting their necks on the line to do so. my hat is firmly off to you and all peaceful, intelligent, empassioned [sic] protesters who use direct-action.”* (The Coal Hole, 2008)

Perhaps more indicative of the wide-spread prevalence of this ‘self-evident rationale’ was the proliferation of similar actions within the UK that were loosely affiliated as part of what can be termed the ‘radical climate movement’. By the end of the same year alone, Stanstead Airport’s taxiway had been blockaded in protest of aviation emissions, the roof of the Houses of Parliament had been occupied in protest of the Heathrow expansion plans, the Camp for Climate Action coordinated a ‘48-hours of action’ against energy company E-On and later made Kingsnorth coal power station the target of its annual protest camp attracting thousands, whilst Greenpeace’s *Rainbow Warrior* blockaded the same power station less than a month later. Indeed, from mid-2006 onwards the ‘radical climate movement’ arguably made a significant contribution in shaping the popular narrative on climate change - not least through the extensive media coverage the diverse actions received - even if there were no more than several thousand people participating in ‘radical’ direct-action.

The radical climate movement must not be understood as something wholly ‘new’, but rather as a phenomenon which developed out of numerous other historical struggles and political ideologies. A substantial amount of work has been conducted into both the history and the ‘rationale’ of environmental direct-action movements, both from within the academy and from movements themselves (Anderson 2004a, 2004b; Doherty 1999; Doherty et al. 2000; Wall 1999; Plows 2002; Anon 2007; Chuck 2010). Importantly, the commitment to ‘direct-action’ within these movements is strongly influenced by the anarchist tradition(s), which has tended towards understanding direct-action not merely

as a tactic but rather as a fundamental prefigurative component of the political outlook. In other words, the most important thing about 'direct-action is that it forms a decisive step toward recovering the personal power over social life that the centralised, over-bearing bureaucracies have usurped from the people' such that direct-action 'is not a 'tactic'... it is a moral principle, an ideal, a sensibility. It should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook' (Bookchin 2004: 47, 48). As such, direct-action is less about a set of tactics than an indicator of a broader set of anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist values, such that those involved in Reclaim the Streets and the anti-roads movement in the 1990s did not broadly consider themselves as engaged in single-issue campaigns, but rather as being 'united in a feeling of belonging to a broader, and global, anti-capitalist social movement' (Schlembach 2011: 197).

Radical environmental movements should not therefore be reduced down to single-issue campaign groups, and in many ways the 'environmental' component obscures much broader counter-cultural, philosophical and political tendencies. For example, in September 2009 the Camp for Climate Action held a self-reflective 'where next?' discussion at its summer camp, the introduction to which traced the genealogy of the camp to moments as diverse as the recent anti-G8 Dissent! network, the No Borders actions in France, the 2001 Argentinean uprisings, Australian tree-defence campaigns in the 1980s, the feminist movement (especially with respect to non-hierarchical decision making), the anarchist movements in the Spanish Civil War, the German anti-nuclear movement, and the Machnovite peasant uprisings in the 1920s (Camp for Climate Action, 2009a). Those who participated in radical environmental movements will have undoubtedly engaged with concerns that go beyond a simplistic concern with 'the environment', instead having debates (and often full-blooded arguments) over the politics of food, the exclusion of queer or minority voices through patriarchal meeting structures, issues of class inclusion/exclusion, and active concerns over collaborating with the state - not least over what can be considered viable political tactics.

Like many of my generation, I had been 'brought into politics' through my involvement in the anti-war movement, whilst the road to radicalization perhaps began with its failure. This propelled me into various degrees of campaign and volunteer NGO work concerning the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the collaboration between the Colombian government and Coca-Cola in the repression and murder of unionized workers, and academic investment in the arms-trade and protests at the DSEi arms fair. By the time of the 2005 anti-G8 protests in Gleneagles, my political perspective had developed to a

point where understanding and tackling systemic problems took precedence over 'single-issue' campaigning, and I was actively attracted by the public positions of the Dissent! network and the broader anti-G8 discourse. From 2005 onwards, the opening of the Common Place social centre in Leeds helped me to actively begin to engage with and learn from others who held explicitly anti-capitalist, anarchist and anti-authoritarian beliefs, and by 2006 I had become a (cautiously) active participant within the 'radical climate movement'. What attracted me was not the concern with climate-change *per se* - which at the time I knew relatively little about - but the possibilities for engaging with larger networks of people who shared the desire to critique and act on the systemic problems of the state and capitalism.

Up until the beginning of this research at the end of 2008, my participation in the radical climate movement included activities such as attending and arranging workshops, participating in regular local and national meetings, living on protest-camps, facilitating decision-making sessions, being 'stop-and-searched' by police, building barely usable compost toilets (and the inglorious task of cleaning them), practicing how to 'de-arrest' people, participating in 'site-takes' and occupying corporate offices. My participation in the Drax action was undoubtedly the most 'high-profile' and 'committed' aspect of my participation in the radical climate movement, but it cannot be taken out of the broader context of informal learning and value-absorption that had occurred throughout my engagement in the movement.

Simultaneous to my participation in the climate movement, I worked for the New Internationalist magazine and then studied on the MA in Activism & Social Change at the University of Leeds. I had begun the latter in 2007 with the intention of pursuing the systemic questions that had arisen through my earlier activism, namely the nature of power, liberty, the state, and capitalism. I began to go through a process of problematizing and rejecting my own naive anarchistic perspective, specifically the Kropotkinite assumption that the underlying predisposition of the human condition was towards 'mutual aid' or a general human 'goodness' (Kropotkin 1972) that needed to be liberated from the distorting tendencies of capital, patriarchy and the state. This essentialist assumption crucially served to cast 'power' as the inverse of freedom, essentially a coercive and oppressive phenomena which served to pervert humanity from its 'naturally' communistic condition of free association. As such, what had been central underpinnings to my understandings of what constituted 'social change', such as

the idea of an essential human subject, my understanding of power, and what it meant to be 'free', had all been radically destabilized.

This destabilization resulted in a degree of existential angst, for if one was not against power, the state, or capitalism on the premise that they are fundamentally oppressive, or distort an otherwise 'good' human, then why should one be against them? This didn't mean abandoning the critical anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives that I'd developed within my political activity, but expanding them and looking for substantially different understandings of the nature and relationships between freedom and power, how capital operated at the intersect between these concepts, and the nature of 'resistance' and what more broadly constituted 'social change'. It meant understanding both capitalism and 'power' not as something that was wholly imposed from the outside onto a docile humanity, but as relationships that we ourselves actively reproduce - even if they are to our own detriment.

The transition into 'research' thus emerged from the aforementioned personal circumstances and a substantial slice of fortune in being awarded a scholarship. At the time of application, a scholarship appeared as the ideal path for continuing my 'activism' on the one hand, and to further pursue 'theoretical' questions on the other. In other words, it appeared at the time as an opportunity to sustain both my role as an 'activist' and also as an 'academic', a binary which has been a persistent problematic and source of reflection for others conducting 'activist-research' (Routledge 1996; Blomley, 1994; Fuller 1999; Maxey 2004; Mitchell 2004; Chatterton 2006, 2008). As indicated by the discussion of feminist epistemology (see *section 2.1*), this division became untenable and required confrontation from the beginning of the research. Ultimately, this problematic was not something that could be discretely 'solved' as part of doing research-as-normal; it was a consideration that needed to be brought-to-bear on the very practice of research as knowledge production.

### *2.3 From Theorizing Militant Ethnography...*

The problematic of the academic-activist relationship is one feminist and post-structural critiques are particularly adept at confronting. The underpinning concern is that the 'academic' is synonymous with the production of objective, detached knowledge - the very object of feminist epistemological critique - whereas the 'activist' is aligned with contingent and antagonistic processes. From the perspective of the traditional

objectivist, scientific-method becomes increasingly compromised as the researcher enters the field and becomes involved with the subjects of the study, the researchers influence on the subject-matter raising questions of the ‘objectivity’ of the research. All ‘methods’ of research are implicated in this sense, not least for the meticulous ethnographer for whom it is highly complicated to ‘see’ without ‘being seen’. For the objectivist who perceives an apparent ‘conflict between the detached observer and the unavoidable inclusion of the researcher’, the easiest route out of the situation for the researcher is to make ‘claims to objectivity and detachment’ - what Duncan Fuller has termed ‘going academic’ (Fuller 1999: 223-225).

As suggested above (see *section 2.1*), research is not a neutral process of truth-relaying performed by a valueless being, but rather the active production of unavoidably partisan knowledge. The process of ‘going academic’ is thus the refusal to acknowledge the partiality of research (and the researcher), instead defaulting to the role of the objectivist ‘academic’, the neutral yet authoritative specialist who claims they are taking ‘objective’ snapshots of movement activity (Holdren and Touza 2005: 605). From this perspective, the ‘academic’ embodies the dominant masculine epistemology that is the object of both feminist and post-structural critiques. From the perspective of the dominant epistemology, this academic-as-specialist - confirmed as such through their use of approved methods of data-relaying - is heralded as a *bona fide* commentator on the subject, thus eclipsing the voices coming from the movements themselves (cf. Foucault 2002: 131).

This distortion of political movement knowledge(s) as objective academic knowledge makes the researcher eminently compatible with the traditional academic regime and the wages that come with it, but at the expense of both ignoring the epistemological critiques, denying the partiality of research, alienating the researcher from their own values, and thus constructing boundaries to engaging with a movement milieu. Indeed, from the perspective of the groups and individuals that are being ‘researched’, the reasons for discontent with this ‘academic’ capture of knowledge(s) are manifold. Why should the academic have an ordained right to speak on behalf of movements, and why should this right be *taken away* from the movements themselves? Why should the academic receive a wage for this, especially when the ‘researched’ are (generally) unpaid for their activism? With the researcher relying on this wage, will the personal interests of the academic come into conflict or take priority over those of the researched

(through dropping out suddenly, taking up time with procedures that aren't useful to the researched etc.) (cf. Chatterton, Hodkinson et al. 2010)?

Critical and radical research therefore demands that one approaches research not as an academic truth-relayer but as a partisan knowledge producer. The first step of this research was thus not to create a series of hypotheses which I would look to test through a discipline-approved set of truth-relaying procedures, but rather to ask *how* can I do research as a partisan knowledge producer? In this sense, the 'aims' of the research are secondary to the conscious decision that one is going to actively produce partisan knowledge - hence the 'aims' of this research are unconventional in the sense that they are informed by, and thus appear *after* the establishment of methodology (see *section 2.4*). In looking for a methodological approach that would 'address these objectivist shortcomings' (Juris 2007: 165), and thus would be appropriate to the production of partisan knowledge from within confrontational social movements, I looked to what Jeffery Juris has termed *militant ethnography*.

Conducting research within the 'movements against corporate globalization', Juris developed militant ethnography to address those problems outlined above, namely the idea of constructing oneself as an outside observer which 'entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically' (Wacquant 1992: 39). Militant ethnography looks to overcome the divide between research and practice through conducting 'collaboratively produced ethnographic knowledge [that] aims to facilitate ongoing activist (self-)reflection' rather than 'generating sweeping strategic and/or political directives' (Juris 2007: 165). The aim of militant ethnography is thus not to 'do politics' on the one hand, and then produce objectivist academic theory about these political experiences, but rather to do politics *critically*, participating in the messy and contingent processes of struggles and (co)producing knowledge that critically reflects upon the aims, processes, knowledge(s) and approaches of these political movements. As Uri Gordon suggests, 'the role of the activist/philosopher is not simply that of an expert observer but primarily one of an enabler or facilitator, and the role of the participants is that of co-philosophers and co-activists' (Gordon 2007: 282).

Militant ethnography thus shares some of the principles of 'solidarity action research', in which the practice of 'solidarity' is 'based on mutual respect and understanding, not agreement for agreement's sake' (Chatterton, Fuller et al. 2007: 219). The concept of 'solidarity' within militant ethnography does not mean forgoing ones critical faculties in

favour of unquestionably pursuing movement goals, but remaining ‘both committed and critical’ (Fuller 1999: 225). This process is not as problematic as objectivist accounts would like to make out; political groups are already full of ‘micro-researchers’, movement participants who are both *committed* to their collective politics yet *critically* engaged through the constant negotiation of interests and collaborative reflection, feeding in critiques, suggestions and ideas based on their active participation with the movements. Militant ethnography strives to be no different to this every-day occurrence; the overbearing aim of research remains to be in *solidarity* with the movements we are participants in, and to do so through *critically* engaging with the movements as a whole.

In practice, then, militant ethnography also has many similarities with Participatory Action Research (PAR), a methodological approach which also ‘represents a major epistemological challenge to mainstream research traditions’ (Kendon, Pain et al. 2007: 9) and looks to embody ‘a democratic commitment to break the monopoly on who holds knowledge and for whom social research should be undertaken’ (Fine 2008: 217). PAR looks to emphasize the importance of extended dialogue and collective action such that researcher is not so much ‘embedded’ in the research as an outside practitioner, but rather that they are an active part of the milieu being researched. In terms of putting this into practice with respect to social movements;

‘this means helping to organize actions and workshops, facilitating meetings, weighing in during strategic and tactical debates, staking out political positions, and putting one’s body on the line during direct-actions. Simply taking on the role of the “circumstantial activist” (Marcus 1995) is not sufficient; one has to build long-term relationships of mutual commitment and trust, become entangled with complex relations of power, and live the emotions associated with direct-action organizing and transnational networking’ (Juris 2008: 20).

Paul Routledge further used this approach in his research with the Peoples’ Global Action (PGA) network in Asia, in which the ethnographic process included ‘attended workshops, informal discussions, roundtables, plenaries, parties, communal meals, confidential asides, and social drinking [with the result of becoming] further entwined in the entangled relations, interactions, relays, intimacies, arguments, and jealousies’ of the PGA (Routledge 2008: 207). Immersion to the point one is not an ‘outside’ researcher that continues to represent other values, but instead an active constituent part of a

movement who researches from within, ensures a far greater potential for knowledge production. As Hardt & Negri have suggested, ‘such militant research is conceived not as community service – as a sacrifice of scholarly value to meet a moral obligation – but as superior in scholarly terms because it opens a greater power of knowledge production’ (Hardt and Negri 2009: 127).

Both Juris (2008) and Routledge (1996) have suggested that militant ethnography and other critical methods that look to dissolve the academic/activist problematic ‘break down’ at the time of writing, as the researcher is required to ‘confront vastly different systems of standards, awards, selection, and stylistic criteria’ (Juris 2008: 21). In other words, the researcher is confronted with producing content according to the criteria of the ‘academy’, and thus may begin to ‘betray’ the self who produces knowledge from within the movement. Whilst this poses an unavoidable problematic, the central concern remains the extent to which one either resists or succumbs to the temptation to ‘go academic’ at the time of writing. The act of writing up is thus an actively political moment where one decides the extent to which it is necessary to ‘go academic’, and the extent to which one is willing to compromise their critical perspectives.

A temporary strategy is perhaps to ‘double-up’ on work, producing objectivist work according to the demands of the academy and then (re)producing what is useful from this as partisan knowledge and circulating it within movements. Whilst this survivalist strategy may be necessary to maintain ones position in the academy whilst attempting to still critically contribute to political movements, it is highly compromising and ultimately reinforces the division between the dominant epistemology (and the reproduction of the associated social order) and radical knowledge. Ultimately, the critical perspective demands that we follow through on Guattari’s suggestion that the university ‘does not have to be this way’ (Guattari and Rolnik 2008: 41); that we look to transform the university and engage in a “rethinking [of] the university as a site of production and not as an ivory tower for the contemplation of the outside world” ((Casa-Cortés & Cobarrubias 2007, 113) in Chatterton, Hodkinson et al. 2010). This means challenging the institutional pressures that demand the ‘academicization’ of knowledge - such as control-mechanisms like the Research Excellence Framework and systems of academic profiling - whilst at the same time actively refusing to produce ‘dominant knowledge’ in ones own work.

#### 2.4 ... To Doing Militant Ethnography

The nature of militant ethnography is that it can be considerably difficult to mark a ‘start’ point to one’s research. Reporting on his work with Italian social centres, Vincenzo Ruggiero noted that his ‘attendance [at] some *centri sociali* for a number of years, numerous meetings and social events, friendships established with some of the members, along with the current involvement in some of the campaigns of the *centri*’ rendered it ‘virtually impossible to quantify’ the time span of his research (Ruggiero 2000: 173). As outlined above (see *section 2.2*), I did not approach this research *tabula rasa* but with a history as a constitutive participant in the radical climate movement, and was thus already ‘entangled with complex relations of power’ having lived ‘the emotions associated with direct-action organizing and transnational networking’ (Juris 2008: 20). Nonetheless, there is a marked difference between being politically active and consciously undertaking radical research.

If militant or radical research can loosely be defined as the process of partisan knowledge production, then we understand that research ‘begins’ at the point at which one decides to become consciously critical in their participation. Indeed, this distinction is useful in highlighting that research is *not* an institutionally bound process, but rather one that is grounded in a consciously critical approach to one’s activities. Nonetheless, when radical research is made possible through institutional channels - such as the securing of PhD funding - it is unavoidable that research will be partially ‘induced’ according to the institutional timeframe. The months following my participation in the Drax action (June 2008), which coincided with the beginning of my PhD scholarship (October 2008), was when specific focus was brought onto the *critical* component of my participation in the radical climate movement. In beginning to interrogate the underlying assumptions that had guided the actions of myself and others over the previous years, and in actively bringing these critiques into practice, I had begun the process of *militant ethnography* that constituted this research project. The ‘starting point for inquiry’ (DeVault 1996: 39) was thus precisely my own history of engagement, the values I had inherited, and the milieu within which I was an active participant.

The last quarter of 2008 was a particularly intense period to begin a process of militant ethnography; in the first instance, I had by this point been charged under Section 36 the 1861 Malicious Damages Act for the June action, and faced a year collaboratively preparing a suitable defence case. The Camp for Climate Action (CfCA) had recently held its third annual direct-action camp at Kingsnorth power-station, and was at the

beginning of considering its direction for the following year and reflecting on the 'politics' of its process. Lastly, following the first international meeting of the network which later became known as Climate Justice Action (CJA), an international 'call to action' had been circulated in mid-September calling for mass direct-action mobilizations surrounding the COP15 summit at the end of 2009 - a call which was directly supported by the CfCA at its September national gathering (Camp for Climate Action 2008a). Alongside the preparation of the defence case, from the end of September onwards I committed to participating in the CfCA's 'International Working Group', which formed at the November 2008 meeting to facilitate participation and communication with CJA, and communication with other countries' 'climate camps'.

In retrospect, there were perhaps three phases of the research that can be determined according to both the geography and the nature of my participation. From late-2008 until my arrival in Copenhagen in mid-November 2009, my participation extended to attending regular national gatherings of the CfCA, infrequent working-group specific meetings, facilitating and running information sessions at several different sites across the UK (such as the 2009 CfCA on Blackheath, the Anarchist Bookfair and numerous city specific events), participating in numerous e-lists, writing funding applications, coordinating publicity for the UK mobilization, organizing mass coach transportation for those attending the protests in Copenhagen, attending CJA planning meetings in Copenhagen (and feeding back to the CfCA), facilitating sessions at these international meetings, and contributing to CJA strategy discussions. From mid-November 2009 I was based in Copenhagen for six weeks, during which my participation included attending regular planning meetings, helping clean and refurbish the squatted buildings being used for crash-space (see *Photo 2.1*), distributing materials and literature between different mobilization spaces, being international 'gofers' facilitating quick and specific information gathering for the UK mobilization, publicly speaking at various events, participating in numerous big 'days of action' including the 'Reclaim Power' action on the 16th, and co-facilitating meetings.

These first two phases resulted in the collection of comprehensive 'data' that is typical of a militant ethnographic approach, including extensive field notes, meeting minutes, a personal blog-diary, email-lists (which were central in political organisation), movement literature, websites, agitprop and films, blogs, media coverage, and personal communication. As part of the commitment to an ongoing critical engagement with the movement(s), I authored a critical reflection on the political implications of the

mobilization for movement journal *Shift Magazine* (Russell 2010), and coauthored a longer piece in the online open-source journal *Perspectives* (Russell & Pusey 2010, which was syndicated across numerous movement websites.

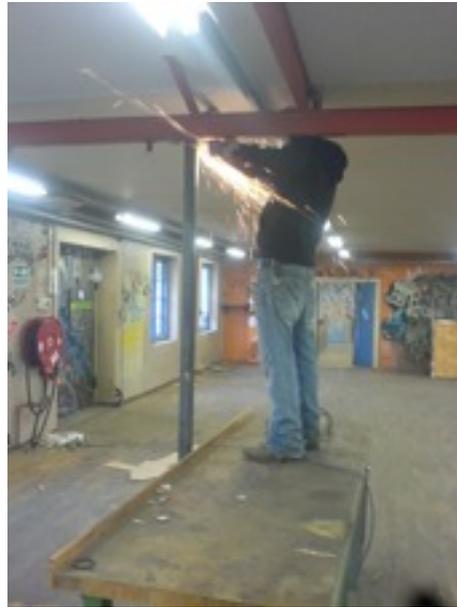


Photo 2.1

Source: Personal photo

The third ‘phase’ of the research extended from mid-January 2010, whilst the ‘end-point’ of the research can be equated with CJA’s international day of action on the 12th October. In the first instance, this included a continued but less intensive participation in the CfCA than had occurred from late-2008 onwards. The CJA network had also committed to continuing to organize and foment an international movement for ‘climate justice’, which included further international network meetings in Amsterdam and Bonn throughout the year and culminated in a moderately successful international day of action on the 12th October. Specifically, my research also extended to participating in the *World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* (CMPCC), held in Bolivia in mid-April 2010.

The CMPCC had been called by Bolivia’s president Evo Morales in response to the widely-perceived failure of the COP15, with the aim of bringing together the “world’s people” to forge a different way forward to that of the UNFCCC process. Following an agreement at the February meeting of CJA, it was agreed that emissaries-of-sorts should be sent to the Bolivia meeting, strictly without representational capacities, with the intention of delivering and distributing a CJA ‘position paper’. It was also agreed that there was a need to understand the Bolivian process, interpreting what it meant for those in Europe that were attempting to build radical climate justice movements. In response,

eight of us based across Europe committed to critically participate in the CMPCC process, and find ways to effectively feedback from the conference. As part of what became known as the ‘Building Bridges collective’, we decided to produce a short (98 page) book entitled *Space for Movement? Reflections from Bolivia on climate justice, social movements and the state* (see Fig 2.1), which we made freely available online (Building Bridges Collective 2010), along with printing 1,500 English copies for European and US distribution and 1,000 Spanish copies for distribution in Latin America.



Fig 2.1

Source: Personal files

The process of producing the book(let) was itself a process of ‘militant research’ conducted within the movement, as we looked to critically engage with the CMPCC with the intention of feeding this partisan knowledge directly back into the movements we were participants in. The process thus included dozens of Skype conferences, co-authoring chapters using the web-tool Crabgrass, and an intensive three-day meeting in Amsterdam towards the end of the authoring process. The research for the book thus included the collaborative experiences, minutes, and notes of the collective, along with 21 interviews conducted during our time in Bolivia<sup>2</sup>. These interviews were conducted for the process of producing the book(let) and were conducted by various members of the collective, and are thus not treated as ‘primary data’ to be used in this research.

<sup>2</sup> The biographies of all interviewees is available at the back of the *Space for Movement?* book(let).

This process of conducting collaborative militant research ‘within’ the process of the broader militant ethnographic research was a central way of ensuring that my research was directly and immediately relevant to the movements I was engaged with. In methodological terms, it ensured that my ‘method’ of participation was not as an outsider but as a constitutive participant in a movement engaged in the co-production of knowledge. Rather than ‘extracting’ information and attempting to provide an objective account of the Bolivian process, we openly stated that our participation was both partisan and critical, and that we were looking to construct knowledge of the CMPCC that would be specifically relevant to the movements in which we participated. Furthermore, the production of *Space for Movement* provides exemplifies the earlier point that movements are already full of ‘micro-researchers’ producing knowledge for their movements, and that research cannot be seen as the privilege of the institution.

### 2.5 Emergent aims

As suggested above (see *section 2.3*), the aims did not emerge as a set of hypotheses to be tested ‘before’ the research had begun, but rather emerged through a process of active critical engagement and commitment to the movement(s). Furthermore, these hypotheses did not emerge with the intention of being extracted from the context of the research and then tested so as to produce detached, objective knowledge - such is the process of ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1968). Rather, these hypotheses are better thought of as critical theoretical interventions, ‘problematics’ that emerged from within the research and were articulated directly into the movement, either through movement publications or through processual contributions in discussions, action planning, and strategizing.

The initial problematic of this research thus emerged during the initial phase of the research. Numerous voices from within the radical climate movement were actively critical of ‘liberal’ climate campaigns, suggesting that mainstream NGO coalitions such as *Stop Climate Chaos* and the *Climate Action Network*, along with organizations such as *Campaign Against Climate Change*, simply adopted reactive positions that could be reduced to ‘demanding the government act quickly’ (see *Section 6.1*). Simultaneously, the Drax action exemplified the alternative methods advocated and practiced by the ‘radical’ climate movement; not lobbying politicians through marches, ‘clicktivism’ (White 2010) and post-card campaigns, but taking responsibility into ones

own hands through taking ‘direct-action’. A key point of disagreement between the ‘reformist’ and the ‘radical’ climate movement thus appeared to be found in the favoured ‘methods’ of inducing change; yet a self-evident consensus existed between the ‘reformist’ and the ‘radicals’ concerning the change we wanted to see - ‘a rapid transition to a post-carbon world’.

This self-evident consensus regarding the ‘problem’ of climate-change - what it is, what its effects are (and will be), and the commonly agreed need to ‘solve’ it - appeared to transcend political differences, such that multi-national oil companies are capable of agreeing with forestry commissions, business lobby-groups, wildlife NGOs, direct-action protagonists, and ethical consumers over the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The hypothesis that arose was that this self-evident body of knowledge regarding ‘dangerous climate change’ was not detached, objective or ‘neutral’ knowledge, but had specific political implications. In other words, between a statement such as ‘atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> are rising’ and any given response, there exists a field of intelligibility - a way of imbuing the initial statement with meaning. The concern is that this ‘field of intelligibility’ has specific political effects, meaning the way we ‘know’ climate change constrains the field of possible (and impossible) actions we can take. The aim was thus to ‘interrupt the smooth passage of “regimes of truth”, to disrupt those forms of knowledge which have assumed a self-evident quality’ (Smart 1983: 135), which in the case of this research is the ‘self-evident’ nature of the problem of anthropogenic climate change.

In practice, this ‘interruption’ demanded tracing the historical production of the idea of ‘dangerous climate change’ - an idea which has become understood as an objective reality - understanding how our knowledge has been actively constructed within specific historical conditions. In tracing the construction of knowledge, there is a strong emphasis on producing a ‘a reconceptualization of the current order, rejecting what is tacitly accepted but known to be flawed, and problematising it in terms of its historical production’ (Kearins and Hooper 2002: 735). Tracing the historical production of knowledge thus cannot be done without a broader consideration of the the epochal shifts in power (and the political) that were occurring at the time ‘dangerous climate change’ emerged as a popular concern - namely in the 1980s during the collapse of the global political division between East and West. Ultimately, this tracing revealed that ‘dangerous climate change’ is a specifically partial knowledge, constructed during the 1980s according to liberal ‘Western’ pre-conditions of knowledge.

This tracing thus revealed a problematic that had begun to be developed elsewhere (cf. Swyngedouw 2009, 2010); the prevailing way of making-sense of climate change was in fact a depoliticizing force, one that was historically constructed within a liberal perspective, and that faced a certain incompatibility with the anti-capitalist and antiauthoritarian tendencies of the radical climate movement. As Slavoj Žižek has suggested, the ‘ecological’ understanding of climate change is the ‘new opium for the masses’ (Žižek 2008: 42); the problematic of climate change, reduced down to the atmospheric concentration of GHGs, serves to defuse the potential for naming and acting on the real political divisions that striate society. As such, the anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and anarchist tendencies which had been prevalent in the ‘radical environmental movements’ were being brought into a potentially irresolvable tension with the dominant knowledge of dangerous climate change.

This critique formed the basis of an essay that was co-authored immediately prior to the COP15 protests, and circulated in a published form immediately after. Albeit in a somewhat embryonic stage, the essay highlighted the ‘urgent need... to move beyond the single-issue environmentalism that has isolated climate change as the preserve of a specialist eco-activist vanguard’ and to look for ways in which the climate justice movements could both reveal and overcome the ‘schizophrenic tension of environmental movements’ (Russell and Pusey 2010: 27-8). This was an observable tension amongst tendencies within the UK radical climate movement, and my involvement within the CfCA and CJA became geared towards addressing this problematic. As such, my involvement in CJA became largely driven by an interrogation of the ‘post-political’ problematic; to what extent did CJA, as a newly composing entity, become aware of this problematic? Confronted by the COP15 as a focal point, was CJA able to create a discourse around ‘climate justice’ that was capable of overcoming the problematic?

The same line of inquiry extended through to my participation in the *World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* (CMPCC). Following Morales’ assertion that ‘the real cause of climate change is the capitalist system’ (Vidal, 2009), and the fact that the conference would be bringing together a significantly different demographic to the COP15 mobilization, the CMPCC offered the potential for further elaboration on overcoming the ‘post-political’ problematic. Thus the questions to be asked; to what extent did the CMPCC process address the ‘post-political’

problematic? Did the developing discourse(s) of climate justice sufficiently address this depoliticizing tendency, articulating different knowledge(s) of climate change?

Finally, it is essential that I preempt a potential response to the research introduced above, one which would lead to a considerable misreading of its purpose. The intention of disrupting the ‘self-evident quality’ of our knowledge of dangerous climate change is *not* to align this research whatsoever with those that claim climate change is a ‘hoax’, or that there is ‘too much uncertainty’ in the available science to warrant acting. Indeed, this research is not interested with scientific information *per se*, but with the role afforded to scientific information within a broader epistemic frame. If anything, this research is more interested in the similarities between ‘deniers’ and ‘believers’ *vis-à-vis* the centrality of scientific information than it is with any contested claims over the accuracy of science. Thus, from the outset, my ‘critical commitment’ was with those fighting to tackle the ‘root causes’ of climate change, and the research remained directed towards co-producing new knowledge(s) to empower movements. I remain committed to working with those who share a desire to critique and act on the systemic problem of capitalism, always looking to construct new forms of freedom.

### 2.6 A contingent ‘ethics of care’

Any social sciences work conducted within the academy is expected to be conducted according to a series of normative ethical principles, which in general are extended across all research procedures without exception. As Bradshaw suggests, ‘the standard approach adopted by ethics committees for research on human subjects is biomedical and/or psychological. This approach is firmly grounded in quantitative positivist science and applies either a deontological model of ethical absolutism or a utilitarian model of balancing costs or risks against benefits’ (Bradshaw 2004: 203). This understanding of ‘ethics’ belongs firmly within a detached and objectivist understanding of conducting research ‘on’ other humans or cultures, and thus denies ‘ethics’ its contingent nature.

With respect to any form of ethnographic work, ‘to be bound by such a set of regulations would be absurd; such a code could not possibly apply in all research situations’ (Ferdinand, Pearson et al. 2007: 538). Not only is it impossible that one could declare all the potential unfoldings of the research to an ethical review board prior to the research (Manzo and Brightbill 2007: 34), but the nature of any ethnographic involvement is that as the research is conducted within a given social milieu - or many

in the case of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) - what may be considered an 'ethical' process of engagement is liable to change. Thus from a practical perspective alone, there are notable restrictions to the application of normative ethical procedures to ethnographic research.

More importantly, and informed by the feminist and poststructural critiques of detached and objective knowledge, the form of 'ethics' which are relevant to conducting any form of radical or militant research necessarily understands 'ethics' not as predetermined 'rules of conduct', but rather as an open process of negotiation. Indeed, the idea that a universal and impartial set of 'ethics' can be extricated from any form of social setting is a fundamental object of feminist critique (Scheper-Hughes 1995: Gilligan 1982). Contra the dominant idea that 'the most ethical person acts from universally applicable rights or virtues or obligations... governed by universal laws', a more 'sophisticated' method of 'moral decision making [is] based on the value for relationship, not the value for principle' (Pressie 2007: 517). In other words, through understanding 'ethics' as an open and negotiated procedure that respects the contingent and fluid nature of relationships - what has been termed an 'ethics of care' (Noddings 1984) - a non-essentialist ethics is arguably 'more ethical' due to its sensitivity to the peculiarities of both the researcher and the research participants.

Just as the feminist and post-structural epistemological critique does not endorse a post-modern relativism in which 'anything goes', this approach to a contingent ethics of care in no way absolves the researcher of ethical responsibility. On the contrary, it means learning, adapting and negotiating a shared ethics *within* the milieu, which if anything is a more rigorous and demanding process than meeting the abstracted demands of an ethics committee. It means prioritising respect for the relationships and values that emerge within the milieu over any external 'demands'. As a militant researcher within the radical environmental movement, there are a series of ethical problematics which are unique to the field of research, along with a series of more general problems that arise from conducting militant research 'within' the institution.

The foremost ethical principle when conducting militant research from 'within' the academy is the necessity to remain critically committed to the milieu. In practice, this means resisting the process of 'going academic' through positing oneself as an objective researcher who either has *no need* to engage with internal ethical debates, or is in some way 'exempt' from the ethical perspectives that emerge. Indeed as a constitutive participant in these movements, it should be self-evident that one has an active concern

or ‘stake’ in any internal deliberations; any idea that one could ‘extricate’ oneself from these concerns quite simply doesn’t make sense, except from the position of an ‘objective’ researcher. For example, meetings of CJA and the CfCA often collectively agreed principles of engagement or ‘codes of conduct’, which covered how participants were to engage with each other (i.e. through consensus decision making, not shouting over others, and no tolerance for racist or sexist perspectives) and matters of security, such as agreeing that no recording devices were to be used in the meetings. It is uncontroversial to suggest that the militant researcher abide by these commonly agreed principles.

The real ‘ethical’ problematics arise when the demands of the institution intrude into the militant researchers critical commitment in the movement. A specific tension is that institutional pressures such as a thesis deadline result in the researcher ‘dropping out’ of their commitments, either temporarily in periods of high pressure, or ‘for good’ once the research has been completed. In positions when one is reliant on the wage of the academy, this can be problematic as one may be forced to change focus according to funding potentials, irrespective of their political commitments. This is not strictly a problem unique to militant research conducted from within the academy; any number of life pressures (jobs, family, or ‘burnout’) may result in participants taking ‘time out’ or changing the focus of their political commitments. However, it becomes truly problematic if one ‘goes academic’, looking to involve oneself in political movements purely - or primarily - to further ones own academic career rather than through a deep solidarity with the movements. Such a scenario is a betrayal of the principles of solidarity that are at the heart of any critical research.

Whilst critical or militant research thus requires the researcher to prioritize an ‘ethics of care’, it does not necessarily put one in opposition to common ethical concerns, although a critically committed perspective on these ethical commitments is required. For example, the principle of ensuring the anonymity of others within the research milieu remains absolutely crucial. Many participants within the radical climate milieu are conscious of the illegitimate ‘criminalization’ of their activities, both from within the mainstream media (PCC 2008) and through the actions of the state (Climate Collective 2012). Maintaining the anonymity of participants is thus absolutely crucial, and names, revealing details or photographic material was not collected at any point in the research. Furthermore, personal notebooks were kept secure such that there was no possibility of them being used for anything bar their intended purpose.

On the contrary, the commonly required practice of gaining ‘informed consent’ from research participants was not appropriate to this research. In the first instance, it was impracticable to gain consent; meetings usually consisted of hundreds of people that could not all be consulted. Given that all the groups were self-avowedly non-hierarchical, the common ethnographic practice of gaining consent through ‘community leaders’ or ‘gate-keepers’ (Wax 1980) was also implausible, as nobody had the authority to make decisions on behalf of others. Beyond the practical impossibility of achieving informed consent, the actual process of attempting to gain informed consent is problematic from the perspective of conducting militant research. As Anthony Ince found in his research with the IWW and Social Centres in London, ‘individualising and contractualising consent... potentially compromises the bonds of solidarity and trust between participants’ (Ince 2010: 130). In other words, ‘importing’ an ethical tool that is commonly associated with the fulfillment of an ‘academic’ understanding of the ‘ethical’ can serve to undermine the collective trust and comradeship that defines militant ethnography, and that is the basis of collective knowledge production.

The decision not to seek informed consent, instead prioritising the creation of close mutual bonds of trust, was also relevant in the issue of ‘access’. As mentioned above (see *section 2.2*), I had a long history of involvement in the radical climate movement, such that I did not begin this research as an ‘outsider’ but as a constituent movement actor interested in conducting militant research. Whilst there were no concerns regarding how to ‘access’ these movements, given that I was already part of them, a separate ethical problem arose as to whether the commencement of research would constitute an ‘abuse’ of this trust? This was an important reflection, for had I began to undertake ‘objectivist’ research, such as attempting to provide a mechanical account of how these movements communicated and organized, there would be a danger of abusing the trust I had built within the milieu. Furthermore, I would have been producing knowledge which, in the wrong hands, may well be of detriment to the movements of which I was part. Thus the decision from the outset to a militant ethnographic approach, which committed me to undertaking partisan research with the movements in which I participated, along with an openness to engaging and reflecting on the research, was central to an ethical approach to the research.





### **Chapter Three: The Post-Political Condition**

#### *3.0 Introduction*

It has been suggested by Erik Swyngedouw that contemporary ecological/environmental politics contribute ‘to the making and consolidation of a post-political and post-democratic condition, one that actually forecloses the possibility of a real politics of the environment’ (Swyngedouw 2007: 12-13). A significant implication of his thesis is the suggestion that the strategies and tactics of movements to tackle climate change may in fact be both contributing to and sustaining a ‘post-political’ condition which leaves us powerless to have any effect on the environmental problems we face. Perhaps more striking is the implicit suggestion that ‘radical climate movements’ - which can be colloquially understood as harbouring critical perspectives regarding how climate change is perceived and addressed - may in fact be committed to the same underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions as other ‘conventional’ accounts of climate change. What Swyngedouw’s critique suggests is that *how* we know climate change is of the utmost importance, and that any critical assessment of climate change must fundamentally include an interrogation of the a priori’s of our knowledge.

This chapter seeks to chart the development of what has been termed the ‘post-political condition’, developing an historical and theoretical account of the concept. In no way peculiar to a discussion of climate change, the post-political condition can be interpreted as a specific way of interpreting the world that developed as a function of Liberalism. Defined by its allegiance to the concept of a universally free and equal humanity, Liberalism has a political history that can be traced from the US Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1776 and 1789 respectively (Hobsbawm, 1980), and that arguably reached its apogee with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Whilst the latter date has been associated with the consolidation of the post-political condition, we will find that it is more accurate to consider the post-political condition as a fundamental characteristic of the Liberal perspective, one that has adopted a new significance over the past two decades.

Acknowledging Swyngedouw’s theoretical influences, this chapter begins with the work of the post-Marxist philosopher Chantal Mouffe, or more precisely with Carl Schmitt, whose ideas are central to Mouffe’s critique of the post-political condition. With specific emphasis on Schmitt’s work *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt 1995), we can

develop an understanding of the political as a relationship constituted by the friend/enemy antithesis. For both authors, this antithesis is the essential basis of all social groupings - not least the formation of states - against which all other binaries are considered secondary and apolitical. As such, the basis of all political establishments is a separation or division, the drawing of a frontier between those who are included and those who are excluded. Consequently, Schmitt's critique of Liberalism is grounded in the latter's claim that there exists a universal humanity that can operate as the basis of the political. Whereas a political relationship takes an exclusion as its founding principle, Liberalism begins with a universal *inclusion* - nobody is excluded from a universally free and equal humanity. The fact that Liberalism is based on a universal inclusion means that it is apolitical by definition; attempts to enshrine the Liberal idea within political institutions pose not only a paradox, but a threat to the political foundation of democracy. As Schmitt notes, 'universality at any price would necessarily have to mean total depoliticization' (Schmitt 1995: 55).

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was welcomed by many as the 'unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' (Fukuyama 1989: 1), spelling the end of an unprecedented political division between the 'communist' East and the Liberal West. Announcing this moment as the 'end of history', Fukuyama acknowledged Hegel's understanding of history in suggesting that the triumph of Liberalism marked the surpassing of political divisions in favour of the global realization of the universal Liberal idea. This 'end of history' could thus be celebrated as the death of ideologies; in place of political differences, we now live in an era of consensus, where 'consensus means that whatever your personal commitment, interests and values may be, you perceive the same things, you give them the same name. But there is no contest on what appears, on what is given in a situation and as a situation' (Rancière 2003: 5).

Remobilizing Schmitt against Liberal universalism, Mouffe reminds us that 'there is no consensus without exclusion, no 'we' without a 'they', and no politics is possible without the drawing of a frontier' (Mouffe 2005: 73). As such, the claim that we have entered a post-political epoch is in fact a peculiarity of a Liberal perspective blinded by its own ideology; rather than the political having been surpassed, it has been hidden from view. Mouffe suggests that the political has been redrawn according to a moral register, where political differences become rendered according to the categories of good against evil. As such, rather than differences being understood as political, everything becomes cast in moral terms, so that it is self-evident that only the ill-

educated, deranged or evil are able to support anything opposed to the Liberal consensus. As Nietzsche suggested, from the perspective of the Liberal, ‘everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into the insane asylum’ (Nietzsche 2006: 10).

Alain Badiou supplements Mouffe’s theory of the moral consensus, noting that the post-1989 epoch has become defined by a ‘return to Kant’ and an obsession with moral discourse. As suggested by Badiou’s reference to a philosopher who lived in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, this moral discourse is not something peculiar to contemporary times, but is definitive of the Liberal project that has increasingly dominated the past two centuries. What *is* novel about the present is that whereas this moral discourse has historically been confronted with visible political contestation in forms such as the Prussian monarchy or the ‘communist’ East, it is now seemingly unchallenged in the global zeitgeist. If this end of history was a cause of celebration for liberals such as Hegel, Kojève, and Fukuyama, it was Nietzsche who was first to lament this trajectory of civilization, warning that ‘the time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself’ (Nietzsche 2006: 9).

It is ultimately Nietzsche who facilitates us in thinking against and beyond this Liberal account of history; as Deleuze concluded in his 1962 book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, ‘there is no possible compromise between Hegel and Nietzsche’ (Deleuze 2005: 184). Nietzsche, like Hegel, perceived the French Revolution as a highly significant development in the realization of universal thought, yet whilst Hegel rejoiced in what he understood as the emergence of a perfect form of ‘scientific’ thought, Nietzsche interpreted it as a succession in the great ‘slaves’ revolt in morality’ (Nietzsche 1994: 18). Understanding the significance of the Revolution in expanding the nihilistic form of thought formed by the moral perspective, Nietzsche warned against the ‘last man’ as the figure that would emerge if we blindly pursued Hegel’s logical account of the dialectical movement of history. Nietzsche’s critique of the emergence of the last man holds such potency that Fukuyama himself, whom is equally incompatible with Nietzsche as Hegel, adopted the figure in the title of his infamous book *The End of History and the Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992). We can ultimately interpret Nietzsche’s account of the last man as the subject of the post-political condition, and hence associate this subject with the moral register that Mouffe and Badiou suggest came to prevail in the post-1989 epoch.

The chapter concludes that the post-political condition is a perversion peculiar to the Liberal perspective - the nihilistic disposition of the last man. With the collapse of the 'communist' East, the universal Liberal ideal reached an unprecedented global dominance as all political opposition to the Liberal ideal appeared to have become relegated to history. However, it is not that we now exist in an epoch devoid of exclusions that constitute the political, but that these exclusions have been hidden from view. This immediately poses the question, where has the political gone? Mouffe's suggestion that the political has been displaced onto a moral register is indicative of the shift that has occurred, but is insufficient in accounting for the historical and ideological development of the Liberal modality of power. As such, it is finally suggested that to enrich our understanding of the operation of the political in the 'post-political' age, it is possible to map the emergence of the post-political consciousness onto Michel Foucault's concepts of the overlapping and changing modalities of power. This provides us with a set of theoretical tools to uncover the genealogy of the 'hidden political spectrum' that has been developing alongside the traditional political form expressed by Schmitt.

### *3.1 Schmitt's concept of the political*

Chantal Mouffe first uses the term 'post-political' in her book, *On the Political* (2005), although the ideas underlying the concept can be found fully formed in her work from the mid-1990s. As such, whilst she may or may not have appropriated the term from Slavoj Žižek's work *The Ticklish Subject* (1999), Mouffe offers perhaps the clearest exposition of the concept. Notwithstanding the question of terminology, a warning against the emergence of the post-political condition can be found in the final paragraph of Carl Schmitt's influential yet controversial work, *The Concept of the Political* (1996 [1932]). It is through Schmitt's understanding of the nature of the political, and its contradictory relationship with an 'apolitical' liberalism, that it is possible to define the condition of the post-political. Mouffe's contribution is therefore to have reiterated the relevance of Schmitt in understanding the contemporary (post)political condition, and to have highlighted the dangerous implications of such a condition.

Schmitt asserts that the political, a prerequisite to the formation of a community in any guise, is formed on a unique and specific distinction irreducible to all other forms of antagonism or difference. That is to say, to be able to distinguish something as a

*political* relationship, there must be a specific distinction that characterises this relationship as such. Schmitt identifies the formative distinction as the antithesis between ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’, where the political is therefore defined by peoples grouped according to a line of demarcation between those who are unconditionally friends, and those who are unconditionally enemies. To this end, the ‘distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost intensity of a union or separation, or an association or dissociation’, so that ‘the political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping’ (Schmitt 1995: 26, 29).

In terms of the emergence of the friend/enemy antithesis, ‘every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy’ (*ibid*; 37). No antithesis but the friend/enemy antithesis is political in its own right; it is only upon their reification as a friend/enemy distinction that they assume a political nature. Consequently, whilst an apolitical antithesis remains intact and may be crucial in rendering the enemy, it becomes secondary to the *political* formation of friend/enemy; ‘emotionally the enemy is easily treated as being evil and ugly, because every distinction, most of all the political, as the strongest and most intense of the distinction and categorizations, draws upon other distinction for support. This does not alter the autonomy of such distinctions’ (*ibid*; 27).

Having established the concept of the *political*, it follows that Schmitt understands *politics* (juridical practice) as those lesser forms of antagonism that operate internal to the now-established ‘friendship’ grouping. Indeed, given that a decision in the realm of politics requires knowledge of who is making the decision and whom is bound by it, the *political* is considered an *a priori* to politics occurring. The *political* act should therefore be interpreted as defining who belongs to the *demos* and is therefore a participant in politics, and those who are excluded from the *demos* and therefore have no role either as the subject or object of politics<sup>3</sup>. Politics is henceforth considered to be the process of disagreement and negotiation over antagonisms that occur within a *demos*, but that are not fundamentally concerned with undertaking a political decision over who does or does not belong to the *demos* - a mutuality is recognised amongst

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that politics and juridical practice are equated here as the procedure of generating the internal law and order of the *demos*.

participants, despite their differences on matters such as economics, morality, faith, aesthetics etc.

A significant danger of politics - Schmitt reserves this critique specifically for pluralism and parliamentarism - is that an apolitical issue may intensify to the point at which it becomes an irresolvable antagonism within the *demos*. When this becomes the case, there is the distinct possibility that the apolitical issue may reify into a friend/enemy antithesis, forcing a rupture in the *demos*; such an event can be understood as the 'becoming political' of an antithesis. This invariably manifests itself in the form of civil war, which can be resolved either through the elimination of the 'enemy' - either through eradication or emasculation, and hence the restoration of a friendship unity - or through secession into separate *political* entities. Historical examples are abound of civil wars having been resolved in either manner, and indeed of unresolved civil wars, but this is not of concern here.

All the more importantly, what is revealed is that 'to the enemy concept belongs the ever present possibility of combat [where] war is armed combat between organized political entities [and] civil war is armed combat within an organized unit'. As such, the 'friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy' (*ibid*; 32-3). The fundamental connection between the *political* and *combat* does not lead by necessity to war, but it must remain an essential possibility. As Schmitt continues, 'war is neither the aim nor the purpose nor even the very content of [the political]. But as an ever present possibility it is the leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behaviour' (*ibid*, 34). War is necessarily reserved by the *political* entity as the most extreme act which, if the existence of the *political* entity as such is threatened, may be mobilised in the defence of the *demos*.

### 3.2 *The paradox of liberal democracy*

Having established the nature of the *political*, finding its definition through the drawing of a line of demarcation between friend/enemy, Schmitt proceeds to provide a critique of the fundamental tenets of the liberal project as antithetical to the *political*. At the heart of the critique is the implication of liberalism's alignment with the concept of a universal humanity, which he understands as a move that is not only thoroughly

apolitical in itself, but one that seeks to deny the very possibility of the *political*. However, the project of realising such a universal humanity would not erase the existence of friend/enemy antitheses in favour of a unified homogenous world, but rather obscure the *political* from view, blinding us to the *political* rationality underpinning antagonisms.

Characteristic of the ‘universal’ nature of liberal humanity is that it necessarily exists without any form of ‘outside’ or ‘exterior’ – humanity is accorded a transcendental quality. Concomitant with the concept of a *universal* humanity is the condition of internal homogeneity; this is not to say that everybody is fundamentally the same, but that every person, as a person, should be considered inherently equal to one another, so that no one person, collective, or race, can be considered an inherently superior entity. This ideal finds one of its earliest expressions in the *United States Declaration of Independence*, in which it is infamously stated that, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that *all men are created equal*, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable Rights*, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ (1776; emphasis added).

The universally homogenous humanity proves to be contradictory to the *political* or democratic conception, for as Mouffe reminds us, the latter ‘requires the possibility of distinguishing who belong to the *demos* and therefore have equal rights and those who, in the political domain, cannot have the same rights because they are not part of the *demos*’ (Mouffe 1997: 23). Given the liberal idea is premised *precisely* on the indivisible nature of humanity, there is no way that it can provide the grounds for any political entity. As Schmitt states, ‘the political entity cannot by its very nature be universal in the sense of embracing all of humanity and the entire world’ (Schmitt 1995: 53). Any idea of a ‘democracy of mankind’ is hence a meaningless concept, for the *demos* can only be formed on the basis of a frontier - a line of demarcation that excludes those ‘enemies’ who are not to be part of the *demos*. The central problem for the liberal condition is ‘precisely its incapacity to conceptualize such a frontier. As Schmitt indicates, the central concept of liberal discourse is ‘humanity’, which... is not a political concept and does not correspond to any political entity’ (Mouffe 1997: 23).

Schmitt understands that liberal-democracy therefore embodies an irresolvable paradox that will necessarily end in crisis and the obfuscation of the *political* and hence the democratic state - the conditions of which we shall return to shortly. More optimistically, Mouffe suggests that there is a productive way forward, providing that

democratic politics develops the ‘vital’ understanding that ‘liberal democracy results from the articulation of two logics which are incompatible in the last instance and that there is no way in which they could be perfectly reconciled’ (Mouffe 2005: 5). Less a resolution and more a scenario of constant negotiation, Mouffe proposes that liberal democracy ought to adopt an *agonistic* model of democracy, characterised not by the ‘misguided... search for a final rational solution’ - a criticism she reserves for theorists of deliberative democracy and communicative action such as Rawls and Habermas - but by its ability to ‘grasp the nature of the political’ (*ibid*, 93).

The aim of an agonistic model of democracy - which is also termed *agonistic pluralism* - is to ‘construct the ‘them’ in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed but as an ‘adversary’, that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question’ (*ibid*, 101-2). In other words, the underlying concern is that the very antithesis that is constitutive of the *political* also contains the potential of evolving into a condition of absolute war, whereby the ‘friend’ seeks to permanently erase the existence of the ‘enemy’<sup>4</sup>. This, Mouffe argues, leads to a fundamental existential crisis, as the destruction of the Other results in the elimination of the ‘constitutive outside’ that is the foundation of the *political*. In other words, the two aspects of the ‘we/they’ binary are mutually constitutive, and must therefore recognize each other as legitimate competitors that require each other for their own internal consistency. If one side succeeds in the elimination of the other, they are in the same move responsible for removing the conditions of the political.

The sporting analogy of a game of football provides perhaps most the accessible account of the agonistic scenario. Both teams desire nothing less than to ‘beat’ their opponents, whilst opposing sets of fans may want to injure or even kill each other. However, both sides require the other to exist if they are going to have a game of football, and therefore must recognise that despite their bitter rivalry, they must in the last instance respect the mutuality of their existence. Whilst it may seem tenuous to reduce the agonistic concept as such, the etymology of agonism can be traced to the Greek *agon* (*ἀγών*), which ‘refers most directly to an athletic contest orientated not merely toward victory or defeat, but emphasizing the importance of the struggle itself – a struggle that cannot exist without the opponent’ (Chambers 2001; n. pag).

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<sup>4</sup> This possibility is recognized by Schmitt, but he embraces this potential of conflict as the fundamental nature of the political that cannot be evaded.

The agonistic model of democracy therefore looks to guard against the emergence of such a crisis situation, to prevent the realisation of war which nonetheless remains an inherent potential in the political relationship. Whilst it is perhaps self-evident that Mouffe would not look to the arch-liberal Kant to ground her political conception, the agonistic scenario nonetheless appears to find close accord with his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*. In laying out the conditions for a perpetual peace that nonetheless recognises the sovereignty of states, Kant notes that in a situation of conflict, ‘neither of the two parties can be called an unjust enemy, because this form of speech presupposes a legal decision’ (Kant 1915: 115). With this statement, Kant pre-emptively Schmitt in recognising that the relationship between two parties is not a juridical concern, which is to say, the relationship between two parties is not a matter of *politics* but of the *political*. Existing as separate *political* entities, there is no consensual politics between the two and as such no common juridical framework according to which any justice could be meted out.

Given the *political* nature of the problem, Kant rules out the possibility that nations could ‘[give] up their lawless freedom, just as individual men have done’, through the creation of a global nation-state. Although Kant does not elaborate on his reasons for this impossibility beyond simply maintaining that states ‘by no means desire this’ (*ibid*, 136), it is nonetheless consistent with Schmitt’s view that the ‘political entity cannot be universal in the sense of embracing all of humanity and the entire world’ (Schmitt 1995: 53). The reasons for this have already been touched upon, namely that the creation of such a universal political entity would serve to negate the *political* dimension, leading to ‘a complete devaluation of political equality and of politics itself’ (Mouffe 1997: 24).

Kant therefore presents what he terms a ‘negative substitute’ for the idea of such a world-republic - ‘[only] a federation averting war, maintaining its ground and ever extending over the world may stop the current of this tendency to war and shrinking from the control of law’ (Kant 1915: 136). This ‘federation’ is conceived as one in which *political* entities retain their sovereignty, yet for the sake of their own perpetuation, form a consensus amongst one another that they will refrain from acts of war. Nonetheless - and once again revealing the consistency between himself, Schmitt and Mouffe - Kant warns that even with the formation of this noble federation ‘there will be a constant danger that this propensity [of war] may break out’ (*ibid*, 136). Mouffe’s *agonism* can be understood as sharing not only the desire to obtain the condition of perpetual peace, but also the impossibility of this ever occurring as a final

‘rational’ solution - in other words, the perpetuity of this perpetual peace cannot finally be guaranteed.

If Mouffe’s agonistic vision has indeed made an advance on Kant’s dream of perpetual peace, it is through introducing an awareness of the mutual interdependence of political entities; the effect of which is only to make the call for a Kantian solution all the more urgent. Ultimately, Mouffe wished to use Schmitt *contra* Schmitt to both reveal the antagonism of liberal-democracy, and at the same time to pose a post-Schmittian solution based on the mediation of the contradiction between transcendental liberalism and the foundation of democracy. In the final circumstance, and no doubt much to the dismay of Mouffe given her awareness of the dangers of returning to Schmitt, the *agonistic* vision can ultimately be subjected to a Schmittian critique - we must finally think Schmitt *contra* Mouffe.

Mouffe’s agonistic solution is ultimately premised on the establishment of a consensus between sovereign states, which is to say, (in)perpetual peace is to be established through sovereign entities coming to a collective agreement that it is in their self-interests to not eliminate one another. For advocates of deliberative approaches to liberal democracy, the admission that *agonism* relies upon rational consensus serves to only further strengthen their claims. As Andrew Knops summarises:

‘Mouffe’s own agonistic alternative to deliberative democracy, designed to counter the impossibility of rational consensus, is itself reliant on that very notion...The very reason for advocating her alternative was the impossibility of the notion of rational consensus, and she has offered detailed arguments to show how rational consensus was impossible. However, it now turns out that her alternative relies on the notion of rational consensus that she has rejected’ (Knops 2007: 118).

Yet whilst this contradiction in Mouffe’s work appears to be a ‘legitimation of the liberal democratic monopolizing of plurality and emancipation [and] the incontestability of liberalism (Frederiksen 2010: 150), a more critical eye would assert that this has only returned us to the paradox of liberal-democracy. It is fitting that we therefore return to Schmitt in providing a critique of Mouffe’s *agonism*.

The purpose of *agonistic pluralism* is to transform, or rather prevent, struggle developing into a conflictual war between enemies; as Mouffe reiterates, ‘*antagonism* is struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is struggle between adversaries’ (Mouffe

2005: 102-3). This move to soften the immediate possibility of war had been preempted by Schmitt, as he notes that 'liberalism in one of its typical dilemmas of intellect and economics has attempted to transform the enemy from the viewpoint of economics into a competitor and from the intellectual point *into a debating adversary* (Schmitt, 1996; 28. emphasis added). Following Mouffe's logic, the consensus that the *agonistic* scenario relies upon must itself have a constitutive outside, which is to say, the 'federation of nations' must itself be founded on a frontier, the inclusion must be based on an exclusion.

Given that Mouffe's *agonism* ultimately serves to only restate the liberal-democratic paradox on a different scale, it is worth revisiting Schmitt's concern for the prospects of democracy in the event of continued the expansion of liberalism. Writing in 1923, Schmitt's *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* was an attempt to defend the constitution of the Weimar Republic, which had formed following the German revolution in 1918. Schmitt saw that the rise of 'parliamentarism, in government by discussion' - a political ideal which 'belongs to the intellectual world of liberalism' (Schmitt 2000: 8) - threatened the very foundation of the democratic state. The parliamentary process contained the inherent danger of ethical or economic disagreements transforming into friend/enemy antitheses, which would provide a serious threat to the *political* consistency of the Republic. Ultimately, Schmitt was concerned that parliamentarism favoured *politics* over the *political* process responsible for sustaining the Republic; the parliamentary process served only to sow the seeds of civil war.

Beyond the threat posed to the Weimar Republic, Schmitt noted that wherever the liberal ideal of an 'indifferent concept of equality, without the necessary correlate of inequality, actually takes hold of an area of human life, then this area loses its substance and is overshadowed by another sphere in which inequality then comes into play with ruthless power' (*ibid* 13). Hence, whilst the worth of all could be respected so long as they belonged to one state or another, 'it would nevertheless be an irresponsible stupidity, leading to the worst chaos, and therefore to even worse injustice, if the specific characteristics of various spheres were not recognized' (*ibid* 11). As maintained throughout his life, the *political* fundamentally relied upon an exclusion, and the only way equality could be established was through the drawing of a frontier in the first instance. To a degree, Schmitt was an ardent supporter of equality; it was the idea of *universal* equality that was anathema to him.

### 3.3 *The emergence of the post-political*

The 9th November 1989 symbolized the end a geopolitical division of unprecedented scale that had come to define the twentieth century. Whilst the geographical distribution of socialist and liberal states only roughly corresponded with the terms ‘East’ and ‘West’, it was nonetheless one of the primary antitheses in rendering the *political* division. Nowhere was this antitheses embodied more clearly than in the division between the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* and the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* - understood in Anglophone nations as East and West Germany. With East and West Germany having become rendered the epicenter of the *political* antithesis, the Berlin Wall became the reified frontier, a physical representation of the line of demarcation between two *political* antagonists. For this reason, and despite the fact that state-socialism did not abruptly end but rather entered into a transition, the breaching of the Berlin wall signified the termination of the *political* formation on a global scale.

The closure of this *political* antagonism was heralded by Western protagonists, most infamously in Francis Fukuyama’s declaration that we (that is, humanity) had finally reached ‘the end of history’. Fukuyama’s article, published only a few months prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, reflected on the Soviet *perestroika* and its implementation by Gorbachev to suggest that ‘what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’. What was occurring was not a ‘convergence between capitalism and socialism’, as there was no compromise that could be made in such a *political* formation, but the ‘unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism’ (Fukuyama 1989: 3).

To restate his argument briefly in terms we are have become familiar with, the East/West *political* formation that had dominated the twentieth century had come to an end, with the Liberal West emerging as the victor. This did not mean that all states were now ‘perfectly’ liberal-democratic, or that there was no longer any form of suffering, disagreement or misery in the world that may manifest itself in various conflicts, but rather that the idea of democratic-liberalism was *ultimate* in every sense of the word. On the one hand, liberal-democracy was the best possible Idea achievable and ‘there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled’ (Fukuyama 1992: xii). On the

other, democratic-liberalism was the dialectical product of all other ideological antagonisms that had come before it, and could therefore be considered to mark the end point of the philosophical process. The fall of the Berlin Wall did not therefore mark any progress in the ‘history of ideas’ - such a feat would be impossible from the liberal perspective - but rather the unprecedented global dominance of the liberal Idea following its triumph over its final adversary, communism.

Whilst Fukuyama’s article attracted much attention, this was arguably due to its impeccable timing and the accessibility of his ideas rather than to any theoretical innovation. Indeed, what is found in both the article and his later book *The End of History and the Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992) is little more than an explicit restating of the work of Alexander Kojève, who himself had largely been recognized not for his own theoretical progression but for the clarity with which he had interpreted Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (Hegel 1977 [1807]). Given that Fukuyama makes no attempt to hide this theoretical debt, the uniqueness of Fukuyama’s work is to be found in its claim that material reality had now ‘caught up’ with the ideological completion of Liberalism.

Hegel’s philosophy suggested that the history of ideas would not continue indefinitely but rather that through pursuing a dialectical resolution of contradictions, we would ultimately reach a point at which no contradictions remained at the level of ideas and consciousness. Hegel ultimately attributes this final ideological state to liberalism, although he could not recognize or name it as such for to do so would be to acknowledge his own thought as ideological. In contrast, Hegel interpreted this liberal endpoint as the ‘scientific’ condition, a form of thought free of any ideological bent and instead capable of establishing objective truths about the world. Although the *United States Declaration of Independence* (1776) could perhaps be accredited for having fulfilled the task at an earlier date, the significance of the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789) was to have realized the liberal idea at the level of political organization, which is to say, the French Revolution was the point at which Liberal thought actualized itself in a political form. As such, the Revolution adopted a central significance in Hegel’s thought; indeed, Hegel insisted that it was only possible to write the *Phenomenology* because the Revolution had created an audience capable of receiving it (Gunn 2011).

Hegel had expressed some concerns in his 1802 essay *The German Constitution* that, following the Second Congress of Rastatt in 1797, France was renegeing on the

principles of the Revolution and pursuing self-interested expansion and enrichment as opposed to a principled exportation of the Liberal idea. However, this wavering commitment to the French Revolution was ephemeral, and Napoleon's defeat of the Prussian monarchy at the 1806 Battle of Jena was considered by Hegel as confirmation that the Napoleonic order was committed to an expansive realization of the values of the Revolution. The defeat of the Prussian monarchy at the Battle of Jena was not to be understood merely as the defeat of an 'enemy', but as the prevalence of Liberalism over an inferior regime of thought plagued by contradictions. Hegel understood this *political* victory as the beginning of the *end of history*, as from this moment on what would unfold would be the gradual realization of 'scientific thought' on an increasingly global scale.

It is henceforth possible to ascertain precisely why the fall of the Berlin Wall can be considered as signifying the emergence of the post-political epoch. According to Fukuyama's assessment, the defeat of the 'communist' East was the final *political* act of embodied Liberalism, concluding a process which had begun in 1806. This event heralded the realization of the Liberal ideal on the global scale in as much that no substantial *political* opponent to the West remained. Whilst some bastions of 'inferior' regimes of thought still remain, such as North Korea or Cuba, they could be deemed as irrelevant; as Fukuyama nauseatingly puts it, 'it matters very little what strange thoughts occur to people in Albania or Burkina Faso, for we are interested in what one could in some sense call the common ideological heritage of mankind' (Fukuyama 1989: 7). All are now considered to be born equal and guaranteed their rights as humans; a humanity which knows no frontiers, and has no enemies. From a Liberal perspective, the 'end of history' has been reached precisely because the ultimate form of thought - namely a transcendental humanism - has been realized on a global scale.

Reiterating Schmitt's argument, 'the phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping' (Schmitt 1995: 35). If universal humanity has taken global precedence over all forms of division, then from the liberal consciousness the *political* has necessarily become a historical artifact. In place of *political* divisions and exclusivity, what has come to dominate the global *zeitgeist* is now the universal inclusivity of humanity. Whilst multicultural divisions such as variations in custom, religious order and language undoubtedly still exist - whether they are 'tolerated' or celebrated - what is now considered as an *a priori* to these differences is a fundamental homogeneity rooted in

our equality as humans. Whilst Liberal difference still exists, it exists only to the extent that it is rendered as a superficial variation that maintains a fundamental *sameness* - that of universal humanity and all which comes to be aligned with it. As Badiou notes, ‘the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the ‘right to difference’ are clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference...* [the] celebrated ‘other’ is acceptable only if he is a *good other* - which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us?*’ (Badiou 2002: 24).

Despite the prevalence of the idea of universal humanity, the question of the constitution of the political has not been resolved. This underlying paradox of liberal democracy is recognized by Anthony Giddens - one of the foremost post-Cold War liberal philosophers and ideologue for the Blairite ‘Third Way’ - when he suggests that ‘with the passing of the bipolar era, most states have no clear-cut enemies... [and therefore must] look for sources of legitimacy different from those in the past’ (Giddens 1998: 71). Indeed, this shift away from the *political* was made explicit by the former New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair in his 1999 Labour Party Conference speech: ‘The 21st Century will not be about the battle between capitalism and socialism but between the forces of progress and the forces of conservatism. They are what hold our nation back. Not just in the Conservative Party but within us, within our nation’ (Blair 1999). Whilst the political has supposedly been surpassed by the global actualization of Liberal thought - and hence a movement into a post-political epoch - the underlying process of creating an exclusion remains absolutely fundamental to maintaining the internal coherence of the ‘universal’ liberal project. As such, although not visible from a liberal consciousness, it is not so much that the political has been surpassed, but that it has been obfuscated; the immediate question is therefore, what does ‘universal’ Liberalism exclude?

### *3.4 The moral register and the foreclosure of the political*

Mouffe shares Fukuyama’s account of history up to a point, also interpreting the fall of the Berlin Wall as the triumph of liberalism on a global scale. However, whereas Fukuyama follows Hegel and suggests the event marks the final conquest of liberalism and the realization of the dialectical resolution of contradictions on a global scale, Mouffe follows Schmitt in suggesting that the *political* has not ‘disappeared’, but rather that it has now been obscured from view. It is therefore worth being explicit that the claim that we are now ‘post-ideological’ or ‘post-conflictual’ is a perspective peculiar to

the Liberal consciousness, which has blinded itself to political antagonisms through *transmuting* them onto a transcendental register.

As elucidated above, universal humanity cannot be the basis of a *political* distinction, for in adopting a universal as its very basis it denies the possibility of drawing the frontier that is necessary for the *political* distinction between friend and enemy. However, the fall of the Berlin Wall appeared to have brought to bear precisely these conditions, namely the prevalence of the universal concept of humanity as a reality upon which ‘political’ legitimacy is now constituted. As Mouffe elaborates, this appearance is nothing but a liberal illusion:

‘Contrary to what post-political theorists want us to believe, what we are currently witnessing is not the disappearance of the political in its adversarial dimension but something different. What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the *moral register*. In other words, it still consists in a we/they discrimination, but the we/they instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle between ‘right and left’ we are faced with a struggle between ‘right and wrong’ (Mouffe 2005: 5).

This is not meant to suggest that people now ‘act in the field of politics in search of the common good’, but that instead of ‘being constructed in political terms, the ‘we’/‘they’ opposition constitutive of politics is now constructed according to the moral categories of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ (Mouffe, 2005; 75); in the simplest possible sense, political legitimacy is grounded in the myth of acting in the ‘greater good of humanity’. The line of demarcation between friend/enemy still exists, but instead of antagonism being interpreted as a *political* delineation - a line of demarcation that creates a political enemy and thus a legitimate confrontation over what constitutes the parameters of the possible - there is now a caesura created in an otherwise homogenous reality. In other words, although *political* differences still occur, they are not understood as political distinctions between Self/Other but rather self-evident delineations between Possible/Impossible, Moral/Immoral, Good/Evil, Scientific/Passionate, Rational/Irrational, Sane/Mad and so on. The crucial point being that whereas a *political* distinction maintains (at least) two *possible* accounts of reality, the post-political condition establishes a single transcendental realm of the possible and in turn reduces all other properly political relationships simply to ‘impossibilities’.

This moral turn has the significant implication of rendering it impossible, from the perspective of the Liberal, to interpret differences as *political*. Whereas *political* distinctions are defined by the possibility of taking sides, the ‘post-political condition’ preordains the ‘other’ as fundamentally irrational/immoral/untruthful etc. Although a *political* distinction still underlies any given consideration, it is now apparently self-evident that one could only support the position of the Other if one was either ignorant, deranged, or evil. As Nietzsche perceives, ‘everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into the insane asylum’ (Nietzsche 2006: 10). It becomes untenable to argue from the position of the Other, as it is has a preordained association with an irrational, subjective, and unscientific perspective that can consequently be rejected out of hand. The liberal no longer perceives issues as political, but *forecloses* the political through claiming allegiance to irrefutable, objective, scientific facts that reduces the role of ‘politicians’ to administrators; ‘political’ debate is no longer between differing accounts of the world, but who can claim the greatest fidelity to ‘the truth’. Indeed ‘the ultimate sign of post-politics in all Western countries is the growth of a managerial approach to government: government is reconceived as a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension’ (Žižek 2002: 303).

Jacques Rancière has also identified the prevalence of this moral register as the obfuscation of the *political*, considering that the prevailing condition engendered by the moral register to be one of *consensus*. Rancière suggests that the essence of consensus ‘does not consist in peaceful discussion and reasonable agreement, as opposed to conflict or violence. Its essence lies in the annulment of dissensus... Consensus is the ‘end of politics’: in other words, not the accomplishment of the ends of politics but simply a return to the normal state of things - the non-existence of politics’ (Rancière 2010: 42-3). *Political* difference is obfuscated in favour of a ‘post-political’ consensual world in which ‘conflicts are turned into problems that have to be sorted out by learned expertise and a negotiated adjustment of interests’ (Rancière 2004: 306). Where there once existed *political* differences based on heterogeneous perceptions of the world, the consensual world suppresses these differences through rendering them as erroneous deviations or perversions within a homogenous world. There exists a singular truth within this consensual realm - the objective, moral and rational. All other perspectives are considered to rest upon flawed assumptions, and are therefore ignored.

The emergence of the moral register and the consensual realm of politics has had a significant effect on the conduct of the classical political sphere. Political parties no longer try and persuade the electorate of a specific ideological project to which the latter would then subscribe; on the contrary, the contest is now to align oneself with politically indeterminate categories - such as Blair's binary between forces of progress and forces of conservatism - and to claim one's own party as offering the most objective and rational account of existence. As Žižek noted regarding the 2001 election of Berlusconi and *Forza Italia* in Italy: 'The true state of today's political struggles is: which of the two former main parties, the conservatives or the "moderate Left", will succeed in presenting itself as truly embodying the post-ideological spirit, against the other party dismissed as "still caught in the old ideological machine?" (Žižek 2002: 303).

Mouffe considers that a further phenomenon of consensual 'post-politics' is the emergence of right-wing national-populist parties, which arise to fill the political vacuum created by the exclusion of *political* difference between the conventional political parties. With the latter grounding their discourse in the consensual moral register, national popular parties such as the *British National Party* (BNP), the French *Front National*, the *Freedom Party of Austria*, the Belgian *Vlaams Blok*, and the *Sverigedemokraterna*, have had remarkable electoral success with, most notably, Jean Marie La Pen, leader of the *Front National* most notably placing second to Jacques Chirac in the 2002 French general election. Mouffe suggests that the emergence and relative success of these parties is founded in their replacement 'of the weakened left/right opposition by a new type of we/they constructed around an opposition between 'the people' and 'the establishment'" (Mouffe 2005: 70). In other words, populist parties are refounding a *political* relationship between the consensual traditional parties and themselves, deriving their success less from the (in)coherence of their policies but due to their offering of a visibly *political* alternative to an otherwise homogenized 'post-political' space.

The fact that these national-populist parties reinstate a *political* relationship as the basis of their electoral challenge has led to their inevitable malignment from all the traditional 'post-political' parties. Accepting Žižek's note that the contemporary state of political struggles is to illustrate the other as 'caught in the old ideological machine', national-populist parties appear as the apogee of antiquated ideological entities that ought be vilified for their regressive and illiberal sentiments. One of the clearest examples of this

consensual malignment occurred in an October 2009 edition of the BBC's *Question Time*, in which the leader of the BNP Nick Griffin was invited to debate along side the then incumbent *Labour Party* Justice Secretary Jack Straw, the *Conservative Party* shadow minister for community cohesion Baroness Warsi, the *Liberal Democrats* Home Affairs spokesman Chris Huhne, and playwright and author Bonnie Greer.

Whilst the BBC's West London studio and surrounding roads were 'locked down' as hundreds protested against both the BNP and the BBC's decision to host Griffin, the cross-party panel and audience were unanimous in denouncing Griffin as 'the Dr. Strangelove of British politics' and a 'confused' and 'deceptive man'. The following day Jack Straw referred to Griffin as 'a fantasising conspiracy theorist with some very unpleasant views and no moral compass', whilst the Conservative Mayor of London stated that 'the BNP has no place here and I again urge Londoners to reject their narrow, extremist and offensive views at every opportunity' (Mulholland 2009). Whilst the racism in much of the BNPs agenda is undoubtedly abhorrent and rightly denounced, Chris Huhne gave an unwittingly insightful assessment of the success of the BNP: 'the evidence on the success of the BNP is very simple. It's not primarily about immigration, what it is actually about is people being disconnected from the political system' (BBC 2009). Interpreting this beyond any superficial reading, the success of BNP was found in the fact that it offered an explicitly *political* alternative to the otherwise post-political consensus.

Further to this example, the cross-party malignment of Griffin and the BNP was not a political debate but a moral condemnation that refused to allow the latter to be recognized as *politically* legitimate. The frontier between the post-political parties and national-populist movements refuses to be drawn by the former as a *political* difference, but rather as a moral condemnation that denies the latter a *political* voice. As Mouffe notes, 'a particularly perverse mechanism is at play in those moralistic relations. This mechanism consists in securing one's goodness, through the condemnation of the evil in others' (Mouffe 2005: 74). Importantly, this act of securing ones 'goodness' is not peculiar whatsoever to the condemnation of national-populist movements, but is in fact the very function of Western ethics, and hence lies at the core of Mouffe's account of the moral register. Indeed, Alain Badiou has gone as far to state that 'ethics explicitly presents itself as the spiritual supplement of consensus', and that the 'collapse of revolutionary Marxism' - which although long dead in the formations of the Soviet Union, can loosely be associated with the cultural shift away from revolutionary leftist

theorizing following the fall of the Berlin Wall - has marked the 'return to the old doctrine of the natural rights of man' and an 'immense 'return to Kant'' (Badiou 2002: 32, 1, 8). It is unavoidable but to draw the conclusion that Badiou's observation of the 'return of ethics' is the phenomena underlying Mouffe's account of the moral turn.

Outlining what appears to be a 'body of self-evident principles capable of cementing a global consensus', Badiou suggests that there are four presuppositions that define ethics, all of which are commonly recognizable in the liberal discourse. *First*, ethics presumes 'a general human subject' such as the one that lies at the heart of the Liberal discourse explored thus far. The positing of a general human subject enables us to detach from the specificities of any given event, and instead assert a preordained and universally recognized Evil that can be decried without any knowledge of the event itself. *Second*, all 'politics is subordinated to ethics', which is to say that there is no act that can be justified over and above the ethical mandate; politics becomes a task of administering the reality that exists within the preordained ethical field. *Third*, 'Evil is that from which the Good is derived', so that any being that delivers us from Evil (as the Lord's Prayer suggests) can be deified. *Fourth*, we ascertain that "Human rights' are rights to non-Evil', such that rights have nothing to do with our affirmative capacity and the potential content of life itself, but rather the 'general human subjects' right to be defended from Evil (Badiou 2002: 9).

Whilst these a priori's appear quite uncontroversial to a common Western understanding of ethics, the effect is to define the human as a purely negative construct; the essential Liberal conception of the human is as a victim, a biological being under permanent threat of destruction. As such, the virtuous comes to be defined not by any affirmative act, but purely as one who *refrains* from performing Evil; to reiterate Mouffe, one's goodness is derived purely from their being *not*-Evil. This securing of the Good through refraining from Evil is precisely the *ascetic ideal* that Nietzsche so vehemently critiqued in his 1887 work *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in which he describes the ascetic desire as a 'will to nothingness' (Nietzsche 1994: 136). The virtuous humanity that is secured through refraining from Evil is precisely an empty nothingness, and given the consideration that 'a nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be' (Nietzsche 1968: 318), we can understand Western ethics - and Mouffe's moral register - as a fundamentally nihilistic pursuit. To the two great nihilistic movements identified by Nietzsche - namely Buddhism and Christianity - we can finally add Liberalism.

The force of Nietzsche's critique of morality and asceticism is fully embraced by Badiou, who ultimately asserts that ethics:

'confirms the absence of any project, or any emancipatory politics, or any genuinely collective cause... The celebrated 'end of ideologies' heralded everywhere as the good news which opens the way for the 'return of ethics' signifies in fact an espousal of the twistings and turnings of necessity, and an extraordinary impoverishment of the active, militant value of principles. The very idea of a consensual 'ethics', stemming from the general feeling provoked by the sight of atrocities, which replaces the 'old ideological divisions', is a powerful contributor to subjective resignation and acceptance of the status quo' (Badiou 2002: 31-2).

The subjective resignation and acceptance of the status quo that Badiou laments is to be understood as the disposition of those who have fully embraced the consensual ethics, those who subscribe to the thesis of the end of history and believe that with the triumphant conquest of the Liberal idea we have entered a post-conflictual and post-ideological age. As Fukuyama notes, this is 'the creature who reportedly emerges at the end of history, the last man' (Fukuyama 1992: 300).

### *3.5 The foreclosure of radical-ecological politics*

This chapter began by noting the claim that the praxis of contemporary ecological/environmental politics is arguably contributing 'to the making and consolidation of a post-political and post-democratic condition, one that actually forecloses the possibility of a real politics of the environment' (Swyngedouw 2007: 12-13). As such, the purpose of this chapter has thus been to provide an outline of the concept of the 'post-political condition', both in terms of its function and its historical construction. Furthermore, it has been suggested that one of the core ways this 'post-political condition' is iterated is through the emergence of transcendental moral discourses that foreclose the possibility for truly *political* praxes to emerge.

The chapter argues that the post-political condition can be understood as a fundamental function of the Liberal ideology, the result of a coming to fruition of an modality of knowledge/power where properly 'political' relationships have been supposedly relegated to history. The post-political is an epoch of liberal subjectivity in as much as, from the perspective of the liberal, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the defeat of the

‘communist’ East marked the conclusion of a historical process of the expansion of ‘scientific’ thought. As such, we must understand the post-political condition to both embody a specific liberal account of history, one that agrees upon a universal humanist basis of existence, and one that believes that the function of history had been to realize this on a global scale. According to this liberal perspective, we now live in a post-political (and hence post-historical) epoch for what underpins ‘political’ legitimacy is no longer an *exclusion* but a universal inclusion - a global consensus of universal humanity.

The purpose of this chapter has been to show that the post-political condition is not an *objective* condition, but rather a peculiarity of the liberal perspective - indeed, that the very concept of political Liberalism appears as a paradox. On the premise that any ‘consensus’ must necessarily be based upon an exclusion, and to that extent is essentially part of a political relationship, we can assert that the fall of the Berlin Wall did not mark the surpassing of the political (as the Liberal’s would have it) but rather the *transmutation* of the political onto the terrain of the universal. In other words, the ‘post-political condition’ is one in which, although political relationships objectively persist, their *political essence* is foreclosed through casting them as an ‘Evil/Impossible/Passionate/Illogical/Unspeakable’ against the transcendental ‘Good/Possible/Scientific/Logical/Speakable’. Any attempt to contest the parameters of ‘the way the world is’ thus immediately results in one being placed outside the *realm of the possible*, and thus discounted as irrelevant.

We can thus understand that the ‘post-political condition’ is one in which the potential for any radical change to the present operation of society is foreclosed. As Žižek has suggested:

‘It is here that we encounter the gap that separates a political act proper from the ‘administration of social matters’ which remains within the framework of existing sociopolitical relations: the political act (intervention) proper is not simply something that works well within the framework of the existing relations, but something that *changes the very framework that determines how things work...* One can also put it in terms of the well known definition of politics as the ‘art of the possible’: authentic politics is, rather, the exact opposite, that is, the art of the *impossible* - it changes the very parameters of what is considered ‘possible’ in the existing constellation’ (Žižek 2006: 199).

As *Chapter 5* illustrates, this post-political condition is iterated by numerous ‘post-modern’ discourses, in which the dominant discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ is absolutely central. From the perspective of those within the ‘radical climate movement’, in which ‘radical’ necessarily means seeking change through affecting the parameters of society, it thus becomes absolutely crucial to develop a praxis which does not unwittingly contribute to the iteration of the post-political condition. As *Chapter 6* will argue, despite an aesthetic of radicalism and numerous attempts to surpass this problematic, the praxis of the UK’s ‘radical’ climate movement consistently iterated the ‘post-political condition’ through its adherence to a Liberal framing of climate change, and thus unwittingly served to reinforce the present liberal-capitalist constellation.

Whilst the present chapter has thus established that the function of the ‘post-political condition’ is to foreclose the possibility for the parameters of society itself to be challenged - and thus foreclose the possibility of a truly radical anti-capitalist ecological politics - it remains less clear as why the ‘parameters’ being defended are necessarily a liberal-capitalist constellation. As such, the following chapter looks to further interrogate the relationship between the ‘post-political condition’ and liberal capitalism, and to explore the interrelationship in their development. The chapter will argue that the ‘post-political condition’ is not necessarily peculiar to a specific contemporary historical epoch, but rather has been a core component in the development of liberal political economy.



## **Chapter Four: Towards a Genealogy of the Post-Political and Liberal Capitalism**

### *4.0 Introduction*

The previous chapter began with the proposition that the praxis of contemporary ecological/environmental politics is arguably contributing ‘to the making and consolidation of a post-political and post-democratic condition, one that actually forecloses the possibility of a real politics of the environment’ (Swyngedouw 2007: 12-13). From the perspective of radical climate movements that are looking to confront the underlying systemic causes of climate change - which is typically associated with capitalism as a mode of organizing the social relations of production - this would imply that the existing movement praxis is actually suffocating the potential for a truly radical anti-capitalist ecological praxis to emerge. To aid the understanding of this claim, the previous chapter illustrated the specific nature of the ‘post-political condition’, arguing that it is a perspective peculiar to the liberal consciousness which came into ascendancy with the collapse of the Berlin Wall (see *Section 3.3*). However, it is suggested that whilst it is understandable as to how moral discourses contribute to the iteration of the ‘post-political consciousness’ (see *Section 3.4*), it remains unclear as to why this is necessarily bound to reinforcing the present liberal-capitalist constellation.

The present chapter thus looks to develop upon the understanding of the ‘post-political condition’, providing a broader account of how the development of the liberal consciousness was intertwined with the production of a specifically liberal economic subjectivity. Furthermore, the chapter illustrates how this subjectivity - which incorporates specific ideas on the nature of ‘freedom’ and by extension the nature of ‘governing’ - was at the core of the emergence of a specifically Liberal modality of power, one that conceptualized the economic milieu as posing a fundamental limit to the *sovereign* modality of power engendered by the friend/enemy dichotomy. It is argued that the ‘post-political’ is not only a condition in which the possibility for a truly radical ecological politics to emerge is foreclosed, but one which inherently supports the continuation of a (neo)liberal-capitalist arrangement of societies. Indeed, the post-political condition is one in which it is only ideas ‘that work’ within the liberal-capitalist constellation that are permitted; all other possibilities rendered precisely as *impossibilities*.

This chapter thus begins through drawing a parallel between the Schmittian account of power outlined in the previous chapter (see *Section 3.1*) and a modality of power which

Michel Foucault termed *sovereign power* (cf. Foucault 2004). It is suggested that *sovereign power*, as a form of organizing the political according to discrete friend/enemy dichotomies, faced an essential crisis at the end of the eighteenth century as a new Liberal modality of power emerged which rendered *sovereign power* illegitimate. This Liberal modality of power - which Foucault termed *biopower* (Foucault 1998: 140) - was premised on the articulation of a new form of Liberal freedom in which 'the general good' was most fully realized not through the will of the sovereign, but through individuals acting in pursuit of their own personal self-interest. This new liberal subjectivity thus emerged not so much as a subject of rights, but as a self-interested subject of economics - *homo aeconomicus*.

It is thus argued that the problematic from the perspective of power became how to govern this liberal subject, to which a response was found in the birth of political economy. From Adam Smith onwards, economic man was understood as a rational economic actor whom, in as much as her knowledge would allow, would pursue the most efficient path in maximizing her own personal interest. To this extent, *homo aeconomicus* became 'eminently governable' to the extent that you did not (and could not) act directly upon the individual, but upon the conditions - the environment or *milieu* - in which economic man went about his free business. To this extent, the free and equal subject that emerged with the French Revolution, and which constituted an insurmountable barrier to the sovereign modality of power, became the 'basic element of the new governmental reason formulated in the eighteenth century' (Foucault 2008: 271).

With the neo-liberal turn in the mid-20th century, *homo aeconomicus* went through a further reconceptualization away from a subject defined by exchange - as the classical liberal theorists such as Smith and Ricardo would have it - towards one defined by *competition*. For classical liberalism, the purpose of government was to remove fetters to the liberal economic actor entering into relationships of exchange; the *laissez-faire* approach was to act to resolve anything which restricted the 'natural' operation of the market. In contrast, the neoliberal position considered that there was nothing 'natural' about the operation of the market, such that the very role of government became to create markets in which *homo aeconomicus* was able to pursue her own interests. By the time we reach the 1990s, the (neo)liberal perspective had come to equate the act of promoting markets as synonymous with the promotion of freedom, whilst even the most

benevolent techniques of governance relied upon capitalist markets (or rather, the liberal economic subject acting within her milieu) as a prerequisite to being able to govern.

The chapter concludes that we can thus understand the ‘post-political condition’ as a complex historical moment which both forecloses the possibility for political contestation *and* promotes capitalism not only as the foremost mode of social organization but as the *only* feasible mode of social organization - hence we come to an acute understanding of Margaret Thatcher’s infamous dictum that ‘There is no alternative’. Not only does the ‘post-political’ signify a condition in which all forms of radical political contestation are foreclosed, but one in which the *modus operandi* is the extension and imposition of markets in the name of both individual ‘freedom’ *and* the ‘greater good’.

It is argued that the implications of this for those seeking to construct a radical anti-capitalist ecological politics is that, despite an *ethical* commitment to anti-capitalism, the specific discourse on climate change being reproduced is serving to iterate the ‘post-political condition’. This means not only foreclosing the possibility of a truly radical ecological politics (as was suggested in the previous chapter), but also reproducing the conditions for the further expansion of capitalism as a mode of ordering the social relationships of production. Chapter 5 will thus move to address the specific discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’, exploring both the construction and the characteristics of the discourse, and illustrating the extent to which it contributes to the constitution of the ‘post-political condition’.

#### *4.1 A liberal limit to sovereign power*

Carl Schmitt’s account of the *political*, in which the formative act is the delineation between friend/enemy, finds many parallels with Michel Foucault’s account of *sovereign power*; indeed, Schmitt is arguably one of the foremost modern theorists of sovereign power. As suggested by the terminology, the role of the sovereign is absolutely pivotal in the operation of sovereign power, whom for Schmitt could be defined as ‘he who decides on the exception’ (Schmitt 1985: 5). The decision on the exception is hence a formative concept for sovereign power, which in its most rudimentary form can be understood as the drawing of the frontier between the friend/enemy. Furthermore, given that the condition defining the friend/enemy is ultimately

one of war (see *Section 3.1*), sovereign is he who has the power to perform an act of war - to administer death - without being subject to any legal implications (Agamben 2005).

In the case of *sovereign power*, the capacity of the sovereign to administer death is not absolute, in the sense that the sovereign cannot kill without purpose. Rather, whilst the sovereign reserves the right to take life, he may only do so on the condition that he is eliminating something which poses a threat to the integrity and consistency of the territory over which the sovereign presides. As Foucault summarises, 'sovereignty is not exercised on things, but first of all on a territory, and consequently on the subjects who inhabit it. In this sense we can say that the territory really is the fundamental element both of Machiavelli's principality and of the juridical sovereignty of the sovereign as defined by philosophers or legal theorists' (Foucault 2007a: 134). The referent object of sovereign power - that which one acts in the name of - is therefore territory, which the sovereign acts to secure against its enemies.

So long as 'sovereignty was the major problem and the institutions of sovereignty were the fundamental institutions, and so long as the exercise of power was thought of as the exercise of sovereignty, the art of government [as a liberal modality of power] could not develop in a specific and autonomous way' (Foucault 2007a: 139). In this sense, whilst it has been recognized that liberal universalism would come to pose a distinct threat to the sovereign modality of power (see *Section 3.2*), a more fundamental challenge to the sovereign modality arose with the emergence of the concept of the *population* in the mid-eighteenth century.

Whilst a concept of the 'population' existed prior to its emergence in the *biopolitical* modality of power, its meaning was altogether different to that which emerged with the latter arrangement of power. Within the sovereign modality of power, population meant little more than the number of bodies collected under the body of the sovereign, so that a territory could be undergoing a process of 'population' or 'depopulation' according to fluctuations of the number of individuals in the territory. In this instance, population merely referred to the number of juridical subjects and their relation to a sovereign. On the contrary, the concept of population that emerged with the French physiocrats, and more generally within eighteenth century economics, appeared as 'a set of elements in which we can note constants and regularities even in accidents, in which we can identify the universal of desire regularly producing the benefit of all, and with regard to which we can identify a number of modifiable variables on which it depends' (Foucault 2007a:

74). The population emerged as the *milieu* in which individuals freely acted, circulated, produced, reproduced, became ill etc.

As such, *biopower* is not concerned with the individual *per se*, but rather in the statistical trends that occur within the population over a period of time. Understood in the broadest sense, population is the statistical outcome of a mass of individual acts (of death, of birth, of unemployment etc.), so that it becomes possible to see that there are certain ‘population characteristics’ which refer to aggregate tendencies in the population. In the most rudimentary form, these population characteristics were constructed around biological phenomena such as child mortality or the contagion of disease, which are understood to be affected by any number of ‘environmental’ factors. These environmental factors are to be understood in the broadest sense as meaning any element that has the potential to induce certain population characteristics, varying as widely as to include the weather and geographical location of the population through to the availability of contraception, exposure to advertising, general access to sanitation or the layout of a town.

From the middle of the 18th century onwards we witnessed ‘the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of “biopower”’ (Foucault 1998; 140). Biopower therefore seeks to intervene not at the level of the individual but at the level of population, purposefully modifying the environmental characteristics of a population with the aim of increasing (or decreasing) the chance of any given phenomena occurring. In this way, biopower never functions through directly forcing the individual to perform (or not) a specific act, but rather looks to induce certain behaviours within the population.

The human species was now understood as consisting of its own processes of production and circulation that occurred ‘naturally’ and without the external will of the Sovereign, as the population came to be understood not ‘as a collection of subjects of right, as a collection of subject wills who must obey the sovereign’s will... [but] as a set of processes to be managed at the level and on the basis of what is natural in these processes’ (Foucault 2007a: 70). As such, through the lens of biopower the individual was no longer considered as a passive subject who was to directly be coded, segmented, drilled and disciplined, but rather as an eminently productive and autonomous subject.

More than that, from the perspective of the functioning of biopower, the individual was not really relevant at all, rather what matters is the chance or risk of certain events occurring; what is the *risk* that reducing public spending will result in a higher rate of robbery? What is the *chance* that introducing water sanitation will induce a lower rate of cholera? What are the *odds* that reducing income tax will lead to greater spending and capital investment?

The emergence of the milieu of population facilitated an entirely new form of knowledge, one that was associated with the characteristics of the population but that was by no means limited to rudimentary forms such as birth and death statistics. Indeed, what the emergence of population facilitated was an entirely new regime of truth that unified the heterogeneous disciplinary knowledges to produce an account of how populations functioned and what was considered to be positive or negative at the level of population. Indeed, 'science in the singular did not exist before the eighteenth century' (Foucault 2004: 182); it was the unification of knowledges around the figure of the population that gave birth to 'science' as we understand it. It was Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, which introduced the concept of the population as the milieu essential to evolution, that gave birth to the field of science known as biology, whilst Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* established economics as a field of science in its own right. The single element which established these heterogeneous schools of knowledge as 'scientific' - and hence established Science - was the figure of the *population*.

#### 4.2 *Homo oeconomicus and the birth of political economy*

The emergence of the biopolitical modality of power introduced the concept of governing (instead of ruling) at the heart of the operation of power. The act of governing required, as a prerequisite to its functioning, the establishment of population statistics and an approximation of the environmental factors that affected these statistics. Furthermore, it required the formation of regimes of truth that established what form of discrimination should be adopted towards the population; what flows should we seek to promote, and what flows should we seek to stifle or eliminate altogether? The biopolitical modality of power is hence fundamentally concerned with the concept of *risk*, which is to say, the object of governing is to increase or decrease the risk of certain events occurring (cf. Miller and Rose 2008; Dean, 2010), or failing that,

to use technologies of insurance to mitigate against the outcomes of a given event (Lobo-Guerrero 2010).

Although the functioning of biopower is not directly concerned with the actions of individuals, focused instead on affecting population characteristics through intervening in environmental conditions, this new concept of the population was necessarily concurrent with a rethinking of the 'individual'. The biopolitical modality of power necessarily relies upon the predictability of outcomes; a governmental action only makes sense if it can reliably *predict* that changing specific environmental conditions will engender a specific effect within the population. In itself, governing therefore presumes a certain consistency and predictability - a 'rationality' - to the decision-making processes of individuals. If there was no consistency in the decision-making processes of an individual, or if decision-making processes varied widely from one person to another, it would be impossible for biopower to predict how individuals would respond to a change in environmental conditions.

We can understand that for biopower to function, it requires conceptualizing a specific model of decision-making - a rationality - which it projects on to individuals' every-day functioning. In other words, an *a priori* to the functioning of biopower is that it undertakes a *subjectification* process, actively seeking to produce an homogeneous form of rationality amongst all beings within the population. Whilst there are endless techniques and mechanisms of subjectification that can be applied, it suffices to say that their function is to engender a homogenous perspective on the world, to 'train' us to interpret (and act in) the world through a single rationality considered appropriate to all fields of life - only then is life made governable.

If the emergence of population was fundamental to the biopolitical modality of power, it was Adam Smith's work, *The Wealth of Nations*, that contributed most directly to articulating a theory of the subject that allowed liberal biopolitical governance to extend over every aspect of our life. Predating Smith, Foucault suggests that the English empiricists such as David Hume forged the concept of the 'subject of interest' (Foucault 2008: 274), which poses an insurmountable challenge to the conception of a juridical subject irrevocably bound to a sovereign. In summary, this subject of interest variously chooses to enter into contracts - including any social contract with a sovereign - because it is ultimately in the individual's self-interest to do so. In entering into a social contract with a sovereign, the subject of interest continues to obey the contract not *because* it is a contract, but because it continues to be of interest to respect the contract. As such, 'the

appearance and the emergence of the contract have not replaced a subject of interest with a subject of right' (Foucault 2008: 274). On the contrary, the 'subject of interest' has been established as an ontological given, relegating the 'juridical subject' to nothing but a socio-political epiphenomenon.

This notion of the subject of interest forms the raw material from which Adam Smith constructs his concept of the economy, perhaps most infamously embodied in his suggestion that 'it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to *their own interest*' (Smith 1981: 119, emphasis added). For Smith, the economy came to be understood as that sphere of human life dominated by relationships of *exchange*, whereby the individual engaged in an act of exchange 'intends only his own security; and by directing [his] industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention' (Smith 1976: 456). Adam Smith thereby proposed a theory of rationality whereby the subject of interest, looking to maximize his own economic benefit, would adapt his productive activity to the interests of others. As such, the selfish pursuit of one's own interest would necessarily lead to fulfilling the interest of others, and consequently to the general benefit of all.

From the perspective of power, Smith's 'invisible hand' was therefore a direct assault on the legitimacy of the sovereign modality of power. The dynamic interaction of an economy of self-interested individuals led to the general benefit of society, and this process was precisely 'invisible' to the extent that no individual could possibly predict, organize and order society more effectively than the collective mass of 'economic men' and their endless process of economic interaction. This economic process was infinitely more attuned to accounting for the heterogeneous interests of man as a species than any external organizing force could ever possibly be; the market was 'epistemologically superior', therefore rendering any power that attempted to directly intervene in the heterogeneous interests of *homo æconomicus* as an illegitimate despotism. As Foucault states, from the perspective of liberalism, 'political power is not to interfere with this dynamic naturally inscribed into the heart of man' (Foucault 2008: 280).

This postulate has proven to be one of the defining features of the liberal and neoliberal project, and is precisely the argument that liberals have restated endlessly against all forms of direct intervention by the state, ranging from Keynesian welfare economics through to socialist and fascist economic designs. As Freidrich Hayek argued more than

two centuries after Smith published *The Wealth of Nations*, ‘the curious task of economics is to demonstrate to men how little they really know about what they imagine they can design’ (Hayek 1988: 76). This perspective is hence the cornerstone of the liberal *laissez-faire* approach to the sphere of economics in which ‘every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, must be able to pursue his own interest and bring his capital where he pleases’ (Smith 1976: 687).

We now understand that the liberal economic subjectivity - theorized as epistemologically superior to the sovereign and bound together in a population termed an *economy* - posed an insurmountable limit to the operation of sovereign power such that ‘in the eighteenth century the problem liberals addressed was how to limit an extant state and establish economic liberty within it’ (Lemke 2001: 196). However, whilst the economy posed an absolute limit to the operation of sovereign power, this was only possible through establishing the figure of *homo œconomicus* as the free subject that simultaneously acts as ‘the partner, the vis-à-vis, the basic element of a new governmental reason’ (Lazzarato 2006). In other words, we can now understand that the ‘free and equal’ subject that lay at the heart of the French Revolution was *homo œconomicus*, and it was the very emergence of the biopolitical modality of power that rendered the sovereign modality - and hence the rule of King Louis XVI - as an illegitimate despotism.

So with the emergence of *homo œconomicus* we have the basis of a new governmental reason, one where the individual is ‘eminently governable’ to the extent that it ‘responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment... [and] responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment’ (Foucault 2008: 270). *Homo œconomicus*, as a self-interested subjectivity that predictably looks to maximize its individual profit, forms the essential basis of the biopolitical modality of power; it is the element that allows the relatively accurate prediction of how individuals will act in response to changing environmental conditions. Indeed we can say that ‘the individual becomes governmentalizable, that power gets a hold on him to the extent, and only to the extent, that he is a *homo œconomicus*’ (Foucault 2008: 252-3).

Political economy therefore emerged as the science of controlling the population through modifying the environmental conditions within which *homo œconomicus* operated. Meanwhile the economist emerged as the expert whom created a field of scientific knowledge regarding how the population would react to given environmental

variations. Increasingly, if something were to be acted on by biopower (which we must now see as synonymous with liberalism), it necessarily needed to be understood as an economy with its own dynamics and variables. From the perspective of biopower, economies would need to be *created* - any given aspect of life needed to be reinterpreted as economic relationships between economic men - whilst economists needed to produce an account of what variables induced what effects on this new economy. Quite simply, a fundamentalist liberal perspective could sanction no other form of political interference other than the regulation and modulation of a market. Everything that fell outside of the economy could not be governed, but instead remained within the rationalities of the disciplinary or sovereign modality of power.

#### 4.3 The neoliberal turn - “there is no such thing as society”

From the Physiocrats and Adam Smith onwards, classical liberalism understood the markets as natural domains constituted by *homo œconomicus*, where the natural propensity of this economic man was to exchange. Indeed it can be said that, for classical liberalism, exchange became ‘the general matrix of society’ (Read 2009: 27). For the neoliberal school of thinkers, namely the German *Ordoliberals* and the Chicago School that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, classical liberalism had been built on two (interrelated) naive assumptions. Firstly, if *homo œconomicus* was defined by its propensity to exchange in the name of self-interest, then the outstanding question remained as to how are we to value labour? Secondly, why did classical liberalism presume that markets - and hence liberal freedom - were natural?

In summary, the neoliberal perspective concluded that markets were in fact something that were both created and protected by the state, and therefore contrary to any claims that the purpose of the state was to adopt a *laissez-faire* position towards the market - and hence the misinterpretation that neoliberalism means the ‘rolling-back’ of the role of the state - the purpose of neoliberal policies was precisely to *create* markets. For neoliberalism, the market was not a neutral space that existed outside of governmental reason; the ‘freedom’ exercised by *homo œconomicus* was one that had to be continuously fostered through creating and maintaining the conditions within which that freedom could exist. In other words - and what was at first tellingly termed ‘positive liberalism’ (Rougier in Foucault 2008: 133) - the purpose of neoliberalism is to govern-

at-arms-length through the creation, promotion and modulation of markets. As Thomas Lemke has commented on the emergence of neoliberalism:

‘In the classical-liberal version, the freedom of the individual is the technical precondition for rational government, and government may not constrain such freedom if it does not wish to endanger its own foundations. [In contrast] neo-liberalism no longer locates the rational principle for regulating and limiting the action of government in a natural freedom that we should all respect, but instead it posits an artificially arranged liberty in the entrepreneurial and competitive behaviour of economic-rational individuals’ (Lemke 2001: 200).

The neoliberal approach to political economy therefore saw the expansion of markets as the underpinning rationale for governing, extending the rationality of the market, the schemas of analysis it offers and the decision-making criteria it suggests, to domains which are not exclusively or not primarily economic: the family and the birth rate, for example, or delinquency and penal policy’ (Foucault 2008: 323). Increasingly, every aspect of life was *potentially* something which could be brought under the control of a liberal biopolitics, and therefore under the auspices of governance, through submitting it to a process of ‘marketization’. Whereas classical liberalism conceived economic rationality as the self-interested logic which guided processes of exchange within an economic sphere, and which existed aside a myriad of other rationalities constructed within the disciplinary and sovereign systems of power, neoliberalism considered that every aspect of life was capable of being brought under the biopolitical modality of power.

The expansion of the concept of the economy to every sphere of activity would, necessarily, require the correlate subjectification of individuals; a justification for the expansion of markets would need to be based on an understanding that every aspect of life was in fact *already* part of the economic cycle. Adopting the perspective that ‘economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have mutually exclusive uses’ (Robbins 1962: 16), any form of human behaviour which rationally calculated the best possible way to dispose of limited resources so as to achieve the maximum gain was considered as the object of economic analysis. In itself, this introduction of Rational Choice Theory into the domain of economics - in which the Chicago School economist Gary Becker was the foremost

proponent (cf. Becker 1964) - led to a massive redefinition of the concept of labour and work, not least through the emergence of human capital.

The theory of human capital rests on the assumption that every aspect of life, from one's genetic makeup right through to one's education or physical appearance, can be considered as a variable in the potential income one can earn. A wage is no longer considered as remuneration for one's labour, but rather a return on the investment one had made into their own 'human capital'. The individual - *homo æconomicus* - is thus considered as 'an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself.... The stake in all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo æconomicus* as the partner of exchange with a *homo æconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault 2008: 226). The *entrepreneuriat* (Pusey and Russell 2012) thus looks at every possible activity as one that has implications for their future income potential; from decisions to go to university through to considering how they portray themselves on social media, life becomes assessed according to its potential (or lack thereof) to provide returns. As such, 'any activity that increases the capacity to earn income, to achieve satisfaction, even migration, the crossing of borders from one country to another, is an investment in human capital' (Read 2009: 28).

Neoliberalism therefore makes a significant advance on the classical liberal conception of *homo æconomicus*. The very *constitution of liberty*, as Hayek argued in a book of the same name (Hayek 1960), is found in our ability to rationalize every aspect of the world according to its potential to increase our human capital, its potential to further our own earning potential. As such, the *homo æconomicus* of neoliberalism is fundamentally defined as a subject of competition, 'not the man of exchange, the consumer or producer, but the enterprise... [whereby] the enterprise is not just an institution but a way of behaving in the economic field' (Foucault 2008: 175). From the neoliberal perspective, all of us are thus little entrepreneurs looking to find the most economical way to improve our income stream - we are all constantly looking to put in as little as possible to secure the greatest possible return. However, the paradox of neoliberalism is that as a political project 'it attempts to create a social reality that it suggests already exists... [it] is not simply an ideology in the pejorative sense of the term, or a belief that one could elect to have or not have, but is itself produced by strategies, tactics, and policies that create subjects of interest, locked in competition' (Read 2009: 30).

The ideological framework for the functioning of neoliberalism is now complete. Given that every aspect of life - from education to genetic material to our physical appearance - is now a potential factor in determining the return on the investment in our own human capital, the introduction of markets to these spheres is merely a process of properly accounting for elements which *were already* economic factors. What comes to define neoliberalism is thus the 'consistent expansion of the economic form to apply to the social sphere, thus eliding any difference between the economy and the social... [such that] the area covered by the economy embraces the entirety of human action to the extent that this is characterized by the allocation of scant resources for competing goals' (Lemke 2001: 197).

The neoliberal concept of *homo œconomicus* thus dovetails perfectly with the liberal idea of the universal human race, namely that there exists a single humanity defined by a single economic rationality. Rather than the perspective of classical liberalism in which the economy (and the rationality that accompanied it) existed as a sphere distinct from 'society', the social dissolves into nothing but a surface effect or byproduct of economic relations. There is no such thing as 'society' as separate from the economy, we have only the economy and the competitive subject of interest that constitutes it. It was precisely this perspective that allowed the former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to proclaim that 'there is no such thing as society' (Keay 1987), and that what we call the social is merely a 'tapestry' of rational-economic decisions.

#### 4.4 A Genealogy of Power(s)

We have therefore 'in the modern world, in the world we have known since the nineteenth century, a series of governmental rationalities [which] overlap, lean on each other, challenge each other, and struggle with each other: art of government according to truth, art of government according to the rationality of the sovereign state, and art of government according to the rationality of economic agents' (Foucault 2008: 313). Proclaiming this in his 1978-9 lecture series immediately before the election of the neoliberal harbingers Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and coupled with his death in 1984, we are left without the critical insights Foucault may have offered regarding the paradigmatic shift in power arrangements that occurred during the neoliberal epoch and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Nonetheless, it's feasible to use the

work he had conducted on the genesis of liberalism and neoliberalism to offer precisely such an account of the reorganization of the arrangements of power.

The French Revolution marked a break, a point at which the operation of the sovereign modality of power was radically curtailed by the emergence of the liberal biopolitical arrangement of power, defined by the concept of the 'population' and a new subjectivity of *homo æconomicus*. Forms of knowledge emerged - not least demographic statistics such as birthrate and the entire scientific field of biology - that adjudicated as to what forms of life ought to be promoted or extinguished. At the forefront of these new biopolitical techniques, the emergence of the figure of the rational self-interested economic being - *homo æconomicus* - allowed the birth of economics, and the emergence of political economy as its method of governing.

From the French Revolution onwards, we can thus see an interplay between different arrangements of power. The sovereign modality of power remained as the principle structuring the geopolitical field in the sense of drawing a line of demarcation between friend/enemy, although it was no longer possible for this sovereign power to be exercised upon a population of self-interested individuals. Rather the eighteenth-century was defined by a dual problematic for Liberals; on the one hand finding ways to 'limit an extant state and establish economic liberty within it' (Lemke 2001: 196), and on the other looking to resolve relations on enmity and extend the terrain within which 'universal humanity' was recognized. As such, it can be claimed that whilst the sovereign modality of power remained, it became 'displaced by biopower as the dominant modality of power in modern Western liberal societies' (De Larrinaga and Doucet 2008: 520).

The emergence and consolidation of state socialism from 1917 onwards, along with the interventionism of Keynesian theory and the social welfare systems following Black Tuesday in 1929 - not to mention the economic crash itself which called into question some of the principles of liberalism - proved to be significant factors in precipitating the emergence of the neoliberal school. First published in 1944, Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek 2006) was a clarion call against the threats to freedom posed by all forms of centralized planning, irrespective of the intentions of the planner. Hayek reinvigorated Smith's argument regarding the epistemological superiority of the market, and along with the associated Chicago School and the German *Ordoliberals*, undertook a paradigmatic reworking of liberalism that established the entrepreneurial *homo*

*œconomicus* at its core, facilitating the extension of markets to every aspect of existence.

Whilst ‘biopolitics only develop[ed] into a fully-fledged form of rationalized power when fused with liberal political economy’ (Larsen 2007: 16), it was with neoliberalism that the biopolitical modality of power finally took hold, at least potentially, of the entirety of life. Economic rationality was no longer to be considered as one form of thinking amongst many - that which guided an ‘economic’ sphere of life - but instead as the only legitimate way to assess and engage with the world. Rationality itself became synonymous with profit-maximizing competitive behaviour, so that *homo œconomicus* became the very essence of man; neoliberalism is the most refined form of the biopolitical modality of power.

Promoted intensively by the RAND Corporation in the United States and the Institute for Economic Affairs in the UK (Peck 2010: 135, 171), and intellectually informed explicitly by the neoliberal economists known as the ‘Mont Pelerinians’ after their regular meetings in the Swiss Alps (Peck 2008), the constitution of the neoliberal biopolitical modality became the political rationale of the Thatcher and Reagan governments following their elections in 1979 and 1981 respectively. As David Harvey notes, a ‘moving map of the progress of neoliberalization on the world stage since 1970 would be hard to construct’ (Harvey 2005: 87) - everything did not suddenly become ‘neoliberalized’ overnight. However, the process of introducing the biopolitical form of governance into every sphere undoubtedly occurred through ruthless processes of privatization, commodification, and submission to metric systems, in which debt was a fundamental tool in coercing individuals and entire countries to submit to the new doxa. All of these processes acted as mechanisms of *subjectification*, actively inducing and extending the competitive economic rationality of *homo œconomicus* further into our every day experiences.

As suggested in the previous chapter (see *Section 3.3*), the fall of the Berlin Wall signified the ascension of what has been termed the ‘post-political condition’. What is clear is that this was not simply the foreclosure of the possibility for radically different ways of interpreting the world - the suspension of political possibilities - but the consolidation of a specifically *neoliberal* understanding of what constituted freedom, rationality and government. Competitive economic rationality (and the subjectivity of *homo œconomicus*) became understood as the *only* way which society could be organized, such that all other forms of rationality were considered to be quaint

indulgences at best, or at worst, dangerous images of thought that needed to be extinguished. In other words, *homo æconomicus* emerged as the very definition of the rational, sensible and developed human being, relegating all other forms of rationality to the ‘abnormal’; as Margaret Thatcher proclaimed, ‘there is no alternative’ (Thatcher 1980).

#### 4.5 Post-politics and the ‘inevitability’ of capital

This chapter has looked to argue that the ‘post-political’ is not only a condition in which the possibility for a truly radical ecological politics to emerge is foreclosed, but one which inherently supports the continuation of a (neo)liberal-capitalist arrangement of society. Indeed, it has been argued that the ‘post-political condition’ is one in which it is only ideas ‘that work’ within the liberal-capitalist constellation that are permitted, such that all other possibilities are rendered precisely as *impossibilities*. The implication of this argument is that if aspiring radical ecological movements are to develop a praxis that effectively challenges the underpinning liberal-capitalist realities, then it is crucial that any discourse does not serve to reinforce the post-political condition.

It has been suggested that claims that ‘the post-political condition is one in which a consensus has been built around the inevitability of neo-liberal capitalism as an economic system’ (Swyngedouw 2009: 609) can be qualified through tracing the genesis of this different modality of power - which Foucault termed *biopower* - that placed the self-interested subject of *homo æconomicus* at its core. It has been argued that the core of the operation of this biopolitical modality of power is the dynamic interaction of an economy of autonomous self-interested individuals (*homo æconomicus*), which left to their own devices would result in the general realization of the ‘common interest’. The subsequent epistemological superiority of this liberal conception of ‘freedom’ thus posed an absolute limit to the functioning of the sovereign modality of power, thus inaugurating a historical process of the negotiation between the different modalities of power

We can thus argue that the Liberal conception of universal humanity - which it has been argued results in the obfuscation of the political through rendering it as an impossibility (see *Chapter 3*) - is fundamentally grounded in a specific *economic* subjectivity. The sovereign modality of power is thus confronted by the coterminous expansion of an *external* limit (in the sense that it is considered ‘impossible’ to decide on an exception to

the all-inclusive ‘humanity’) and an *internal* limit posed by the epistemological superiority of the liberal subject. Crucially, the neoliberal contribution ‘universalized’ this economic rationality through suggesting that *all* decisions were effectively already economic decisions - that there was no outside to self-interested economic interaction - although often with very bad ‘information’ on which to base their decision-making. As such, the very function of neoliberalism is to act to increase the ‘perfection’ with which individuals can perform their decisions, introducing markets into all spheres of life in the name of improving the ‘information’ available in economic decisions.

Margaret Thatcher’s infamous dictum that ‘There Is No Alternative’ thus perfectly encapsulated the (neo)liberal consciousness at the turn of the 1990’s - there was *no possibility* of being outside ‘humanity’, and there was *no possibility* of a subjectivity other than *homo œconomicus*. The potential for a radical politics - whether from the ‘Left’ or the ‘Right’ - was effectively foreclosed, and anything other than the continued creation and extension of markets was rendered an ‘impossibility’. This is not to argue that the 1990s marked the emergence of a completed neoliberal project (Harvey 2005) - the neoliberal project itself was based on the need to continue the expansion of markets - but rather the apparent incontestability of the neoliberal paradox as a political project which ‘attempts to create a social reality that it suggests already exists’ (Read 2009: 30).

The ‘post-political condition’ is thus one in which it is rendered impossible to challenge ‘*the very framework that determines how things work*’ (Žižek 2006: 199), where ‘how things work’ is necessarily grounded in the inevitable expansion of capitalist markets as a way of organizing the entirety of social reproduction. Given this scenario is not only the antithesis but the stated target of many within the ‘radical climate movement(s)’, the claim that these movements may actually be contributing to the ‘making and consolidation of a post-political and post-democratic condition’ (Swyngedouw 2007: 12-13) appears paradoxical. To understand how this is possible, the following chapter (*Chapter 5*) looks to examine the specifics of the popular discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’, tracing its construction over the past thirty years as an *apocalyptic imagination*, an eschatology that circulates around the concept of a ‘dangerous limit’. It is argued that this discourse results in a *carbon fetishism* - and an attendant *moral discourse* - whereby the focus of environmental politics has come to circulate around the politically indeterminate goal of ‘reducing carbon’. Through establishing an understanding of the discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’, it will become possible to assess the extent to which the ‘radical climate movement(s)’ have iterated this discourse

in their attempts to build a properly political anti-capitalist ecological movement (see *Chapter 6*).

## **Chapter Five: The liberal mythology of dangerous climate change**

### *5.0 Introduction*

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that, contrary to any claims that the popular understanding of climate change is somehow ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’, the discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ is a specifically liberal political construct. Through exploring its historical construction, the chapter seeks to illustrate how ‘dangerous climate change’ operates through constructing a universal subject of ‘humanity’ under threat - an essential element of the post-political consciousness - and how the attendant apocalyptic imagination, moral discourse, urgency imperative and constitution of fear are essential elements of this discourse. Building upon the previous two chapters, it will be argued that the specific form of knowledge of ‘dangerous climate change’ functions as the ‘new opium for the masses’ (Zizek 2008), contributing to the making and consolidation of the post-political condition.

Despite the long and contested history of knowledge regarding anthropogenic effects on the atmosphere - including an almost complete lack of interest or research between the early twentieth century and the mid-1970s - the popular consciousness of climate change as a dangerous phenomenon only emerged in the mid to late-1980s, and was in the ascendancy within global politics from 1989 onwards. As will be argued in this chapter, it is not coincidental that the emergence of ‘dangerous climate change’ as an issue of global concern coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Hulme succinctly puts it, ‘the wider geopolitical resonance of climate change was linked with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Fears of Cold War destruction were displaced by those associated with climate change’ (Hulme 2009: 63). Yet ‘climate change’ was not a like-for-like substitute for ‘communism’; rather, the emerging knowledge of climate change was constitutive of the prevailing biopolitical arrangement of power. In other words, from the liberal perspective the end of the Cold War marked the abolition of any form of substantial sovereign frontier, overcome through the final realization of a single universal humanity. ‘Dangerous climate change’ did not therefore replace ‘communism’ as a sovereign threat, but rather constituted a biopolitical arrangement of power framed as a threat to humanity in its entirety, appearing as a crisis that demanded global management.

Whilst insightful, we must radically reinterpret Mike Hulme's claim that climate change has been 'appropriated uncritically in support of an expanding range of ideologies... the ideologies for example, of green colonialism, of the commodification of Nature, of national security, of celebrity culture, of localism and many others' (Hulme 2010: 39) - not least because it is questionable that 'national security' or 'celebrity culture' can be considered ideologies. In contrast, it will be suggested that a *single* rationality - a single epistemic frame - of 'dangerous climate change' has been constructed and expanded on a global scale, and that this rationality incorporates attendant subjective positions such as the moralization of conduct, a discourse of deniers vs. believers, the construction of an apocalyptic imaginary, the single ontological entity of the universal human, the emergence of individualized perspectives on personal carbon footprints, and ascetic approaches to 'solving' the 'crisis'.

Following Lemke's suggestion that 'it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them' (Lemke 2001: 191), it is argued that the epistemic frame of 'dangerous climate change' is not an objective construction from a politically neutral realm of science, but is rather a specifically liberal modality of power. Whilst the underlying geophysical account of anthropogenic GHG emissions leading to a warming effect is not questioned, 'dangerous climate change' is a problematic specific to the (neo)liberal biopolitical modality of power. The well rehearsed account of 'dangerous climate change', in which an ever-increasing atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2e</sub> will bring about global atmospheric tipping points beyond which humanity will 'lose control' of its ability to 'stabilize' the climate, is a specifically political construct framed as an 'objective' crisis of humanity. This discourse demands an unequivocal global focus on the technical/managerial issue of 'stabilizing' atmospheric GHGs below a concentration that has been framed as a disastrous point of no return (Boykoff, Frame et al. 2010).

Claims by popular commentators that there is a propensity to 'put politics first and facts second when confronting the greatest challenge humanity now faces' (Monbiot 2008) dangerously misses the point that 'the facts' are not 'outside' of politics. The mobilization of the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' is not a politically indeterminate gesture - its iteration is constitutive of both the limits and the logic of governing rationality. This epistemic frame has proliferated through the popular imaginary, whether through the publication of popular science literature such as Mark Lynas's *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet* (Lynas 2007a), films such as *The*

*Age of Stupid* (Armstrong 2008) and *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim 2006), or statements from esteemed public figures such as the former UK Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir David King, that ‘climate change is the most severe problem we are facing today, more serious even than the threat of terrorism’ (Brown and Oliver 2004).

The chapter concludes that whilst there is an unquestionable understanding of the geophysical processes underpinning climatic change - and of the anthropogenic contribution of GHGs - the epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’ is a politically constructed problematic. Emerging at the end of the 1980s, ‘dangerous climate change’ constituted part of the political rationality underpinning the neoliberal governance techniques that were promoted most evidently by the UNFCCC, in particular with the Kyoto Protocol. The correlate moralization (cf. Garvey 2008) and apocalyptic imaginary (cf. Tokar 2010) are not ‘responses’ to this epistemic frame, but are rather integral functions of the epistemic arrangement. Furthermore, it becomes untenable to maintain the position that ‘climate science’ operates as a socially and politically indeterminate form of knowledge; IPCC reports on ‘extreme weather events’ (IPCC 2011) and conferences such as the 2005 ‘Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change: A Scientific Symposium on Stabilisation of Greenhouse Gases’ reinforce a specific political sensibility.

### *5.1 The emergence of the liberal problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’*

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, John-Baptiste Joseph Fourier suggested that, given the distance from the Sun, the Earth’s average surface temperature ought to be considerably cooler than experienced. Fourier proposed an hypothesis that the Earth’s atmosphere retained a certain amount of the incoming solar radiation leading to an increase in surface temperatures, a phenomenon he called the ‘greenhouse effect’. In 1859, the Irish physicist John Tyndall established that different ‘greenhouse gases’ - which at the time included carbon dioxide, water vapour, nitrous oxide, methane and ozone - allowed shortwave radiation to enter the Earth’s atmosphere, but absorbed outgoing long-wave radiation in differing degrees. The re-radiation from these atmospheric molecules led to a warming phenomenon within the Earth’s atmosphere, suggesting a direct connection between atmospheric composition and average surface temperature, and by extension, a link between atmospheric composition and the historical ice-ages (cf. Le Treut, Somerville et al. 2007).

Svante Arrhenius' 1896 work on climate sensitivity was the first attempt at calculating the correlation between the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and average surface air temperature. Specifically, Arrhenius estimated that if the atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> was halved, global temperatures would fall by between 4-5°C, further supporting Tyndall's suggestion that glacial periods were *potentially* the result of changing atmospheric concentrations of GHGs. Meanwhile, contemporaries of Arrhenius such as Arvid Högbom had begun to account for the total anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from the burning of coal - the fuel of the industrial revolution - suggesting that whilst anthropogenic contributions were negligible at the time, they could theoretically accumulate to the point of having a tangible impact on the atmosphere and thus average global surface temperatures (Behringer 2010: 182-85). Indeed Arrhenius later suggested that 'the enormous combustion of coal by our industrial establishments suffices to increase the percentage of carbon dioxide in the air' to the extent that we are unlikely to ever witness another ice age (Arrhenius 1908: 61).

Significantly, the work conducted throughout the nineteenth century on atmospheric greenhouse gasses and their impact on average temperatures was framed within a broader debate about the reasons for historical ice-ages. Notwithstanding Arrhenius' contributions which were considered persuasive at the time, the Serbian geophysicist Milutin Milanković contested that Ice Ages were linked to variations in incoming solar radiation resulting from regular changes to the earth's orbit of the Sun, which came to be known as Milanković cycles. The celestial theory led to a cessation in the debate on historical ice ages, effectively resulting in the suspension of scientific interest in atmospheric composition and climate sensitivity. Whilst numerous individuals can be interpreted as contributing to a 'rediscovery' of theories of global warming - such as Guy Stewart Callendar (Callendar 1938), Gilbert Plass (Plass 1956) and Charles Keeling - the infamous 1972 publication *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Randers et al. 1972) had still not established global warming as a concern. Furthermore, the statement of the UN's 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which recommended the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), made no mention of either climate change or global warming (UNEP 1972). Indeed, the predominant 'climate' concern of the mid-twentieth century was not global warming but *global cooling*, either through the rapid accumulation of atmospheric dust due to nuclear war - an 'apocalyptic prediction' in which 'nuclear war could constitute a global

climatic catastrophe' (Sagan 1984: 257-9) - or through a shift in the Milanković cycle leading to the end of interglacial period (cf. Kukla and Matthews 1972).

It was not until a 1975 paper in *Nature* by Wallace Broecker that the term 'global warming' was first used (Broecker 1975). However by 1979 the US National Academy of Sciences had commissioned the influential Charney report which, drawing on the climate models of Syukuro Manabe, stated that 'we now have incontrovertible evidence that the atmosphere is indeed changing and that we ourselves contribute to that change' (Charney, Arakawa et al. 1979: vii). In the wake of the Charney Report's confident assertion, the early to mid 1980s saw a rapidly emerging consensus amongst scientists that there was a demonstrable anthropogenic impact on average global temperatures. The 1985 Villach Conference - the *International Assessment of the role of Carbon Dioxide and of Other Greenhouse Gases in Climate Variations and Associated Impacts*, co-hosted by the UNEP, WMO and ICSU - was particularly significant in developing consensus, having been described as 'probably the most important greenhouse event between 1979 and the convening of the IPCC in October 1988' (Lunde 1991: 77).

The *annus mirabilis* in the construction of the popular imaginary was undoubtedly 1988, in which the Toronto Conference on the Changing Atmosphere published a statement calling for 'a comprehensive international framework that can address the interrelated problems of the global atmosphere', demanding 'a coalition of reason' in response to the 'globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to a global nuclear war' (WMO 1988: 292, 295); the US experienced a drought 'reported to be the worst since the dustbowls of the 1930s' whilst 'temperatures in the US were also at an all-time high' (Paterson 1996: 32); NASA scientist James Hansen gave a now infamous speech to the US Senate in which he declared that 'the global warming is now sufficiently large that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause and effect relationship to the greenhouse effect' capable of 'affecting the probability of occurrence of extreme events such as summer heat waves' (Hansen 1988); and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was formed by the WMO and the UNEP, holding its first meeting in November under the chairmanship of Bert Bolin, one of the coauthors of the influential Charney Report (Bodansky 1994: 51).

Whilst the 1980s had been significant in the consolidation of a consensus amongst scientists regarding the evidence of anthropogenic global warming, the decade crucially witnessed the initial development of 'dangerous climate change' as a liberal political

rationality. In the first instance, there was a transition from understanding global warming as only having implications on ‘local environmental factors’ and ‘local weather patterns’, through to the term ‘climate’ coming to signify ‘an ontologically unitary whole capable of being understood and managed on scales no smaller than the globe itself’ (Miller 2004: 53-5). Indeed, ‘by the mid-1980s, most conceptions of climate change painted its risk almost exclusively in global terms’ (Edwards 2001: 32) - climate change had become globalized. Yet this was not a sudden realization that climate change had a global dimension; working at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Fourier was well aware that the atmosphere led to a warming effect on a planetary scale. This was not primarily a shift in scale, but an essential component in the emergence of ‘dangerous climate change’ as a specifically liberal biopolitical modality of power that took the entirety of life as its referent object.

The English astronomer and physicist Fred Hoyle was prescient in suggesting in 1948 that ‘once a photograph of the earth, taken from the outside is available - once the sheer isolation of the Earth becomes plain - a new idea as powerful as any other in history will be let loose’ (Hoyle in Brand 1982: 430). The prevalence of global circulation models in climate prediction is liable to have the same effect in contributing to the formation of the ‘global’ problematic; as Demeritt notes, ‘the technical practices of science have constructed the problem of global warming for us in materially and politically significant ways’ (Demeritt 2001: 310). In other words, the way in which we interpret the world - the epistemological frame - is absolutely central to the operation of power; indeed, it is a *fundamental part* of the arrangement of power. It is therefore highly significant that in Margaret Thatcher’s speech on the Global Environment to the UN General Assembly on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1989, Fred Hoyle’s aforementioned statement was at the centre of her opening remarks. In a speech focussed on the urgent need for an international ‘framework convention on climate change’, Thatcher asserted that ‘it is life itself—human life, the innumerable species of our planet—that we wantonly destroy. It is life itself that we must battle to preserve’ (Thatcher 1989).

Occurring less than 24 hours before the Berlin Wall came down, Margaret Thatcher had on the foremost international stage of the UN’s General Assembly unequivocally constructed ‘global climate change’ as a biopolitical security imperative. An ‘insidious danger’ that is notably different to those ‘conventional, political dangers’ (*ibid*) that arise from the sovereign modality of power’s focus on defending territorial consistency; climate change poses a threat to *life itself*. This construction of ‘dangerous climate

change' as a security problematic at the level of the human was echoed almost unanimously amongst major international political and scientific institutions. The 1989 Noordwijk declaration, emerging from the Noordwijk ministerial conference on atmospheric pollution and climate change and considered as 'the first high level political meeting focussing specifically on the climate change issue' (Bodansky 1994: 55), asserted that 'climate change is a common concern of mankind'. The Noordwijk conference had taken place on the 6-7th November 1989 - a day before Thatcher's speech and 48 hours before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Elsewhere, the 1989 Langkawi summit of the Commonwealth countries resulted in the *Declaration on Environment*, which states that 'the current threat to the environment, which is a *common concern of all mankind*, stems from past neglect in managing the natural environment and resources' (Commonwealth 1989). The UN General Assembly's 70th plenary meeting in December 1988, which had resulted in the establishment of the IPCC, framed global warming as 'a common concern of mankind' that affects 'humanity as a whole' (U.N. 1988). The overview of the IPCC's First Assessment report reiterated the UN's assertion of 'climate change as a common concern of mankind' (IPCC 1990: 60). Indeed the sudden prevalence of the term 'common concern of mankind' with respect to climate change led the Executive Director of UNEP, Dr. Mostafa Tolba, to submit a note on the implications of the concept to UNEP's 1990 Group of Legal experts meeting in Malta (Tolba 1990).

Writing five years after the formation of the IPCC and a year after the Rio 'Earth Summit', the Indian eco-feminist Vandana Shiva suggested that 'the "local" has disappeared from environmental concern' such that 'only "global" environmental problems exist, and their solution, it is taken for granted, can only be "global"' (Shiva 1993: 53). As has been suggested, this is not primarily a lament for the 'local' in a scalar sense, but rather an accusation that the 'globalization' of environmental issues - and climate change in particular - has been the emergence of a specifically liberal political rationality. As Shiva goes on to state: 'the global in this sense does not represent the universal human interest... the "global" as construct does not symbolize planetary consciousness... the "global" in global reach is a political space, not an ecological one' (*ibid*; 58-60). Indeed, the 'global' was precisely the ascension of a specifically *liberal problematic* of dangerous climate change, one defined by its conception of 'universal humanity' and 'life itself' as under threat.

By 1992 the liberal problematic of climate change had developed to the point that the incumbent Senator for Tennessee and future US Vice-President and Democrat presidential candidate, Al Gore, authored a book entitled *Earth In The Balance: Forging a New Common Purpose*, in which he suggested that ‘the emerging effort to save the environment is a continuation of these struggles... against Nazi and communist totalitarianism..., a crucial new phase of the long battle for true freedom and human dignity’ (Gore 1992: 275). This was not a problem to be shared with the Other - the liberal struggle ‘against’ climate change was successive to the liberal struggle against ‘communism’ - anthropogenic global warming had been constructed as a central problematic for a *liberal humanity* in which *liberal* freedom was under threat. It is an understatement to say that ‘the wider geopolitical resonance of climate change was linked with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989’ (Hulme 2009: 63); alongside discourses such as ‘sustainable development’ (cf. Duffield 2007, 2006, 2010), the epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’ had been constructed as one of the central aspects of the a liberal political rationality that, with the cessation of the sovereign relationship with the ‘communist East’, had assumed not only the entirety of the Earth’s surface but the atmosphere as its terrain of concern.

The liberal problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’ that began to emerge in the mid-1980s is thus a specifically political construct, a way of framing the geophysical processes (and the anthropogenic influence) of global warming so as to render it governable. Whilst one of the central tenets of this biopolitical rationality is the presence of a ‘global humanity’ cast as a subject under threat, the specificity of the threat must be both qualified and quantified through a specific account of life becoming ‘dangerous’ to itself. In other words the very concept of ‘dangerous climate change’ is ‘both politically defined and ideologically constrained’ (Carvalho and Burgess 2005: 1467), such that ‘danger’ is a category that needs to be constructed. The liberal problematic demands that the single humanity is confronted with a *universally* dangerous limit, rendering all scenarios ‘below’ this dangerous limit as *de facto* ‘tolerable’ and therefore erasing the heterogeneous constructions of danger experienced by different peoples, in different parts of the world, facing differing conditions and (potentially) holding different values. Furthermore, the ‘dangerous limit’ is constructed on a universal quantitative spectrum (of PPM or CO<sub>2</sub>) such that contestation over the ‘meaning’ of danger remains in the singular, being reduced down to contested claims

within a 'scientized' discourse of what atmospheric concentration should be the 'dangerous' limit.

Although by the mid-late 1980s there had begun to be calls for an urgent political response to climate change, most prominently at the 1987 Villach Conference and the 1988 Toronto Conference on the Changing Atmosphere (WMO 1988), this discourse on 'danger' had still not emerged. Indeed, despite reporting on the potential implications of global warming and providing various future emissions scenarios, the IPCC's First Assessment Report did not once refer to climate change as 'dangerous' (IPCC 1990). It was not until Thatcher's speech at the UN General Assembly in 1989 that climate change had been referred to as 'dangerous', a construct that was reiterated during her speech to the WMO's second World Climate Conference at the beginning of November 1990 (Thatcher 1990). The ministerial statement of the conference adopted the refrain, stating that the 'ultimate global objective should be to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with climate' (WMO 1990). The ministerial statement embedded the refrain of 'dangerous' climate change at the heart of the epistemic frame, such that the founding statement of the UNFCCC in 1992 asserted its mandate was to achieve the 'stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' (U.N. 1992: art.2).

The liberal epistemic frame of 'dangerous climate change' was therefore constructed as a schematic in which 'global humanity' faced a discrete line of demarcation between a probably 'safe' and 'stable' scenario and a probably 'dangerous' one. Furthermore, the discourse of 'danger' had itself been embedded in two interrelated factors; the average global temperature rise that was considered 'dangerous', and the concentration of atmospheric GHGs that was considered to be required so as to induce the given increase in temperature. The resulting logic follows that if atmospheric concentration of GHGs is kept below 'x' PPM of CO<sub>2e</sub>, then it is likely<sup>5</sup> that average global temperatures will stabilize below 'y'°C, which is likely to prevent the impacts of 'dangerous' global warming from occurring. Consequently, the liberal problematic of 'global danger' became inextricably associated with atmospheric concentrations of GHGs and attendant

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<sup>5</sup> The question of likelihood is addressed by the IPCC, who have a 'likelihood terminology' in which 'very likely' refers to > 90% probability, 'extremely likely' refers to a > 95% probability, and so on.

temperature rises, such that the problematic becomes ‘at what atmospheric concentration does global warming become globally dangerous?’.

As recognized in the IPCC’s Second Assessment report, attempting to define what counts as a ‘dangerous’ increase in global temperature is a highly problematic task as ‘some vulnerable places and people could be at risk from even small changes whereas others could cope, or might benefit, from larger changes’; the impact will ‘vary among regions... and depends on mitigative capacity, since the magnitude and the rate of change are both important’; and climate change ‘can produce minor impacts at the global or national level (in terms of ecosystem change or aggregate GNP) but can produce overwhelming losses at the local scale’ (Liverman 2009: 284-5). Even when assessing purely geophysical processes, the impacts of global warming are estimated to be induced at different temperatures and at different rates of change, such that ‘to significantly reduce the risk of a widespread coral bleaching would require a decarbonization of the economy within a few decades... [whereas] a precautionary policy to reduce the risk of a disintegrating West Antarctic ice sheet would imply to decarbonize the global energy system within this century’ (Keller, Hall et al. 2005: 235). Irrespective of scientific uncertainty over precisely what conditions will trigger what effects, it is implausible that a single quantitative limit of danger could be provided that does not *de facto* render everything that occurs ‘below’ that limit as *tolerable*. Indeed, a universal standard of ‘danger’ appears as an arbitrary concept *except* from the position of the liberal biopolitical rationality, in which it forms an essential part of the ‘intellectual processing of the reality which political technologies can then tackle’ (Lemke 2001: 191).

Despite the often repeated claims by scientists that ‘deciding what is dangerous and what effort to mount to avoid which risks are matters that reach well beyond natural science’ (Oppenheimer 2005: 1405), or more generous assertions that ‘determination of levels of greenhouse gas emissions or concentrations that are ‘dangerous’ is not solely a scientific process’ (Moss 1995: 4) or that ‘defining what is dangerous interference with the climate system is a complex task that can only be partially supported by science’ (IPCC 2007: 99), the very production of ‘objective’ information, such as estimates of climate sensitivity, directly contributes to the iteration of the biopolitical rationale. For example, the announcement that atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> have been found to be ‘rising faster than predicted’ (Rahmstorf, Cazenave et al. 2007) is more than the production and dissemination of impartial knowledge - the very

intelligibility of this ‘data’ requires an epistemic framework through which meaning is attached to the statement. Conversely, the very announcement of such scientific research serves to iterate the entire epistemic framework, such that the statement that CO<sub>2</sub> is ‘rising faster than predicted’ also invokes the imaginary of rising average surface temperatures, the concern that we are approaching the ‘dangerous limit’ faster than expected, the increasing necessity to take ‘urgent action’, and so on.

It is precisely the impossibility of scientific research extricating itself from epistemic frameworks that led Felix Guattari & Suely Rolnik to suggest that those ‘who consider themselves to be mere depositories or channels for the transmission of scientific knowledge, have already made a reactionary choice. Despite their innocence or goodwill, they really occupy a position that reinforces the systems of production of the dominant subjectivity’ (Guattari and Rolnik 2008: 41). Scientific facts are necessarily imbued with meaning, which is to say, they are neither produced nor do they exist outside of the systems of thought which *make sense* of those facts. To be explicitly clear, asserting that science is performing a political role is *not* to make claims akin to the prominent ‘climate sceptic’ Fred Singer that institutions such as the IPCC are somehow conspiratorially ‘engaged in a crusade to provide scientific cover for political action’ (Singer 1996). Such claims erroneously suggest that there is some form of shared political ideology amongst scientists, and that the IPCC *consciously* frames the entire corpus of work being produced on climatic processes with the intention of inducing specific political effects.

With the focus of the liberal problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’ being on the ‘stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system’ (U.N. 1992: art.2), this universalized account of danger becomes fully *scientized*. This is to say, irrespective of contested claims of what precisely is considered ‘dangerous’ - from coral bleaching to the melting of ice-caps - ‘danger’ is unequivocally a singular concept that is written in terms of the atmospheric concentration of GHGs. As such, whilst the 2°C limit emerged as a core indicator of ‘dangerous climate change’ - being supported in the early 1990s by NGOs such as Friends of the Earth (Karas 1991: 37) and Greenpeace (Kelly 1990: 81), before becoming adopted by the EU in 1996 and further agreed upon at the G8 summit in 2005 (Randalls 2010: 600) - it is the ‘global emissions budget - how much CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) we can ‘safely’ emit - [that] is the real issue’ (Athanasίου and Baer 2002: 50). High profiled conferences such as the 2005

*Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change: A Scientific Symposium on Stabilisation of Greenhouse Gases* (DEFRA 2005) at Exeter's Hadley Centre - called by the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair as part of the presidency of the G8 - addressed the question of 'what level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is self-evidently too much?' (Hogan 2005), making further explicit the relationship between the production of science and the epistemic frame of 'dangerous climate change'.

The *scientized* construction of danger is thus the foundation of 'dangerous climate change', along with the 'war against terror' and the demand for sustainable development, one of the great post-political humanitarian concerns of the post-Berlin Wall epoch. The *New Scientist* summarized the 'warning' of the three-day Exeter conference in the following terms - 'time is running out, and fast. Rising carbon dioxide levels and higher temperatures will soon set in motion potentially catastrophic changes that will take hundreds or even millions of years to reverse' (Pearce 2005; n. pag). According to the liberal rationale of 'dangerous climate change', a single humanity is now facing catastrophic collapse, and the cause of this collapse is a specific atmospheric concentration of GHGs. This forms the basis of an unquestionable universal humanitarian concern, in which the expert management of GHG emissions becomes a *moral* imperative of securing 'life itself' from its own destruction, and where the rationale becomes to take action *against* climate change as opposed to the socio-economic processes which lead to it.

### *5.2 Carbon fetishism and the post-politics of 'dangerous climate change'*

This liberal problematic of 'dangerous climate change' has a number of attendant phenomena, ranging from the construction of a moral imperative, the emergence of an apocalyptic discourse and impending fear, the related construction of the 'urgency' of the problem, 'green' consumerism-as-solution, the individualization of responsibility, and 'carbon offsetting'. These do not however exist as 'ideological' responses that somehow confuse or distort an otherwise objective problem, but rather are endemic to the liberal political arrangement of 'dangerous climate change'. Indeed, what lies at the heart of these responses is what some have termed 'carbon fetishism' (Kosoy and Corbera 2010; Shift 2010), understood in this instance as a preoccupation with 'a technical or purely physical-scientific issue' of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in atmosphere. In the simplest terms, a carbon fetishist perspective divorces concern with anything other than

with the amount of carbon dioxide associated with any given activity, such that ones political colours can be 'green' without having any bearing on broader political questions. Whilst this means 'green' politics appear as 'post-political', the previous chapters have served to illustrate the extent to which this enforces the carbon-fetish perspective as an implicitly liberal problematic.

The various attendant aspects of 'dangerous climate change' tend to emerge alongside one another, such that the liberal epistemic frame appears as a complex nexus or meshwork of values, perspectives and rationales. As such, the mobilization of one aspect is often linked to another aspect of the epistemic frame, for instance, a moral reasoning will be given as to why an individual needs to offset their daily activities, or the impending urgency of the crisis will lead to demands for a rapid reduction in individual consumption, the 'ethical consumption' of less-carbon intensive goods, or a shift towards vegetarian and vegan diets. These various aspects are thus constitutive components of the prevailing liberal rationality of 'dangerous climate change'; they are not 'ideological' responses to 'scientific facts', but rather constitutive of the same epistemic frame of 'dangerous climate change' that gives meaning to IPCC accounts of the rising atmospheric concentration of GHGs.

The construction of climate change as a 'moral imperative' is the most prominent and revealing aspect of the political rationale of 'dangerous climate change'. The 'moral imperative' to act to prevent 'dangerous climate change' can be heard from a diverse range of voices; the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced on the BBC's *Today Programme* that the climate change fight is a 'moral duty' (BBC 2006); in 2009, a meeting of faith leaders and faith-based community organisations led by the Archbishop of Canterbury published a statement - 'the first of its kind' - that 'recognized unequivocally that there is a moral imperative to tackle the causes of global warming' (Ormsby 2009); in discussing what he termed 'love miles', popular commentator George Monbiot made clear that 'if your sister-in-law is getting married in Buenos Aires, it is both immoral to travel there - because of climate change - and immoral not to, because of the offence it causes', concluding that ultimately the moral imperative of climate change must prevail because 'if you fly, you destroy other peoples lives' (Monbiot 2006: 172, 188); whilst the renowned naturalist and broadcaster Sir David Attenborough has stated that we now have 'a huge moral responsibility towards the rest of the planet' (Bloxham 2011).

This moral imperative is a fundamental component of the liberal construct of ‘dangerous climate change’; namely, with a universal humanity under threat it becomes a *moral responsibility* to act so as to prevent this threat. Interrogating Badiou’s claim that the fall of the Berlin Wall revealed ‘our contemporary moment [as being] defined by an immense ‘return to Kant’’ (Badiou 2002: 8), it becomes clear that nature of the ‘moral imperative’ to act on climate change is grounded in the Kantian hypothesis that one should ‘act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law’ (Kant 1993: 30). That is to say, the most ‘elementary of moral principles is that of universality, that is, if something's right for me, it's right for you; if it's wrong for you, it's wrong for me. Any moral code that is even worth looking at has that at its core somehow’ (Chomsky 2007). Within the liberal framework of ‘dangerous climate change’ in which humanity is posed as being under threat, the moral imperative is easily aligned with the position of ‘taking action’ to prevent the universal threat of global warming. According to the most basic of principles, the invocation of a moral imperative necessarily implies universality, and with it the idea of a universal human subject. Conversely, anyone who flouts responsibility to ‘take action on climate change’ is putting humanity itself at risk, and must therefore be either ignorant of ‘the facts’ and therefore needs to be educated, irrational and therefore incapable of taking into account ‘the facts’, or is consciously acting immorally and hence belongs to the register of Evil.

Numerous theoretical works on the moral imperative of climate change have begun to emerge (cf. Gardiner, Caney et al. 2010; Gardiner 2011; Garvey 2008; Northcott 2007; Harris 2009) that expound upon different aspects of the moral imperative, such as the responsibility to future generations and the dissonance between those who cause ‘dangerous climate change’ and those most affected by it. Notwithstanding the specificities of different arguments, the organisation of morality is consistently grounded through a carbon-fetishist perspective and the correlate construction of danger, namely an understanding that there exists a discrete point at which life becomes dangerous to itself. As elucidated upon in the previous section, scientific pronouncements on the atmospheric concentration of GHGs and emissions scenarios serve to constantly refine and redraw the ‘dangerous limit’, which at the same time serves as the ‘moral limit’ between what can be considered moral and immoral emissions. Indeed, it becomes possible to perceive that there is more ‘moral weight on the shoulders of developed or rich countries’ (Garvey 2008: 89) due to their greater

contribution to bringing us closer to the ‘ethical tragedy of climate change’ (Gardiner 2011: 3).

The moral discourse thus makes clear the distinction between ‘Good and Evil’ in a carbon context, whilst reinvigorating the basic principle that ‘Evil is that from which the Good is derived’ (Badiou 2002: 9). From the perspective of a carbon-fetishist morality, the Good is thus defined precisely through ones claim to be reducing carbon emissions, whether that be politicians touting a ‘green policy’, activists claiming the direct reduction of emissions at source, or ethical consumers choosing to purchase ‘green’ products - ‘moral goodness’ is derived precisely from ascetic practice (cf. Nietzsche 1994: 86-7). Whilst these actors may critique one another according to the effectiveness of their respective actions in actually contributing to emissions reductions - contesting one another’s ‘goodness’ - there is nonetheless a consensus amongst the actors regarding *what is the matter of concern*. As Swyngedouw notes, ‘there is no contestation over the givens of the situation, over the partition of the sensible; there is only debate over the technologies of management, the arrangements of policing and the configuration of those who already have a stake, whose voice is already recognized as legitimate’ (Swyngedouw 2009: 610). The underlying moral principle is shared by all, and circulates around staying below the ‘dangerous limit’ of atmospheric concentration of GHGs.

Apocalyptic visions, and correlate subjective positions of fear, dovetail with the moral imperative of ‘dangerous climate change’. Sir Martin Rees, the president of the UK’s Royal Society, has suggested that ‘the odds are no better than fifty-fifty that our present civilization will survive to the end of the present century’ (Rees 2003: 8); James Gustave Speth envisions what he calls ‘the Great Collision’ in which ‘societies are now traveling together... down a path that links two worlds. Behind is the world we have lost, ahead the world we are making’ (Speth 2008: 1-2); whilst Alastair McIntosh has suggested that ‘dangerous climate change’ presents us with a clear binary choice in which ‘one way chooses death; the other, life’ (McIntosh 2010: x). What these apocalyptic contributions share is an understanding that the ‘dangerous limit’ marks the *eschaton* of the world-as-we-know-it, either as the point of transition between two worlds (according to the Greek meaning of *apokalupsis* as a revelation or disclosure (Skrimshire 2010: 219)), or as a more colloquial ‘end of humanity’.

This discourse on the ‘dangerous limit’ as the *eschaton* between two worlds was bolstered by a speech by James Hansen to the American Geophysical Union in 2005, in

which he mobilized a theological imaginary through stating that ‘we are on the precipice of climate system *tipping points* beyond which there is no *redemption*’ (Hansen 2005: 8, emphasis added). The discourse of the ‘tipping point’ drew on the possibility of non-linear positive feedback mechanisms within the Earth’s system, such as increased temperatures leading to a melting of permafrost and the subsequent release of methane, which in turn leads to greater warming. Whilst an understanding of the potential of numerous biogeochemical feedback mechanisms had existed long before Hansen’s speech (cf. Schimel 1990), Hansen’s framing of these mechanisms as ‘tipping points’ is a linguistic turn that contributes to the construction of the *eschaton* - namely, the ‘tipping point’ is understood as the point at which we move irreversibly from one world to the next.

The potency of the ‘tipping point’ metaphor within the liberal epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’ is thus its contribution to forming the *eschaton* - the point of no return. For James Lovelock, the concept of the ‘tipping point’ is equated directly with the ‘threshold’ beyond which ‘Gaia’ will take its revenge on humanity (Lovelock 2007). Perhaps even more indicative of the *eschaton*, research released by the New Economics Foundation in August 2010 announced that we have only ‘100 months’ before we reach ‘the point of no return’ (NEF 2010), whilst a large red clock on the associated *100 Months* website provided a real-time countdown of the months, days, hours, minutes and seconds left until we reach this point of no return (see *Fig 5.1*). The website also lists the 170 ‘partners’ to the *100 month* initiative, which range from large environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace and the Soil Association through to the Scottish Green Party, an online computer games company, and an indoor climbing centre based in North London.

The NEF’s ‘100 months’ point-of-no-return is ostensibly grounded in a combination of IPCC emissions scenarios, estimations of current GHG emissions, and accounts of the atmospheric concentration of GHGs that would be required to result in an average 2°C warming effect. The resulting claim is that, extrapolating from current GHG concentrations and future emissions scenarios, a specific date can be ascertained beyond which ‘it is no longer *likely* we will be able to avert potentially irreversible climate change’ (NEF 2010: 2). Yet as Gavin Schmidt suggests (the regular coauthor and NASA colleague of James Hansen), this rationale can result in ‘two seemingly opposite, and erroneous, conclusions - that nothing will happen until we reach the ‘point’ and conversely, that once we’ve reached it, there will be nothing that can be done about it’.

This perspective is derived from the erroneous assumptions that ‘the existence of positive feedbacks must imply ‘runaway’ effects i.e. the system spiraling out of control’, and that despite their being a potentially endless number of positive (and negative) feedback effects there nonetheless exists a single ‘climatic tipping point’ (Schmidt 2006).



Fig 5.1  
Source: 100 Months website

As Russill and Nyssa point out in their research into the ‘tipping point’ metaphor in climate communication, it is ‘the desire to increase public urgency [that] is driving the mainstreaming of tipping points in climate change communication, not the reporting of peer-reviewed research’ (Russill and Nyssa 2009: 342). In the case of the *100 months* initiative, the apocalyptic narrative has been strengthened through providing a temporal narrative to the ‘dangerous limit’, leading to similarities with the eschatological claims of millenarianists - such as the misinterpretation of the Mayan calendar that the world will end in 2012 (Telegraph 2009) - that there exists a doomsday upon which we move from one world to the next. This is not to contest scientific claims that there exist a myriad of complex physical processes that may occur due to increased average global temperatures, but rather that ‘the use of tipping points originates in a desire to reshape how the public views dangerous climate change’(Russill and Nyssa 2009: 343). The apocalyptic discourse is thus another component of the liberal epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’, relying on a conception of a single ‘dangerous limit’ that is not only *morally* abhorrent but represents the end of the world-as-we-know-it.

Having understood the extent to which both the *moral impetus* and the *apocalyptic sensibility* are central components of ‘dangerous climate change’, it’s somewhat straightforward to understand the constitution of fear. As noted above, the apocalyptic

imagination relies upon introducing a temporal perspective, an understanding that a point of return exists in the imminent future; the constitution of fear is thus embedded in the imminent arrival of the point of no return. It has been noted that the construction of fear can lead to contradictory subjective conditions (cf. Amsler 2010; Skrimshire 2008); in the first instance, fear can lead to the constitution of apathy and resignation. For example Paul Kingsnorth, the former publications editor for *Greenpeace* and deputy editor of *The Ecologist*, co-founded the *Dark Mountain Project* in 2009. The project is based around ‘eight principles of uncivilisation’, the first of which is that ‘we live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling. All around us are signs that our whole way of living is already passing into history. We will face this reality honestly and learn how to live with it’ (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009). In contrast, fear of the ‘dangerous limit’ has undoubtedly provided an imperative to act for many in the radical climate movement. A recent film about climate activism entitled *Just Do It: A Tale of Modern Day Outlaws*, featured an interview with ‘Lily’, who explained her rationale for taking direct-action on climate change thus: ‘having the fear of God put into me by the climate science, like it’s scared the crap out of me, I’m not going to lie. And that was when I went ‘right, this is not something I can know and then not do anything about, I have to do something’” (James 2011; 3:22-3:32).

### 5.3 *The individualization of ‘dangerous climate change’*

There has thus far been the introduction of four specific components of the liberal epistemic framework of ‘dangerous climate change’; the *moral imperative*, the *apocalyptic imagination*, the *constitution of fear*, and the *constitution of urgency* (see Section 5.2). As suggested, these phenomena are grounded in a carbon fetishist perspective that understands there being a single ‘dangerous limit’, marking the point at which life becomes dangerous to itself. Irrespective of scientific uncertainty or the integer of ‘danger’ that is adopted, this dangerous limit is a single caesura within the quantitative spectrum of atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide. In other words, these heterogeneous components are wholly reliant on a *single* limit, which forms the boundary between the ‘dangerous/immoral/intolerable/abnormal’ and the ‘safe/moral/tolerable/normal’. Whilst these components thus form a crucial part of the liberal epistemic framework, it is through the individualization of the carbon fetish - what can be considered a liberal subjectification process - that dangerous climate change moves towards being made governable.

Reduced to its most basic principle, the individualization of ‘dangerous climate change’ takes the principle that having constructed a single ‘dangerous’ limit it is then possible - through accounting for the size of the global population - to establish what amounts to a ‘sustainable’ amount of carbon emissions per capita. Whilst as early as May 1992 - a month before the UNFCCC was formed at the Rio Earth Conference - UNCTAD had produced an in-depth special report proposing a global system of tradeable carbon emissions entitlements (UNCTAD 1992) that would require localized accounts of carbon emissions, the first substantial ‘per capita’ ecological measurement was calculated by Mathis Wackernagel in 1996, in what he termed the ‘ecological footprint’ (in Wackernagel and Rees 1996). The underlying principle of the ecological footprint responds to the core concept of the original *Limits to Growth* report, and is effectively a ‘resource accounting tool that measures how much biologically productive land and sea is used by a given population or activity, and compares this to how much land and sea is available, using prevailing technology and resource management schemes’ (Kitzes and Wackernagel 2009: 813). Wackernagel went on to cofound the *Global Footprint Network*, which promotes the idea of ‘Earth Overshoot Day’ as the day in the year by which ‘humanity’ has consumed as many of Earth's ecological services as nature can provide in a whole year (GFN 2011), whilst the NGO WWF produces the *Living Planet Report* which states that by ‘2030 humanity will need the capacity of two Earths to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> waste and keep up with natural resource consumption’ (WWF 2010: 9).

The concept of the ‘carbon footprint’ is effectively a sub-category of the ecological footprint, and whilst it has become used as ‘a generic synonym for emissions of carbon dioxide or greenhouse gases expressed in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents’ (Wiedmann and Minx 2008: 3), it has facilitated the accounting of an individual’s (or organization’s) annual carbon emissions and thus a comparison against both national averages and the ‘sustainable level’ that would make it likely that ‘humanity’ would not exceed the global ‘dangerous limit’ of atmospheric GHGs. Measured in metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, the US *Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center* (CDIAC) provides yearly calculations of average per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, although numerous commentators have suggested this data fails to account for international trade flows, in which responsibility is ascribed to the country of production as opposed to the country of consumption (cf. Dawson and Spannagle 2009: 133).

Methodologies for working out personal carbon footprints have proliferated to such an extent that *Ethical Consumer* magazine produced a guide to their ‘approved’ calculators (Welch 2007), whilst numerous books have also been published helping you calculate and reduce your personal footprint (cf. Yarrow 2008; Purman, J. 2008; Lynas, M. 2007b). A 2007 article by Mark Lynas in the *Guardian* entitled ‘It’s Carbon Judgement Day’ professed to help you establish whether you are ‘a green angel or a carbon criminal’, leading the reader through a brief carbon accounting exercise covering their gas and heating, electricity, transport and ‘consumption’ habits. Having established that a ‘sustainable’ per capita carbon allowance should be around 1000kg, it allowed the reader to compare themselves based on their home accounting, informing those who emit between 12-15,000kg that they are ‘carbon criminals’, whilst those who emit more than 21,000kg are advised to ‘shoot yourself now. For the planet’ (Lynas 2007c). Whilst it would likely be claimed that suggestions of committing suicide to save the planet are metaphoric (although the *Optimum Population Trust* - renamed *Population Matters* - comes close through advocating intervening to reduce population to ‘sustainable’ levels), it nonetheless makes an unequivocal link between immorality, criminality and ones personal carbon emissions.

The technique of carbon footprints thus serve to iterate the ‘dangerous limit’ of CO<sub>2</sub> atmospheric concentration on an individual spectrum, such that one is capable of accounting the extent to which they are acting in a criminal or immoral way. This liberal epistemic framing serves to construct the problematic as the consumption throughput of individuals and the production practices of individual corporations, shifting ‘responsibility’ onto the level of individual rationality and ‘free choice’. This rationality is further iterated through schemes such as the *Carbon Trust’s* voluntary ‘carbon reduction labels’, adopted by companies such as Walkers crisps and Innocent smoothies, so that individuals are theoretically able to factor in the the ‘carbon cost’ of a multi-bag of crisps or a carton of juice into their annual footprint.

Launched in 2006, the UK Government’s *Act on CO<sub>2</sub>* campaign further iterated the individualized carbon fetish, not least through a series of television advertisements. The series of adverts informed us that ‘we all have a carbon footprint, which contributes to climate change’ and that ‘we can begin to make a difference by driving five miles less a week’. Another advert showed a father reading a bed-time story to his daughter, which suggested that if ‘the adults... made less CO<sub>2</sub>, maybe they could save the land for the children’ (Meadows 2008), alongside the image of a girl switching off her bed-room

light. The individualized carbon fetish was thus linked both to the *moral imperative* to act (through intergenerational responsibility) and to the *apocalyptic imagination* - not least in the image of animals drowning outside a sign for the ‘The World’s End’ pub (see Fig 5.2).



Fig 5.2

Source: Screen capture of ‘Act on CO<sub>2</sub>’ advert

The UK Government’s *Act on CO<sub>2</sub>* campaign exemplifies the iteration of ‘dangerous climate change’ on the level of the individual, constructing the moral imperative and apocalyptic imagination as factors which are fundamentally tied to quotidian activities such as turning off a light bulb or driving five miles less each week. Furthermore the very terminology - *Act on CO<sub>2</sub>* - reflects the iteration of the carbon-fetishist perspective; rather than extending a political analysis, the *Act on CO<sub>2</sub>* precisely constructs CO<sub>2</sub> as the externalized object of concern. The rationale of ‘dangerous climate change’ is thus fully evident, as the response to the apocalyptic threats and the moral burden of climate change is not to create a collective political analysis and response, but to realign individual decision making to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at every possible opportunity.

The liberal problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’ thus forms a meshwork of power-knowledge that in the first instance serves as ‘the delineation of concepts, the specification of objects and borders, the provision of arguments and justifications, etc.’, such that problematic not only renders the ‘problem’ in a specific way but also structures the specific fields of governmental intervention (Lemke 2001: 191). This carbon fetishist perspective directly frames a ‘dangerous limit’ of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, and universalizes the referent object of this danger such that it is ‘life itself’ which is brought under threat. There is thus a *consensual problematic* that transcends any form of political difference, in which we can all be measured up against one another

according to our carbon emissions, which in the same move serves to subject us all to an universal moral limit. The issue of ‘dangerous climate change’ thus appears as a thoroughly post-political issue, in which there is an inescapable and ‘objective’ consensus that transcends all other difference, and which can be individualized through an elaborate accounting process that allows individuals to measure themselves against a universal standard.

The unequivocal point however is that this consensual problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’ is *not* an objective crisis that exists irrespective of political difference, but rather is *itself* a specifically liberal political construct. This is not to say that anthropogenic global warming is not occurring, that there will not be any negative consequences, or that it is merely a product of a social constructivism and thus little more than a figment of our imagination. In contrast, it is to suggest that constructing climate change as a liberal problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’, in which a carbon fetishist perspective is central, serves to ‘structure specific forms of *intervention*. For a political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge which simply ‘re-presents’ the governing reality; instead, it itself constitutes the intellectual processing of the reality which political technologies can then tackle’ (Lemke 2001: 191).

The political construct of ‘dangerous climate change’ thus creates a problematic and structures the field of intervention, such that the aim is to reduce atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> to a ‘safe’ level. The ‘dangerous limit’ effectively creates a scarcity in the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that ‘humanity’ is able to ‘safely’ (and morally) emit; having established the level of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> that has been framed as ‘dangerous’, all emissions underneath that point are considered to be the acceptable running-costs of the human species. The question is thus not about how the problematic has been constructed, but what are the most effective management techniques for intervening to reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> to a safe level. As Hayward suggests,

‘determining a responsibility not to emit more than a certain amount of CO<sub>2</sub> is, in effect, to license emissions up to that amount, and it is this amount that people want to know and negotiate about. Yet the risk in debating this question is that we lose sight of how addressing the causes of climate change has fundamentally to do with responsibilities for reducing emissions. The focus on [emission] rights instead of responsibilities tends to encourage claims of a self-interested character, the competition between which has an inherently expansionary logic’ (Hayward 2007: 431).

In other words, framing the atmosphere as a finite resource serves to create an ‘atmospheric pie’ that needs to be carved up amongst the universally equal humanity, such that the only remaining issue is a negotiation over what is the most effective and equitable way to distribute the ‘carbon slices’ between self-interested actors. The epistemological framework of ‘dangerous climate change’ thus creates an externalized concept of nature as an unmanaged resource, in which the over-exploitation by is resulting in the foremost global example of a ‘tragedy of the commons’ (World Bank 2009: 3) and the ‘greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen’ (Stern 2006: i).

Constructed as an external resource, heterogenous and complex ecological systems become assessed according to their ‘carbon recycling’ capacities, a utilitarian understanding that reduces ecosystems down to the ‘economically productive’ functions that they provide. It is not therefore a failure of market logic *per se* that is understood as the problem, but rather the fact that this economic logic hasn’t been extended to cover the ‘cost’ of emitting GHGs that is considered as the ‘failure’. As such, the rationale of governmental intervention becomes the creation of ‘a system of economic accounting that assigns appropriate values to the ecological consequences of both routine choices in the market place by individuals and companies and larger, macroeconomic choices by nations’ (Gore 1992: 306). In other words, through putting a price on ‘carbon recycling’ capacities, it’s possible for *homo œconomicus* to perform a more accurate cost-benefit analysis of their individual decisions. As the UK Government’s recent White Paper on the Environment (entitled *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*) summarises;

‘Too many of the benefits we derive from nature are not properly valued. The value of natural capital is not fully captured in the prices customers pay, in the operations of our markets or in the accounts of government or business. When nature is undervalued, bad choices can be made’ (DEFRA 2011: 4).

In what amounts to a process of ‘selling nature to save it’ (McAfee 1999), ‘dangerous climate change’ provides the rationale for framing heterogeneous ecosystems as providing a single ‘ecosystem service’ of carbon recycling, assessing the annual carbon recycling capacity of the biosphere, and the establishing of a variable price of carbon that reflects the demand for the ‘ecosystem service’. The neoliberalization of nature (cf. Thorne and Randall 2007; Castree 2003, 2008) *vis a vis* climate change is thus a process of *actively producing* carbon markets as a field of governance, which

simultaneously actively produces the subject of *homo æconomicus*, bringing it into a relationship with the problematic of ‘dangerous climate change’. To this extent, the individualization process is a core theme of the liberal epistemic framework, whether that be through creating a moralized discourse through the discourse of carbon footprints, or whether it be through neoliberal management techniques that rely upon the perfect economic rationality of the individual. In each case, responsibility lies with individual decision making; the individual is actively produced as the subject of change.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Emerging in the mid-late 1980s, and dramatically signified by Margaret Thatcher’s speech to the UN less than 24 hours before the fall of the Berlin Wall, ‘dangerous climate change’ emerged as a specifically liberal political construct. Contra the perspective that a gradual accumulation of scientific knowledge resulted in a political ‘tipping point’ that facilitated the emergence of political responses such as the UNFCCC, this chapter has argued that it was the emergence of the liberal arrangement of power/knowledge that was responsible for the rapid popular familiarization with what became known as ‘climate science’. This at no point constitutes an argument against the existence of the physical processes that result in anthropogenic global warming, with the reservation that the blanket term ‘anthropogenic’ has a dangerous tendency to uncritically attribute changes to ‘humanity’ as opposed to any specific socio-economic forms of organisation.

From the perspective of a genealogy of power, Mike Hulme’s claim that ‘the wider geopolitical resonance of climate change was linked with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989’ (Hulme 2009: 63) is perhaps more insightful than originally intended. The historical significance of ‘dangerous climate change’ is precisely that its complicity with the liberal modality of power - one in which humanity itself is posed as under threat - serves to render political divisions as artefacts peculiar to history. From the liberal perspective, ‘dangerous climate change’ renders all political divisions irrelevant, such that it is humanity *per se* which is both responsible and under the threat of extinction, such that political contestation is a dangerous distraction from the task at hand - to reduce atmospheric GHGs to a safe, sustainable level. From this perspective, the possibility of opening up a political discourse on the climate is already foreclosed,

and those that attempt to do so are immediately confronted by the ‘impossibility’ of their claims given the urgency and moral necessity of reducing carbon *now*.

To that extent, ‘dangerous climate change’ was considerably more than a like-for-like concern which, merely due to temporal circumstances, came to take the place of Communism following the fall of Berlin Wall. In contrast, ‘dangerous climate change’ itself is a liberal construct that directly poses a challenge to the political; as Žižek puts it, ‘ecology is a new opium for the masses’ (Žižek 2008), which suffocates political difference in the name of a universal humanitarian concern. The fundamental tenet of this liberal arrangement of power/knowledge is thus a universal humanity which is posed with an absolute ‘dangerous limit’ to its continuation as-we-know-it. This limit simultaneously serves as the basis of a *moral imperative* to act in the name of humanity, the *eschaton* for an *apocalyptic imagination* and the correlate *constitution of fear*, and through extrapolation a temporal limit that results in the *constitution of urgency*. All of these factors circulate around a *carbon fetishism*, a fundamental preoccupation with the atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> such that ‘moral goodness’ comes to be derived from the amount of carbon-reductions an individual, government or corporation is capable of performing.

In light of this analysis of the discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’, the next chapter thus looks to examine the praxis of the ‘radical climate movement’. With a general starting premise that those constituting the ‘radical climate movement’ sought to reveal and tackle the ‘root causes’ of climate change, the chapter explores the extent to which the movement found itself iterating the liberal discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’. Furthermore, it explores the extent to which conscious attempts to force a rupture in the discourse - and thus pursue the development of a radical anti-capitalist ecological praxis - ultimately manifested themselves as a ‘liberal anti-capitalism’.



## **Chapter Six: The Post-Political Condition and the UK's 'Radical' Climate Movement(s)**

### *6.0 Introduction*

The previous chapter outlined the extent to which the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' is not a politically indeterminate account of physical reality, but a specifically liberal arrangement of power-knowledge that emerged in the mid-1980's onwards. This chapter looks to examine the political implications of this way of 'knowing' climate change for radical climate movements, tracing the tensions that emerge between 'dangerous climate change' and radical political perspectives, and exploring the attempts to recognize and overcome these limitations and establish a radical-critical ecological politics. The main argument of the chapter is that, despite an initial trajectory and repeated attempts to construct a politicized anti-capitalist ecological praxis, the actions of the UK's 'radical climate movement' ultimately served to iterate the discourse of 'dangerous climate change'.

The chapter begins through an account of the UK's 'radical climate movement', loosely defined through a shared heritage in 'environmental direct-action' movements such as *Earth First!* and the UK's anti-roads movement (cf. Plows 2002). From around 2006 onwards - the date of the first *Camp for Climate Action* at Drax power station in South Yorkshire - and reaching a peak of activity in 2008-9, there had been a steady rise in 'direct-actions' and protests undertaken both by non-aligned affinity groups and by more established organisations such as *Plane Stupid*, *Rising Tide*, *Climate Rush*, and the *Camp for Climate Action*. These groups can variously be considered as being constitutive of the 'radical climate movement' through their commitment to direct-action tactics, along with the professed 'anti-capitalist' and 'anarchist' ideological backgrounds of many of the participants. Nonetheless, many of the actions of these groups also served to reproduce the specifically liberal frame of 'dangerous climate change'.

The 'anti-climate change' protest offers the perfect embodiment of Žižek's statement that 'it is easy to make fun of the idea of Fukuyama's notion of the "End of History", but most people today *are* Fukuyamean, accepting liberal-democratic capitalism as the finally found formula of the best possible society, such that all one can do is try to make it more just, more tolerant, and so on' (Žižek 2009: 88), and in the case of 'dangerous

climate change', *more green*. The main argument of this chapter is that the UK's radical climate movement, despite its foundations in anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian ideologies and the continued presence of these perspectives within the movement, found the liberal imperatives of 'dangerous climate change' to suffocate confrontational political tendencies. Indeed, the *Camp for Climate Action's* infamous declaration in 2008 that it was 'armed only with peer review science' symbolizes the fissure in the psyche of the radical climate movement between the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' and the more anti-capitalist sentiments that many participants profess.

The chapter concludes with the suggestion that the UK's radical climate movement went through a parabola of visible activity; emerging in 2006, peaking between mid-2008 and the end of 2009, before having all but disappeared by the end of 2010. Although having emerged with the intention of taking direct-action on the causes of climate change and maintaining a strong anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist analysis, there was a tendency towards an increasingly post-political carbon-fetishist rationale. As such it can be claimed that despite the intentions of many of the participants, the UK's 'radical' climate movement failed to produce an effective anti-capitalist ecological politics.

### *6.1 The emergence of the 'radical climate movement'*

Following the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, which had asserted climate change was one of its key foci, the UK experienced a rapid increase in public concern on the issue of climate change. A proliferation of NGOs and 'civil society' organisations either emerged or refocused their efforts towards climate change - such as the *10:10 Campaign*, the *Campaign Against Climate Change (CaCC)*, and a coalition of NGOs known as *Stop Climate Chaos* - which tended to promote the discourse of 'dangerous climate change', creating 'a state of necessity in which the element of political choice of debate is effectively annihilated' (Larsen 2008: 757). Although particularly prevalent in the UK, this science-driven perspective fueled similar initiatives throughout liberal-capitalist countries.

Almost without exception, these initiatives have iterated the post-political carbon-fetishist discourse of 'dangerous climate change' uncritically, framing their purpose wholly within the discourse of carbon-reduction. For example, the CaCC's mission statement notes that its aim is to:

‘bring together as many people as possible who support our broad aims of pushing for urgent action on climate and reducing global emissions. The CCC does not therefore campaign on the important but more detailed questions of how best to achieve these emission reductions and recognises that supporters will have different and deeply held views on these issues’ (CaCC n.d.).

Using this as its platform, the CaCC held annual marches and rallies in London, which between 2005 and 2009 brought together anywhere between 10,000 to 60,000 participants. Beginning in 2009, the *10:10 Campaign* was a voluntary initiative led by a series of NGOs and the *Guardian* newspaper, aimed at getting individuals, companies and institutions to pledge to reduce their carbon-footprint by 10% in 2010 (Katz 2009). *Stop Climate Chaos* is a coalition of major NGOs formed in 2005, under the broad aim of ‘demand[ing] practical action by the UK to keep global warming as far as possible below the 2 degrees C danger threshold’ (Stop Climate Chaos n.d.). Its two campaigns included *iCount*, which primarily lobbied the Labour government to introduce a Climate Change Bill that included legally binding cuts and an 80% emissions target for 2050, and *The Wave*, a march in London on the 5th December 2009 calling on governments to ‘agree a fair deal at Copenhagen that keeps global warming well under 2 degrees C’ (Stop Climate Chaos n.d.). Consistent with all these campaigns was a wholly depoliticized account of climate change; irrespective of their differences, success could be measured against the sole indicator of whether atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> was sufficiently being reduced.

Whilst the aforementioned groups and campaigns uncritically pursued a ‘carbon fetishist’ account of climate change, the post-Gleneagles G8 also witnessed the emergence of the radical climate movement. To provide a tentative and summary definition, the radical climate movement can broadly be considered as those groups or events that adopt an outwardly antagonistic position on the issue of climate change, tending towards using forms of ‘direct-action’ as the preferred form of action. These groups and events directly draw on the heritage of the environmental direct-action (EDA) groups that were active in the UK during the 1990s and early 2000s - not least the occupation methods of the anti-roads movements, the organizational structures of groups such as Earth First!, and the alter-globalization movement (cf. Plows 2002; Wall 1999; Doherty 1999; Doherty et al. 2000) - whilst a number of individuals have remained active within the ‘scene’ since the 1990s.

Whilst forms of direct-action are the most visible indicators of these movements, the 'radical climate movement' must be understood as emerging with the same anti-authoritarian, anarchist and anti-capitalist sentiments that had circulated in the earlier EDA movements. Although political perspectives within these movements are by no means homogenous, there is a strong tendency towards a rejection of traditional-left/socialist forms of organization, a rejection of the state, and a commitment to some form of anti-capitalist perspective. Although many participants within these movements would identify to an extent with labels such as 'anarchist' or derivatives such as 'eco-anarchist', it is perhaps most accurate to write in summary that participants in EDA movements are 'environmentalists who believe that radical political and social changes are necessary to deal with the ecological crisis' (Doherty in Plows 2002: 18).

Arguably the inaugural event of the UK's radical climate movement was the first week-long *Camp for Climate Action* (CfCA), held next to Drax Powerstation in East Yorkshire in August 2006. Emerging out of discussions within the anti-G8 Dissent! network, and drawing on the experience of organizing the Horzone Eco-Village which had provided food, camping and support for those protesting at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 meeting, the Camp for Climate Action emerged as a network with the intention of building a 'social movement to tackle climate change' (Camp for Climate Action n.d.). Whilst the camp provided a base for an attempt to shut down Drax Powerstation (one of the CfCA's aims was 'to take direct-action against the root causes of climate change'), the broader purpose of the CfCA was 'to break out of a cycle of counter-summits as a protest form that had made little inroads since the large-scale demonstrations and riots in Seattle and Genoa' (Schlembach 2011: 197). In other words, at its inception the radical climate movement was conceptualized by many as a strategic response to the cycles of anti-capitalist struggle that had come before it, an attempt to create a new broad-based social movement that was capable of setting its own agenda rather than reacting to the agenda and time-scale of large institutional summits.

The CfCA became one of the most prominent aspects of the UK's radical climate movement, organizing yearly direct-action camps, one-off mass direct-actions such as the 'Great Climate Swoop' in October 2009, and longer campaigns against corporations such as E-On. Forming around the same time, *Plane Stupid* emerged as a group focused on ending airport expansion and short-haul flights, undertaking a series of high-profile actions at UK airports along with longer term campaign work with groups in Sipson and Harlington against the building of a new Third Runway at Heathrow. At the end of

2008, the campaign group *Climate Rush* formed with the intention of raising awareness 'of the biggest threat facing humanity today - that of Climate Change' (Climate Rush n.d.). Forming in 2000 and one of the first groups to begin using the term 'climate justice', *Rising Tide* had a less public profile during this period, but in 2010 were responsible for blockading the Ffos-y-Fran coal mine in south Wales and for coordinating the 'Art not Oil' campaign. There was also less publicly explicit involvement from groups such as *Earth First!* and the associated *Leave it in the Ground!*, whilst numerous other 'one-off' actions were done without explicit association to established groups. Lastly, the international NGO *Greenpeace* could potentially be considered to be part of the radical climate movement through its use of direct-action stunts at numerous coal power stations, although the 'grey-area' of their inclusion is indicative of the post-political problematic at the core of the radical climate movement.

The significant point of differentiation between the aforementioned 'liberal' climate change groups, such as *Stop Climate Chaos* or *CaCC*, and those that constitute the radical climate movement is twofold. In the first instance, the latter are committed to taking forms of direct-action as their *modus operandi*, the intention to take personal responsibility through directly intervening in the field of concern. As such, direct-action is not a 'tactic' but the principle of taking direct responsibility for ones beliefs and actions; rather than deferring responsibility or decision making to others, it is a prefigurative politics in which people act in the 'here and now' to realize their values (Graeber 2002; Bookchin 2004). This deeper political-philosophical understanding of direct-action, considered as a tenet of most anarchist perspectives, points towards the broader political perspectives underpinning the radical climate movement.

Along with the underpinning commitment to direct-action, those that constitute the radical climate movement also tend towards sharing a commitment to various forms of 'anti-capitalist' perspectives. Crucially, this is not to suggest there is a general agreement between participants as to what 'anti-capitalism' means. For example, at the CfCA's *Where Next?* meeting in 2009, a flip-chart rested next to the facilitators that listed the 'danger words' that were not allowed be used during the discussions - at the top of this list was the word 'class'. The commonly agreed necessity for this list was to prevent the use of terms that were known to have different connotations for different participants, the use of which tended to result in extensive discussions over the meaning and relevance of the terms. In putting sticking points aside the intention was to 'lubricate' the discussions, focusing on what 'brings us together' as opposed to

enflaming our differences. The result, however, was that whilst the ‘anti-capitalist’ commitment of the CfCA was regularly affirmed, extensive discussion over the changing relationships between labour, capital, and climate change, were generally sidelined altogether in CfCA meetings.

One participant suggested that the diversity of understandings of ‘anti-capitalism’ was in fact one of the strengths of the movement, allowing for a broader participation than if a stable definition had to be established. This is a continuation of a tendency documented in the ‘alter-globalization’ movement of movements - in which the radical climate movement partially finds its heritage - whereby ‘some are clearly anti-capitalist, others are anti-neoliberal or anti-corporate [whilst] others are anti- something much more local or specific than ‘capitalism’, neoliberal or otherwise’ (Tormey 2004: 140). Notwithstanding these differences, the broad anti-capitalist underpinning of the radical climate movement was often explicit, especially as it became less controversial to brand oneself as ‘anti-capitalist’ in the face of the continuing financial crisis.

Measured against the aim of ‘building a broad-based social movement’, the radical climate movement that emerged in 2006 was in many ways successful. At its peak in 2009, barely a month passed that didn’t witness numerous direct-actions that could be considered part of the radical climate movement, ranging from numerous blockades of coal-fired power stations through to the occupation of airport taxiways and the annual Camp for Climate Action that took place between 2006 - 2010 (see *Fig 6.1*). The 2009 ‘Great Climate Swoop’ at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station was particularly indicative of the increased mobilization capacity and willingness of people to take certain forms of confrontational direct-action, as around 1,000 participated openly in an attempt to occupy the power station.

**Actions associated with the radical climate movement, 2005-2010**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Action</b>
Sep 2005	Plane Stupid	Protest at aviation conference in London
Aug 2006	Camp for Climate Action	Drax Powerstation protest camp
Sept 2006	Plane Stupid	East Midlands airport taxiway blockade
Nov 2006	Greenpeace	Didcot A Powerstation protest; 'Blair's Legacy' painted on side of chimney
Feb 2007	Rising Tide	Office occupation of the Carbon Neutral Company
Aug 2007	CfCA	Heathrow Airport protest camp; office occupations of the Carbon Neutral Company and Climate Care
Sep 2007	Plane Stupid	BAA Heathrow HQ blockaded
Oct 2007	Greenpeace	Kingsnorth Powerstation smokestack occupied
Oct 2007	Plane Stupid	Manchester Airport departure lounge blocked
Nov 2007	N/A	MP inquiry into BAA disrupted by Third Runway protesters
Feb 2008	Plane Stupid	Parliament banner drop regarding government support of Third Runway
Apr 2008	Rising Tide	Worldwide Fossil Fools Day
Jun 2008	Drax 29	Drax Powerstation coal train occupation
Jun 2008	Leave It In The Ground / Earth First! / Smalley Action Group	Proposed site of Lodge House Opencast mine, protesters occupy site.
Jul 2008	N/A	Dan Glass superglues himself to PM Gordon Brown
Jul 2008	Stop Incineration Now!	Protest at proposed site of incinerator plant in Newhaven
Aug 2008	CfCA	Kingsnorth Powerstation protest camp
Oct 2008	Climate Rush	Houses of Parliament; 'The Climate Rush'
Oct 2008	Greenpeace	Kingsnorth Powerstation Rainbow Warrior blockades Kingsnorth

<b>Date</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Action</b>
Nov 2008	Leave It In The Ground	Proposed site of Lodge House Opencast mine protest
Dec 2008	Plane Stupid	Stanstead airport taxiway blockade - Climate Emergency banner and 'Please DO something' high-vis vests
Dec 2008	N/A	Kingsnorth Powerstation; single protestor enters and temporarily shuts down powerstation
Jan 2009	Climate Rush	Heathrow Airport sit-in at domestic departures
Jan 2009	Climate Rush	Chained to gates of Westminster during debate on Heathrow Expansion
Feb 2009	Plane Stupid	Southampton airport chained to main entrance; tents to represent a 'climate refugee camp'
Feb 2009	Climate Rush	UK Coal Awards cancelled after Climate Rush promote 'No New Coal Awards'
Mar 2009	Plane Stupid	Aberdeen taxiway occupation; 'Climate 9' court case
Mar 2009	Plane Stupid	Lord Mandleson covered in green custard at a 'low carbon summit'
Mar 2009	Climate Rush	Party outside RBS London Offices forces closure
Apr 2009	CfCA	G20 'Camp in the City', protest outside European Climate Exchange
Apr 2009	Climate Rush	Parliament 'glue-on', 4 days after new coal powerstations announced
May 2009	CfCA	Coal Caravan
Jun 2009	Climate Rush	'Bike Rush'; tour of 'climate criminals' timed with UNFCCC Bonn ministerial
Jun 2009	Greenpeace	Kingsnorth Powerstation coal ship delivery occupied
Jun 2009	N/A	Mainhill Solidarity Camp begins in Scotland, in solidarity with local resistance to opening of opencast mine. Evicted Jan 2010
Jul 2009	Climate Rush	Protest at agro-fuel conference
Jul 2009	CfCA	Tipping Point info-shop in Kingsnorth. Closed March 2010
Aug 2009	CfCA	Blackheath protest camp
Aug 2009	CfCA Scotland	Camp at Mainhill Wood, proposed site of open-cast mine.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Action</b>
Aug 2009	Workers Climate Action	Vestas solidarity camp, Isle of Wight
Aug 2009	Climate Rush	Protest at Lord Mandleson's house over closure of Vesta wind-turbine factory on Isle of Wight
Sept 2009	CfCA	Royal Bank of Scotland superglue protest over investments
Sept 2009	Plane Stupid	London City Airport, noisy protest against transatlantic business-class only flights
Oct 2009	CfCA	Ratcliffe-on-Soar Powerstation, 'The Great Climate Swoop'. Around 1000 people attempt to occupy the power station.
Oct 2009	N/A	Occupation of Didcot A Powerstation
Oct 2009	CfCA	E-on, F-off'; national protests against E-On in Brighton, Bristol, Coventry, London, Nottingham, Norwich and Plymouth
Oct 2009	Plane Stupid	Virgin Atlantic table hijacked at 'PR Week Magazine Awards'
Dec 2009	CfCA	Camp in Trafalgar Sq; blockade of ECX; 20 'Santas' occupy London City Airport departure lounge
May 2010	Rising Tide	Ffos-y-Fran opencast mine; protestors blockade coal train
Aug 2010	CfCA Cymru	Welsh protest camp
Aug 2010	CfCA	Royal Bank of Scotland (Edinburgh) protest camp
Sep 2010	Climate Rush	Climate Viagra delivered to Nick Clegg, to help him 'get hard' on climate change
Sep 2010	Coal Action Scotland	Happendon Wood camp to resist opencast mine in Douglas Valley
Oct 2010	Numerous	'Crude Awakening'; blockade of Coryton Oil Refinery
Nov 2010	Coal Action Scotland	Ravenstruther coal terminal blockade, Scotland
Feb 2011	CfCA	'Space for Change' meeting agrees not to organize in 2011

Fig 6.1

Source: Personally compiled

## 6.2 *The aesthetic of radicalism*

Although the radical climate movement had been burgeoning in terms of public profile, the numbers of people involved and the number of direct-actions that were occurring, and whilst anti-capitalist rhetoric and direct-action tactics prevailed, it appeared that ‘the grounds for protest... often become discordance between ‘the science’, and the actions of major polluters and their regulators’ (Bowman 2010: 177). In other words, despite the fact that many involved openly stated their anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist politics, and many were openly critical of the ‘liberal’ initiatives for failing to directly intervene through promoting direct-action or their absence of systemic critique, the forms of direct-action taken were nonetheless largely rationalized within the post-political epistemic framework of ‘dangerous climate change’. The focus of direct-action generally tended to be sites of high-emissions - including coal power stations, mines and airports - the offices of carbon-related business such as E-On and the Royal Bank of Scotland, and those companies and institutions promoting ‘false solutions’ such as the European Climate Exchange (ECX) and the offices of carbon offset companies.

Perhaps the most evident expression of the post-political tendency within the radical climate movement occurred at the 2007 CfCA held on the perimeter of Heathrow Airport. The 2007 CfCA was on a significantly larger scale than the previous year, both in terms of the number of people in attendance (the CfCA estimates more than 2000 people attended), and in terms of the media coverage of the event as it received daily coverage from all the major national newspapers and television networks. On the main ‘day of action’ on the 21st of August, the principal march that departed the camp was fronted with photos of ‘victims of climate change’, copies of a Tyndall Centre report on the climatic impacts of aviation emissions, and a large banner that stated “we are armed... only with peer-reviewed science” (see *Photo 6.1*).



Photo 6.1

Source: Kristian Buus. <http://photo.climatecamp.org.uk/>

The choice of slogan needs to be put into context; on the 13th August the Evening Standard ran a story entitled ‘Militants will hit Heathrow’ - later condemned by the Press Complaints Commission - in which it presented fabricated evidence that some of those involved in the CfCA were planning to place ‘hoax bombs’ in the airport (Guardian 2008). As an entity that was significantly concerned with its presentation in the media - the CfCA had its own dedicated media team that was active throughout the year - the decision to front the media-friendly march with a banner stating “we are armed... only with peer-reviewed science” was to an extent a response to the scare mongering that had occurred in the mainstream media during the week.

The choice of slogan was thus consciously chosen to establish a ‘populist’ narrative, exemplifying how participants in the camp were not bomb-wielding extremists but ‘rational’ beings taking what could be seen as a calculated and measured response to a supposedly objective crisis. Radical and marginal political discourse was eschewed in favour of mobilizing the post-political epistemological framework of ‘dangerous climate change’; irrespective of any political colours, it was being suggested that the CfCA was coming armed only with *the truth*. Rather than posing a political argument, the slogan framed the problematic of climate change as purely a discordance between the objective ‘peer-reviewed science’ and the failure of humanity - whether that be individuals, politicians or businesses - to take responsibility and act accordingly. Whilst most participants in the week-long camp ‘privately’ maintained their anti-capitalist, anarchist, or anti-authoritarian perspectives, the external discourse on ‘dangerous climate change’ existed as a stand-alone narrative. Indeed, the very rationale for the slogan was to suggest that ‘dangerous climate change’ is an issue which transcends any political boundaries.



Photo 6.2

Source: Plane Stupid. <http://www.planestupid.com/actions?page=2>

This focus on the disparity between the ‘science’ and the actions of individuals, politicians or businesses was by no means peculiar to the CfCA, becoming a predominant characteristic of the radical climate movement. In 2007 the anti-aviation group *Plane Stupid* blockaded BAA’s Heathrow headquarters through chaining themselves to the front doors, before dumping copies of IPCC and Tyndall Centre reports in the reception and hanging a large banner in the forecourt stating ‘Read the Science - [www.planestupid.com](http://www.planestupid.com)’ (Plane Stupid 2008) (see *Photo 6.2*). The implication is simply that the ‘science’ needs to somehow be enforced, even if many of the participants harboured a skepticism that any existing institution is willing or capable to take this action. The August 2008 occupation of Stanstead airport’s taxiway by 57 *Plane Stupid* activists further iterated the post-political rationale; unfolding a banner that simply stated ‘Climate Emergency’ and wearing fluorescent jackets with ‘Please DO something’ stenciled on their backs, *Plane Stupid*’s press-team kept track of the tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>E the Stanstead action had successfully ‘grounded’ (see *Photo 6.3*).



Photo 6.3

Source: Plane Stupid. <http://www.planestupid.com/actions?>

Seemingly more confrontational actions, such as the occupation of the train delivering coal to Drax power station in June 2008 - an action which the author was a participant in - centered on the fact that the power station was the largest single-point emitter of CO<sub>2</sub> in the UK (see *Photo 6.4*). The subsequent court case was to be based around a legal defence of necessity, namely that the imminent threat posed by ‘dangerous climate change’ meant that we were compelled to act so as to prevent an avoidable ‘threat to life and limb’ and that these actions were proportionate to the imminent threat. Although the judge controversially adjudicated that the defence was not admissible - Greenpeace activists had successfully run the same defence following their 2007 occupation of

Kingsnorth power station - the preparations for the case had included gaining the support of scientific experts such as NASA scientist James Hansen, who agreed to provide scientific evidence of the immediate threat posed by climate change. Taking data from reports such as the Global Humanitarian Forum's *The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis*, the case preparation had gone as far as attempting to quantify the number of lives that had been 'saved' by us being on the train, or the financial damage that had been 'prevented'. The underlying premise of the case was built around the severity and immediacy of the threat of climate change, and that Drax's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions compelled us to intervene.



Photo 6.4

Source: Greenpeace. <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/taxonomy/term/741>

Whilst the court case provides an insight into the rationale of the Drax train occupation, it was nonetheless constructed to be compatible with a legal framework that could be used in a court case. That is not to suggest that the arguments put forward during the case were false, but that within the legal process a necessity defence is mutually exclusive to a series of other reasons for taking the direct-action at Drax. Whilst the precise reasoning differed for each participant, the occupation variously stemmed from a desire to directly affect public opinion regarding the 'climatic inviability' of coal at a time that the government was considering sanctioning a new generation of coal power stations. Secondly, there was a desire to act according to the strength of ones beliefs, to be 'judged by history' as having done as much as ones personal capacity could afford them to try and prevent climate change. Thirdly, there was an imperative to take *any action* through the very real fear of the implications of climate change, and the overwhelming disparity between these implications and the lack of action being taken to address it. Underpinning of all of these factors was a carbon fetishism that divorced any

truly political analysis from our actions; the impetus was purely the high GHG emissions associated with coal.

Beyond the Drax case, coal had become a dominant theme in the radical climate movement, primarily because coal is considered the ‘dirtiest’ of the fossil fuels. In other words, ‘King Coal’ was chosen as a specific target because of the embedded CO<sub>2</sub> content of coal itself, thus providing the rationale for repeated direct-actions at Drax, Kingsnorth, Ratcliffe-on-Soar and Didcot A power-stations, Ravenstruther coal terminal, the extended *E-On, F-Off* campaign, and the open-cast mines at Ffos-y-Fran, Happendon Wood, and Lodge House. The logic underlying all of these actions was summarised in a 2009 *Greenpeace* blog post; ‘In terms of greenhouse gases, coal is the dirtiest fuel there is. Coal plants lead to carbon emissions which drive climate change - which threatens people and property around the world from increased risk of flooding, drought, water shortage and extreme weather events’ (Christian 2009). In other words, its status as the most CO<sub>2</sub> intensive fuel was itself enough to justify coal power infrastructure becoming the primary target for direct-actions. Indeed, in the lead-up to the 2009 Camp for Climate Action, the CfCA ran an online poll entitled ‘Britain’s Got Direct Action’, in which the public were able to compare the relative carbon emissions of Drax and Ratcliffe-on-Soar power-stations, and thus drawing on a scientific assessment of the power stations ‘climate impact’, choose which should be the target of the CfCA’s 2009 day of mass action - the ‘Great Climate Swoop’ (Webb 2009).

Meanwhile, many of the workshops that took place at the annual camps eschewed political discussion altogether. For example, at the 2009 Blackheath CfCA a workshop entitled ‘If not Carbon Trading then what?’ brought together around 200 people to compare and contrast more ‘workable’ managerial solutions to ‘dangerous climate change’, such as Tradable Energy Quotas, a Green New Deal, or Kyoto 2 - all of which are state-regulated systems of carbon management that presume the continuation of a capitalist socio-economic system. The handful of dissenting voices that suggested none of these proposals addressed underlying relationships between capitalism and climate change were met with the response - both from the crowd and the ‘stage’ - that it’s ‘not realistic’ and that we ‘don’t have enough time’ to pursue such alternatives, however much it would be desirable in the ‘long run’. The session thus resorted to straw polls on which carbon-management system could be considered the most desirable amongst the audience.

The ‘grey area’ of including *Greenpeace* in the radical climate movement thus stems from the the organizations commitment in undertaking quite spectacular and audacious forms of direct-action, ranging from sea-blockades to the occupation of power station smokestacks, which are largely undistinguishable from other actions that constitute the radical climate movement. However, as an institution *Greenpeace* eschews any form of anti-capitalist or anarchist political perspectives; photogenic direct-actions are little more than publicity stunts which, alongside a usual repertoire of post-card campaigns, marches and behind-closed-doors lobbying, are utilized to promote the carbon-fetishist account of climate change. Indeed, the chief policy advisor at Greenpeace UK, Ruth Davis, has suggested that ‘greens can build the new capitalism’, a ‘responsible capitalism’ that uses state-authorities to re-localize control of resources such as fisheries and energy (Davis 2012).

Arguably, this ‘grey area’ also accommodates *Climate Rush*, an organisation initiated by individuals who had been involved in Plane Stupid and the CfCA - perhaps most obviously in the case of the self-publicizing Tamsin Omond. The organization’s actions unproblematically iterate the epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’, taking ‘direct-actions’ such as doing a cycling tour of London’s ‘climate criminals’ such as BP, Shell and BAA (Climate Rush n.d.), or blockading the homes of government ministers whilst demanding more government investment in green energy. Much like Greenpeace, the organisation eschews any form of radical discourse, instead framing their actions purely through a post-political perspective, with the hope that they are capable of persuading politicians, individuals or businesses to ‘take immediate action on climate change’. In both cases, direct-action appears to be little more than a form of ‘militant lobbying’, utilizing spectacular stunts to increase awareness with the aim of putting pressure on governments, corporations or individuals to change their behaviour.

Many participants in groups such as the CfCA or Rising Tide would reject outright the possibility that their own direct actions, unlike *Greenpeace* and *Climate Rush*, were publicity-stunts or attempts to affect the decisions of politicians; the purpose of their direct-action is not to influence others but to take direct responsibility in making the changes you want to see. For example, the CfCA’s publicized reasoning for the 2009 ‘Great Climate Swoop’ action at Ratcliffe-upon-Soar power station:

‘There’s too much big-industry money, too much fear of change, too much political capital tied up in the carbon economy to make lobbying MP’s enough to meet a challenge of this magnitude... Climate change won’t just

go away until we, that's you and me, get together and create moments of resistance and celebration that break through this grey, complacent slide towards catastrophe' (Camp for Climate Action, n.d.).

Whilst this perspective retains an 'anarchistic' commitment to direct-action through treating it as an 'end-in-itself' rather than a method for influencing others, the rationale for taking direct-action nonetheless has become wholly depoliticized, as the underpinning rationale remains the discordance between 'dangerous climate change' and the failure to reduce carbon emissions. Indeed, the logic for taking action direct-action at Ratcliffe-upon-Soar power station continues: 'Nothing has done more to cause climate change than burning coal. To survive we have to stop burning it!'. Ultimately, the cohesive force of the UK's radical climate movement was the post-political epistemic frame of 'dangerous climate change', and to a large extent was only distinguishable from organisations such as *Stop Climate Chaos* and *CaCC* through the preference for using direct-action tactics.

### 6.3 'Liberal anti-capitalism'

The critique of the carbon-fetishist tendency was certainly not absent within the movement itself. Not only did numerous voices express their concerns with the increasingly 'liberal' tendency of the movement through different channels, movement organisations themselves made moves to directly address these critiques that were emerging from within. In terms of critique, a 2007 contribution to movement journal *Shift* suggested that the radical climate movement was already becoming 'a dramatic single-issue mass lobby for punitive state intervention. Friends of the Earth with D-locks'<sup>6</sup> (Archer 2007). An open letter from the *Cambridge Anarchists*, published on Indymedia after the 2009 Blackheath CfCA, lamented the increasingly 'strong tendency in the Green movement to simply offer a "Green New Deal" of increased state power. Nationalisation, taxation, austerity, surveillance and social control are offered as solutions to the ecological crisis rather than working-class self activity for a democratic, equal society' (Cambridge Anarchists 2009).

Towards the end of the 2008 CfCA at Kingsnorth power station, an open letter was circulated by an anonymous groups of participants expressing a 'deep concern with the

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<sup>6</sup> 'D-locks' refers to a direct-action tactic in which individuals use bicycle d-locks to lock themselves on - often to a piece of machinery such as a JCB digger, a coal-conveyer belt, or one another - in an effort to directly prevent the operation of something.

direction that the debates at the camp have taken in the past days [and that] the camp risks losing contact with its anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian roots and appearing as a gathering that lends its support to top-down, state centered responses to the crisis' (Anon 2008). This had been written immediately after a large plenary session in which George Monbiot had demanded a stronger state response to climate change, which received widespread applause from within the audience, later summarizing his position thus:

‘Yes, let us try to crack the problem of capitalism and then fight for a different system. But let us not confuse this task with the immediate need to stop two degrees of warming, or allow it to interfere with the carbon cuts that have to begin now’ (Monbiot 2008).

Monbiot’s position of ‘let’s deal with climate change first’ undoubtedly came to be supported, perhaps with regret, by many participants within the radical climate movement. Commenting on his experience at the Blackheath CfCA, Damien Abbot noted how commonly ‘the time-frame in which it is posited that something can be done to halt a global temperature rise is used as a bludgeon to quell any argument’ (Abbott 2009: 39) by participants, illustrating the pernicious urgency imperative of ‘dangerous climate change’. Nonetheless, the general concern to affirm the anti-capitalist identity of the radical climate change remained prominent, and there were a handful of attempts to practically respond to the criticisms that the radical climate movement was ‘going liberal’ (see *Photo 6.5*).

At the beginning of 2009 the CfCA made a decision to link climate change with the financial crisis, a decision which would be reflected both in its choice of actions and its media strategy. This was a widely supported decision, as it not only provided the vague



Photo 6.5  
Source: Mike Russell.

potential to explicitly link capitalism and climate change, but also to make

governmental institutions the target of protest - thus moving away from ‘points of emission style protests’ (Camp for Climate Action 2009b). This ultimately manifested itself in a protest outside the European Climate Exchange (ECX) during the G20 summit (see *Photo 6.6*), and a handful of protests against the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) due to it managing investments in the hydrocarbons industry.



Photo 6.6

Source: Amelia Gregory. [http://photo.climatecamp.org.uk/gallery5/source/amelia\\_cccity\\_07.html](http://photo.climatecamp.org.uk/gallery5/source/amelia_cccity_07.html)

This decision highlighted the concern of many participants to strengthen the ‘anti-capitalist’ nature of the radical climate movement, and thus appeared superficially as a moment of ‘politicization’ moving beyond the limits of the carbon-fetishist position. In practice however, the attempts to ‘link’ a critique of capitalism and climate change ultimately subsumed any intended anti-capitalist critique under the all-encompassing logic of carbon-fetishism; no anti-capitalist political strategy emerged, and it wasn’t even *all* banks that were targeted due to their role in the reproduction of capital and the consequent link with the climate, it was RBS specifically that was targeted for its *unethical* choice of investment in carbon-intensive industries. A CfCA press release explained the rationale for targeting RBS:

“It’s bad enough that RBS were funding some of the dirtiest fossil fuel developments to happen around the world - now they are using tax payers’ money to do this. First, banks caused the financial crisis, and now they are dragging us headlong into the climate crisis too” (Camp for Climate Action 2010).

Indeed, the 2010 CfCA was ultimately held at RBS's Edinburgh headquarters, in which the primary message appeared to be that the 84% public owned bank should not be investing in carbon intensive industry. It wasn't capitalism *per se* was deemed to be demonstrably responsible for climate change, but that the 'excesses' of an unbridled financial system needed to be moderated. Equally, whilst the ECX protests appeared to have some obvious potential given their timing coinciding with the G20, they were ultimately focused on decrying the 'false-solution' of carbon-trading, due to its well documented failure in reducing carbon-emissions (cf. Böhm and Dabhi 2009).

The Vestas solidarity campaign was perhaps the most celebrated step towards creating a more explicit link between capitalism and climate change, and towards providing an example of a concrete anti-capitalist climate struggle. At its peak in July and August 2009 and led primarily by *Workers Climate Action* (WCA) - a group affiliated with the CfCA, which was largely comprised of members of *Alliance for Workers Liberty* collaborating with participants from within CfCA - numerous activists formed a solidarity camp next to the Vestas wind-turbine factory on the Isle of Wight. The Newport based administration office had been occupied by workers who were facing immediate redundancy, as Vestas looked to close the plant and make redundant its 525 employees due to an alleged lack of demand for turbine blades in the UK market. The CfCA sent a solidarity message from its July gathering in London (see *Photo 6.7*), stating that 'Climate Campers stand shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity with the Vestas Workers, struggling to stop the closures and save the planet' (Jones 2009). The Vestas issue also attracted attention from outside of the radical climate movement, as CaCC held multiple 'Save Vestas' rallies outside the Department of Energy and Climate Change, stating that there is 'an overwhelming need for the government to play a much more active role in ensuring a greater scale of investment in wind power and a more rapid expansion of the industry (CaCC 2009).



Photo 6.7

Source: Indymedia. <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2009/07/434678.html>

The ‘Save Vestas’ campaign was widely hailed as an outstanding example of how the CfCA - and the climate movement more broadly - was linking issues of class and capitalism to climate change. One commentator from within WCA suggested that it constituted ‘the first significant working-class fight for ecology in decades’ (Jordan 2010). In contrast, there is every reason to suggest that the reason the Vestas occupation received such large-scale support from across the climate movement - both radical and ‘liberal’ - was perhaps less to do with an analysis of the relationship between labour, capital and climate change, but because Vestas produced wind-turbine components. In other words, the large-scale support for the Vestas occupation within the radical climate movement was grounded upon the carbon-fetishist perspective that wind-turbine production should be promoted, either by government intervention or through the direct influence of the workers themselves.

Whilst the Vestas struggle thus appeared superficially as the perfect example of an ‘anti-capitalist ecological struggle’ - a labour struggle in a wind-turbine factory appearing to tick both the ‘anti-capitalist’ and the ‘climate change’ boxes - it did not surpass a fractured analysis that saw a ‘workers struggle’ as fulfilling the anti-capitalist sentiment, and the fact they were producing wind-turbines as fulfilling the climate-change imperative. The Vestas struggle was a circumstantial convergence of a labour struggle in a wind-turbine factory. The complete absence of the radical climate movement in the similar Visteon redundancies three months beforehand, in which producers of car components mass occupied three factories in the UK and Northern Ireland, suggests that the imperative of the radical climate movement was the fetishization of low-carbon wind-turbine production as opposed to a deeper political analysis of the relationship between the self-determination of labour and climate change. From the perspective of the radical climate movement, and despite the anti-capitalist sentiments of many

involved, the ‘Save Vestas’ campaign had everything to do with low-carbon wind-turbines and little to do with an analysis of the relationship between labour, capital and climate change.



Photo 6.8

Source: Neil White. [http://photo.climatecamp.org.uk/barclays/source/img\\_8205.html](http://photo.climatecamp.org.uk/barclays/source/img_8205.html)

Both the Vestas and RBS examples point towards a common condition amongst those who professed the need for the radical climate movement to strengthen its anti-capitalist praxis; rather than developing a properly anti-capitalist critique of climate change, the tendency was rather to target climate change as one of the ‘excesses’ of capitalism. As one of the most insightful commentators from within the radical climate movement blogged, ‘many “anti-capitalists” at the camp appear to have misinterpreted what capitalism is and were merely reproducing liberal critiques (see *Photo 6.8*). Indeed the only political difference between liberals and many “anti-capitalists” at the camp was the willingness of the latter to take (highly mediatised [sic], symbolic) direct action’ (Resonance 2009). In this sense, a struggle ‘against’ climate change bears similarities with a struggle against sweatshop labour; whilst it may be commended as an ethical position, and whilst it may be recognized that capitalism is responsible for these conditions, campaigning on an ‘issue’ such as sweatshop labour does not constitute anti-capitalist organizing, but an effort to ‘fire-fight’ the excesses of capitalism.

#### *6.4 The failed search for the political*

Despite a political trajectory that initially aimed at confronting the ‘root causes of climate change’, and notwithstanding the attempts of some within the movement to construct a politicized praxis on the climate, the actions of the radical climate movement have been largely indiscernible from those more ‘liberal’ campaigns

demanding ‘urgent action on climate change’. Whilst the confrontational direct-action tactics and rhetoric suggests that the ‘over-arching problem [is the] absolute faith in unfettered markets and endless economic growth’<sup>7</sup>, the praxis of the UK’s radical climate movement iterated the politically indeterminate position of being ‘against’ climate change. Whilst forms of direct action such as hijacking coal trains, occupying power stations or supergluing oneself to the Department for Transport belies a radical political position, the underpinning rationale for these actions has not emerged from an ‘anti-capitalist’ political knowledge of climate change, but rather from the carbon-fetishist perspective characteristic of ‘dangerous climate change’.

This is not to say that those taking direct-action do not consider themselves to have explicit anti-capitalist or anti-authoritarian sentiments, but rather that the ‘radical climate movement’ failed to combine these perspectives with the depoliticizing force of ‘dangerous climate change’, corroborating Zizek’s assertion that this ecological concern serves as a ‘new opium for the masses’ (Zizek 2008: 42). Crucially, this depoliticizing tendency is not a result of individuals with anarchist and anti-capitalist perspectives evacuating the movement in some form of exodus, nor had they been ‘overpowered’ or ‘pushed out’ by an influx of individuals with liberal perspectives (a g.r.o.a.t. in Shift and Dysophia 2010: 11); rather, there is a potential incommensurability between the liberal discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ and the development of a radical *political* praxis.

The next chapter thus traces the emergence of the international mobilizations leading up to and during the COP15 summit, held in Copenhagen at the end of 2009. Although the political framing was indeterminate at first, it is noted that the mobilizations - most interestingly the alliance between Climate Justice Action (CJA) and Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) - coalesced around an internally heterogenous discourse of ‘climate justice’. The chapter argues that the ‘climate justice’ mobilizations were a further attempt to construct a politicized praxis on the climate, and were thus a conscious attempt to contribute to the emergence and consolidation of a radical anti-capitalist ecological movement.

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<sup>7</sup> From ‘G20 - Climate Camp in the City: 01 Apr 09’ mobilization flyer.





## **Chapter Seven: Climate Justice, Copenhagen and Attempts to Politicize the Climate**

### *7.0 Introduction*

The previous chapter suggested that despite the prevalence of anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives within the UK's radical climate movement, the epistemic framework of 'dangerous climate change' dominated the movement's praxis and extinguished the potential for a truly radical environmental politics to emerge. Whilst there were conscious attempts on behalf of some to address the 'liberalization' of the movement(s) discourse and to produce a radical politics of the climate, these attempts ultimately manifested themselves as a 'liberal anti-capitalism' that reproduced the liberal epistemic framework of 'dangerous climate change'. It was thus argued that UK's 'radical' climate movement ultimately failed in its efforts to rupture the liberal discourse, its praxis remaining an iteration of the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' laced with an aesthetic of radicalism.

The present chapter addresses the 18 months of mobilizations towards the COP15 summit that occurred in Copenhagen at the end of 2009. It is argued that both the Climate Justice Action (CJA) and Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) networks adopted the discourse of 'climate justice' in an attempt to reveal the post-political condition engendered by the mainstream discourse on climate change. Indeed, it is argued that the strength of the 'climate justice' mobilization(s) was that they stood in clear antagonism to the dominant liberal account of climate change. Nonetheless, the chapter argues that the discourse of 'climate justice' was itself fractured and incoherent; whilst it served an important *political* role during the mobilizations, it remained uncertain as to whether a coherent discourse of 'climate justice' could emerge that would facilitate the coalescence of a radical anti-capitalist ecological politics.

The chapter begins by tracing the genealogy of the Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) network, locating it within a specific discourse of 'climate justice' that had been slowly developing throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. With a focus on a rejection of carbon trading, CJN! emerged as a reaction to the continued adherence to a thoroughly post-political reading of climate change that prevailed within the COP process, and the lack of critical perspective within the dominant allegiance of environmental NGOs that lobby the COP - the Climate Action Network (CAN). In

contrast, CJA emerged from a wholly separate political tradition, being initiated by predominately young Danish activists who identified with the ‘movement of movements’ and were inspired by the growing ‘climate camp’ phenomenon.

The chapter argues that throughout the mobilization(s) surrounding the COP15, the discourse of ‘climate justice’ became central to CJA’s attempt to politicize climate change through challenging the carbon-fetishist framing. This meant vying with other organizations (such as *Tck Tck Tck: Time for Climate Justice*) in an attempt to cement the meaning of ‘climate justice’ as a politicized discourse, rather than letting it become another expression of the post-political epistemological framework. At the same time, although CJA and CJN! were strategic allies on a number of events during the conference itself, some of the defining features of CJN!’s climate justice discourse - such as climate debt and associate reparations - did not have a political history amongst CJA activists. Indeed, by the end of the mobilizations it was clear that whilst ‘climate justice’ may act as a signifier for those who want to actively construct a political discourse on the climate, the actual content of any climate justice discourse remained highly contested.

The chapter concludes with the suggestion that what was achieved at the COP15 was progressive in the sense that, through actions such as the ‘System Change not Climate Change’ bloc on the 12th December and the ‘Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice!’ action on the 16th December, there had been a direct attempt to build upon climate justice as an alternative discourse on climate change through suggesting that ‘climate change is *not* an environmental issue’. However, the fractured discourse on ‘climate justice’ makes it less obvious as to whether the radical climate movement had moved towards developing a properly *political* account of climate change. In other words, if climate change is not an environmental issue, then *what kind of issue is it?* The following chapter therefore examines the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC) as a space in which to build upon the political potentiality of the ‘climate justice’ discourse.

### *7.1 An emerging movement for climate justice*

Following the establishment of the UN’s Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, the signatories to the convention began to meet annually in what was known as the Conference of Parties (COP), the first of which was held in Berlin in

1995. The most significant of the COPs took place in Kyoto in 1997, producing the infamous 'Kyoto Protocol' which introduced the three interrelated 'Kyoto mechanisms' of emissions trading, the clean development mechanism, and joint implementation (UNFCCC 1998: art. 6, 12, 17), along with legally binding emissions cuts for Annex I Parties<sup>8</sup>. Whilst decision making power remains with the representatives of those Parties to the convention, the COPs have variously been open to lobbyists from business and NGO delegates. In the case of the latter, the predominant NGO participation has been in the form of the Climate Action Network (CAN), a global network of NGOs established in 1989 with the remit of monitoring and influencing climate negotiations.

Aside from small localized actions, such as Greenpeace Australia's placards labeling members of the Australian cabinet as 'Carbon Criminals' prior to the COP3 in 1997 (Boehmer-Christiansen and Kellow 2002; 96), the earlier COPs generally took place without much in the way of popular protest. Perhaps the first significant 'counter' event and protests took place during the COP6, held in the Hague in December 2000, in the form of a two-day 'Climate Justice Summit' and the small-scale disruption of some of the COP plenaries. Co-organized by seven NGOs located in Europe, North America, Africa and Latin America, around 500 people attended the summit, which was reported as 'the watershed meeting [that] marked the first time that such a diverse group of grassroots activists [sic] from around the world gathered to focus on climate change' (Karliner 2000). This summit, along with an associated report published by the Transnational Resource and Action Centre in 1999 - '*Greenhouse Gangsters Vs. Climate Justice*' (Bruno, Karliner et al. 1999) - was also the first documented use of the term 'climate justice', although personal accounts attribute the first usage of the term to Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network during the mid-late 1990s (anon 1).

UNEP organized a second Earth Summit in Johannesburg during August 2002, which became known as the 'Rio+10' summit as it occurred a decade after the Rio Earth Summit, and thus also marked the ten year anniversary of the UNFCCC. At the final preparatory committee for the summit, held in Bali at the end of May, a coalition of NGOs including CorpWatch, Third World Network (TWN), Oil Watch, and the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), drafted what became known as the Bali Principles of Climate Justice (Network 2002). This declaration was released at the Rio

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<sup>8</sup> Annex I Parties included relatively economically developed countries, such as the US, EU and Japan.

+10 conference by the small coalition of NGOs, which referred to themselves as the International Climate Justice Network, and reiterated at a further Climate Justice Summit held during the COP8 in Delhi at the end of 2002. Following an international meeting of NGOs in Durban at the beginning of October 2004, known as the ‘Carbon Meeting’, the ‘Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading’ (Group 2004) was released, which further strengthened the critique of carbon markets and became a core organizing platform for NGOs within the loose International Climate Justice Network.

These various declarations, the emerging discourse on ‘climate justice’, and specifically the opposition to carbon trading, opened up an irresolvable tension with those NGOs in the Climate Action Network (CAN) who continued to iterate the carbon-fetishist discourse. Whilst signatories to the Durban Declaration made explicit that they ‘reject the claim that carbon trading will halt the climate crisis’ and thus pledged their ‘solidarity with people opposing carbon trading on the ground’, CAN continued to refuse to take a position on carbon trading. At the COP13 in Bali, held in 2007, a number of NGOs withdrew their membership in CAN and formed the Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) network, its founding statement making clear that ‘Climate Justice Now! will work to expose the false solutions to the climate crisis promoted by these [rich industrialised] governments, alongside financial institutions and multinational corporations – such as trade liberalisation, privatisation, forest carbon markets, agrofuels and carbon offsetting’ (CJN! 2012). As one participant in the CJN! network suggested during the build up to the COP15, the best way of thinking of CJN! was thus as the ‘not-CAN network’<sup>9</sup>.

The COP15 summit had variously been described as ‘the last major chance the world has to decide on a concrete and effective plan for reducing carbon emissions’ (Hopenhagen, 2009), the ‘last chance to stabilise climate at 2°C above pre-industrial levels in a smooth and organised way’ (Connor and McCarthy 2009), and ‘our last chance to avoid a dangerous 2°C of warming’ (Walsh 2009). As the BBC reported in the buildup to the COP15, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared that ‘there was no second chance to undo “catastrophic damage” to the environment if “we miss the opportunity to protect the planet”’ (Harrabin 2009). The prevailing discourse vis-à-vis the COP15 was thus (unsurprisingly) constructed within the dominant perspective of ‘dangerous climate change’; the apocalyptic imperative remained central, the COP15 being presented as a once-in-a-life time opportunity to secure a ‘deal’ that guaranteed

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<sup>9</sup> Notes from personal conversation

emissions reductions inline with preventing a 2°C rise in global temperatures against 1990 levels. Combined with the urgency imperative of achieving adequate emissions reductions before ‘we’ reached the atmospheric ‘tipping point’ in 2015, the COP15 was seen as specifically important with regards to producing a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, of which the first commitment period was due to expire at the end of 2012.

In the lead up to the COP15 summit, CJN! had been allocated 40% of the official UN accreditation badges with CAN receiving the remainder, meaning that the CJN! network had substantial lobbying access to the UNFCCC delegates. Whilst NGO access was severely curtailed in the final few days of the summit, throughout the fortnight of the COP15, CJN! held numerous press conferences within the Bella Centre - the venue for the summit - and arranged twice daily meetings to discuss network strategy. Notwithstanding numerous statements on ‘climate justice’, the primary goals of CJN! during the COP15 were to ensure the continuation of the perceived ‘good bit’ of the Kyoto Protocol - namely, a continuation of the legally binding commitments for Annex I countries and the principle of ‘common yet differentiated responsibility’ - and to oppose all forms of ‘false solutions’ that rely on market mechanisms - not least the further implementation of any version of the UN-REDD programme (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) (CJN! 2009b).

On the second day of the conference, a document known as the ‘Danish Text’ was leaked to major newspapers. Drafted outside of the UNFCCC process by a small group of ‘developed’ countries - including the UK, US and Denmark - the Danish Text caused consternation amongst many NGOs and non-Annex I countries due to its departure from the Kyoto principle of legally binding commitments for Annex I countries, handing over the management of climate finance to the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility, and for making climate finance conditional on a series of reforms. The Danish Text thus represented a direct threat to Kyoto track negotiations, resulting in the efforts of CJN!, many CAN-affiliated NGOs, and ‘developing’ countries being direct towards attempting to ‘save’ the Kyoto Protocol. As further sections elaborate, for CJN! the climate justice agenda during the CO15 period was thus largely reduced down to - or at least sidelined - by a struggle to maintain the Kyoto track for UNFCCC negotiations.

## 7.2 From the 'radical climate' to the 'climate justice' movement(s)

At the beginning of 2008 the Copenhagen based climate activist group, KlimaX, made a decision to begin mobilizing for an international protest to take place during the time of the COP15. As the first email to the 'climate-09-int' e-list stated on the 13th March 2008, 'this is the beginning of international networking towards the first truly massive international climate activist mobilization in the history of the planet' (Anon 2). KlimaX needs to be understood as having emerged in the context of Copenhagen's leftist and 'autonomist' cultures, most obviously epitomized in the autonomous community 'Christiania', but more relevantly the widespread rioting and resistance to the closure of the Ungdomshuset youth house<sup>10</sup> in March 2007 and its relocation in July 2008. Emerging within this context, KlimaX was largely inspired by the direct-action based 'climate-camps' that began in the UK (see *Chapter 6*) and had begun to occur in other European countries, the US and Australia. Whilst the organisation itself emerged following a protest against a Danish company that was planning to build a coal power plant in Germany, as of early 2008 individuals in KlimaX had begun to plan attendance at these camps and co-organize a Danish camp for mid-2009.

KlimaX did not therefore emerge from the same lineage as the CJN! network; indeed, neither the introductory message to the e-list nor the invite to the first international planning meeting used the term 'climate justice', and neither did they frame the mobilization within a history of previous counter summits. As the introductory email went on to state:

'The COP15 summit is the last chance to influence the politicians before they accept a new agreement to replace the Kyoto agreement. So far its [*sic*] not looking good. We have precious few years to avert total disaster. If action isn't taken now it may be to [*sic*] late for our fragile climate. We have to make history at this summit before history makes us extinct' (Anon 2).

Whilst this email explicitly stated that this was not a KlimaX statement but a 'personal analysis of the situation' by a participant in KlimaX, the perspective quite clearly iterated elements of the post-political epistemic frame, not least the discourse on urgency that positioned the COP15 as the 'last chance' and the apocalyptic narrative in which we face 'precious few years to avert total disaster' and extinction. In May 2008,

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<sup>10</sup> The Ungdomshuset Youth House was based in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen, and was the social and political core of the underground music scene, along with a common meeting place of leftist and autonomen groups from the early-1980's onwards.

KlimaX circulated the first call-out for an international planning meeting on the 13-14th September 2008, with the aim of preparing a 'large mobilisation for direct action against the root causes of climate change in Copenhagen and throughout the world during the UN Climate Conference' (Anon 3). This call-out contained rhetoric which resonated more clearly with the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian roots of the UK's radical climate movement, stating that the goal was to 'put reason before profit' and demanded that we 'take direct action, both against the root causes of climate change and to help create a new, just and joyous world in the shell of the old'. KlimaX activists proceeded to visit climate camps across Europe to build support for this international meeting, including attending and hosting a workshop at the 2008 CfCA at Kingsnorth.

The September 2008 mobilization gathering brought together around 100 people, including individuals active in CJN!, CaCC, CfCA, KlimaX, German post-autonomist groups and others, in an alternative democratic school that lent their buildings to KlimaX for the weekend's meeting. The public outcome of this meeting was a refined 'Call to Climate Action'<sup>11</sup> that had been collectively worked on during the meeting and thus represented the first collective position of the international mobilization. This was translated and circulated internationally, and received endorsement from the UK's CfCA Manchester gathering 10 days later, marking the beginning of the 'official' engagement with the as-yet-unnamed Climate Justice Action (CJA) network<sup>12</sup>. Despite agreement on this collective call-out, and enough of a perceived shared agenda for the process to go forward, there were nonetheless significant differences amongst the meeting participants that mirrored the tensions that were present within the UK's radical climate movement.

In the first instance, there was discordance amongst participants as to whether the UNFCCC was a wholly illegitimate process that ought to be 'shut down' - the 1999 Seattle counter-summit protests against the IMF and World Bank being offered as the blueprint - or a process that ought to be influenced, using forms of elaborate direct-action to place demands on the process. Whilst the heterogeneity of perspectives that led to these differing opinions cannot be wholly accounted for, the minutes from the September meeting recalled that by the end of the meeting it was 'clear there was not agreement on whether the main aim should be to change the whole system, or influence

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix I - A Call to Climate Action

<sup>12</sup> This mobilization process will be referred to as CJA from herein.

COP15 as it is'. This division was indicative of a broader division within the meeting, such that it could be reported that 'there are two groups here: people saying we really need to do something about climate change, other people saying we really need to do something about the world' (CJA 2008). The distinction between two groups was perhaps not so clear-cut; many individuals were attempting to personally reconcile these two positions, whilst other perspectives contained important nuances, such as whether the 'shut them in' strategy was to prevent the G8 leaders from walking out, to promote the voices of marginalized developing nations, or to prevent a 'bad-deal' such as carbon markets being supported. Crucially, there were numerous voices in this meeting making clear that any demands or strategies based around emissions reductions 'aren't real demands as they don't reach the root of the problem', and thus that the politics of the mobilization need to move beyond this carbon-fetishist account of climate change.

Whilst there were significantly different opinions within this meeting, these differences did not serve as a barrier to the progression of the CJA mobilization. Notwithstanding some important personal relationships that had been forged during the previous 'movement of movements' counter-summits, CJA did not emerge from the same lineage as the CJN! network, but from 'street-based' direct-action networks and in particular the 'climate camp' phenomenon. Whilst these personal relationships would lead to a more substantial engagement between the CJA and CJN! networks, and played a significant cross-fertilization role in establishing shared elements of a 'climate justice' discourse, CJA did not emerge through the same understanding and discourse of 'climate justice' as the CJN! network. Rather, CJA embarked on its own process of attempting to construct a critical political perspective on climate change which would become its basis for mobilizing around the UNFCCC process.

With the next major international mobilization meeting scheduled for 13-15th March 2009, along with an intermittent and smaller meeting in Poznan during the COP14 on the 7th December 2008, CJA participants began extended discussions to shape the discourse of the movement. Two specific themes emerged which served to structure the debates around whether a unified critical position could be developed within CJA, and what form of intervention would thus be appropriate during the COP15. The first of these was a discussion around the theme of 'green capitalism' and the role of the UNFCCC in this process, whilst the second took the form of a lengthy 'action-strategy' discussion, which became known as the 'shut them down/shut them in' debate.

Whilst a handful of individuals entertained the analysis at the first international meeting, the discourse on 'green capitalism' was crucially developed further by Tazio Mueller and Alexis Passadakis, who agreed to write a discussion piece - ultimately reproduced as '20 Theses against Green Capitalism' (Mueller and Passadakis 2008) - with the intention of clarifying the concept and contributing to a shared understanding of what the mobilization should be tackling. This discussion paper, circulated on the 'climate-09-int' e-list, along with being published in various movement journals and websites, garnered widespread (but not consensual) agreement within the mobilization process.

The substance of the argument was that multiple crises were occurring - a crisis of capitalism, a crisis of political legitimacy, and a 'biocrisis' - and that the UNFCCC process played a central role in attempting to forge a 'green capitalist' solution to these multiple crises. Nominally, through constructing carbon markets and promoting 'green' technologies, governments were finding a 'solution' to the crisis of capital through providing new markets for capital investment, whilst at the same time regaining legitimacy with respect to both the interests of capital and 'taking action on climate change'. Whilst 'green capitalism' may provide a temporary solution to the crisis of capital, and provide legitimacy to these global governing institutions, 'green capitalism' would in-fact only exacerbate the 'biocrisis', as capitalism's imperative of 'infinite growth' - and thus infinite resource consumption - cannot be sustained on a finite planet. The particular political analysis set out in the '20 Theses' text would become central to the political story-telling of CJA, not only framing the strategic debates, but contributing to a contestation over the meaning of 'climate justice' in the context of the COP15.

Alongside the development of the critique of 'green capitalism' was the lengthy 'action-strategy' discussion, which began with the premise that CJA had a choice either of 'shutting down' the summit altogether or 'shutting in' participants to the summit, thus creating a siege scenario allowing demands to be made by the 'activist movements' on the outside. In summary, the arguments for 'shutting down' the conference largely stemmed from the logic that 'no deal is better than a bad deal', and given a presumption that the only possible outcome of the UNFCCC process was the pursuit of the green capitalist agenda, it followed that the COP15 should be shut down so as to prevent a 'bad deal' that would implement further carbon trading, the commodification of forests etc. Aside from any logistical concerns, the critique of this position was manifold;

firstly, ‘shutting down’ the conference was liable to be interpreted as a paradoxical action, as it would be difficult to communicate that CJA wanted to tackle climate change, whilst at the same time shutting down a UN summit with the mandate of tackling climate change. Secondly, as a member of CJA suggested<sup>13</sup>, as much as there was a clear rejection of capitalism and the state amongst many vulnerable communities such as Filipino fisherfolk, there was no choice but to try and secure some form of ‘agreement’ at the COP15 which would help protect those communities on the ‘front line’ of climate change. Thirdly, there was the mobilization of the urgency imperative, namely that despite our ‘radical’ commitments we *have* to get some form of deal on climate change, and that the ‘no deal’ option was not acceptable.

Whilst the alternative ‘shut them in’ strategy encapsulated a range of different perspectives, there nonetheless remained a commitment to the ‘no deal is better than a bad deal’ perspective. The ‘shut them in’ strategy broadly rested upon the idea of creating a ‘siege’ scenario, such that delegates would not be allowed to leave the Bella Centre until they had agreed upon a ‘deal’ that was considered appropriate from the perspective of the demonstrators. Crucially, this strategy relied upon a set of specific concrete demands to be developed which could be directed towards the delegates in the UNFCCC process, so as to force a ‘better’ deal. As one participant suggested, the critique of this strategy was twofold; on the one hand ‘shutting them in (for a "better" deal) wouldn’t really work... as we know that they most probably won’t change to real solutions even if we shut them in for a month’, whilst on the other hand ‘it could give the impression that we are expecting a good solution to come from THEM’ (Anon 4).

This essential dichotomy between the ‘shut them down/shut them in’ strategic options was divisive within the mobilization and posed a potential deadlock; on the one hand those who took a ‘hard’ line towards the summit as an institution that needed to be ‘shut down’ due to its irreducible commitment to ‘green capitalism’, and on the other hand those who saw the need to delegitimize the summit in its current form through a strategy of ‘shutting them in’. By the time of the March meeting, which brought together more than 140 people, there had been over 23 proposals made for ‘actions’ that could be taken by the CJA network. Nonetheless, the framework for discussion - or rather the ‘deadlock’ which needed to be overcome - remained the ‘shut them down/shut them in’ dichotomy.

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<sup>13</sup> Notes from personal conversation

### *7.3 CJA and CJN: A circumstantial alliance?*

The March meeting, during which the mobilization decided upon the name Climate Justice Action, was formative both in terms of the proposed actions to be taken at the COP15, and of the broader political agenda of CJA. In the first instance, the ‘shut them in/shut them down’ dichotomy had reached a point where it had become imperative, for the consistency of the network, that an action strategy was developed which resolved the dichotomy. At the same time, earlier meetings in Poznan (during the COP14 in December 2008) and a Belem outreach meeting (during the WSF in February 2009) had brought together substantially different demographics than at the September 2008 meeting, a principle outcome being significant exposure to the ‘climate justice’ discourse that CJN! and others had developed over the previous years. The fertilization of CJN!’s discourse on ‘climate justice’ was thus considerably influential in forming CJAs ‘network goals’.

Following a discussion of the numerous action proposals on the Sunday of the March meeting, a working group was mandated to attempt to synthesize the ideas for a mass action, and to propose a draft action proposal back to the meeting. Notwithstanding lengthy debates and planning work in latter meetings, the action-concept proposed by this working group - under the draft title of ‘Creating New Spaces’ - closely resembled the final action adopted by CJA and which took place on the 16th December under the title ‘Reclaim Power! Pushing for Climate Justice’. With the intention of forging an intervention that neither legitimized the summit nor could be interpreted as ‘shutting it down’, the action concept involved a large ‘climate justice’ march that would attempt to enter the grounds of the Bella Centre - although not the building itself - and hold a ‘climate justice assembly’. This assembly would later be joined by ‘allies, delegates and others’ from inside the Bella Centre (which included CJN! members), who would walk out of the conference centre to join the assembly. The action-concept thus centered upon a tactic of ‘delegitimizing’ the COP discussions through creating a visible ‘alternative forum’ that disrupted the dominant discourse.

The ‘Creating New Spaces’ action concept achieved consensus in the meeting, with only one voice actively standing aside from the decision on the basis that they still interpreted the action as amounting to a ‘legitimization’ of the UNFCCC. The proposal satisfied the vast majority of those who saw it as central that CJA acted to delegitimize the COP15 as an institution, and the affirmation from the working group that CJA would not place demands on the summit reinforced this. With hindsight, it remained

ambiguous as to whether this action would serve as a delegitimization of the entire UNFCCC process based on political principles (such as the critique of green capitalism), or an attempt to delegitimize ‘false solutions’ such as carbon trading. Indeed, this ambiguity perhaps partially explains why the problematic ‘shut them down/shut them in’ dichotomy was surpassed with relative ease and achieved consensual support. Meanwhile, the associated ‘climate justice assembly’ was framed as an opportunity to discuss and articulate ‘our solutions’ and form an ‘agenda from below’, symbolizing a form of legitimacy-shift from the UNFCCC to the social movements.

Aside from agreeing the general action concept, the March meeting also agreed upon CJA’s overarching network goals, which in themselves would go on to be featured in the networks ‘press pack’, be taken as the basis for producing key ‘media messages’, and form the overall rationale of the mobilization. The aforementioned decision on the action concept occurred at the beginning of the Sunday afternoon session, and was thus significantly sandwiched between the two discussions on CJA’s network goals (see *Fig 7.1*).

In the Sunday morning session, a draft list of the ‘proposed goals of the mobilization’ had been prepared based on previous discussion. Through an open session, comments and amendments were discussed, and a working group was mandated to bring back a new draft with these elements incorporated. Following the agreement on the action concept, the meeting reopened discussion on the redrafted network goals, which had been reduced down to three ‘streamlined’ points. Crucially, neither the first draft which had been brought to the meeting, nor the second draft which had been resubmitted on the Sunday afternoon, included any mention of the concepts of ecological debt or reparations. As will be suggested, these concepts were pivotal to the ‘climate justice’ discourse that had been developed by CJN!, but failed to feature in the ‘climate justice’ discourse that had been developed by CJA activists. Indeed, it was only as a result of the direct intervention of CJN! activists present at the meeting that the pivotal concepts were included. Ultimately, whilst further minor changes were made, the proposed goals agreed upon at the end of this session closely resembled CJA’s ‘network goals’ at the time of the COP15.

### **CJA Network Goals**

- To promote and strengthen the rights and voices of Indigenous and affected peoples (including workers) in confronting the climate crisis.
- To support reparations and the repayment of ecological debt to the Global South by industrialized rich countries.
- To build a global movement for climate justice that encourages urgent action to avoid catastrophic climate change.
- To highlight the critical role of biodiversity in weathering the climate crisis, and to defend the existence of all species.
- To expose the roles of false and market-based climate “solutions” as well as corporate domination of climate negotiations in worsening the climate crisis.
- To advance alternatives that can provide real and just solutions to the climate crisis.
- To both sharpen our understanding of, and address, the root social, ecological, political and economic causes of the climate crisis toward a total systemic transformation of our society.

Fig 7.1  
Source: Personal files

A number of observations can be made concerning the formation of these network goals; firstly, a number of the goals reflect the considerable influence of CJN! participants on CJA’s process, especially at the Poznan and Belem meetings. In the first instance, the term ‘climate justice’ itself had been introduced at the aforementioned meetings and began to be utilized on the ‘climate-09’ e-list, and quickly became embraced at the March meeting as an ambiguous term that served to distinguish the network from the carbon-fetishist perspectives of the CAN. Secondly - as discussed above - the discourse on reparations and ‘ecological debt’ was directly adopted from CJN!’s discourse, partly due to the increased exposure to declarations such as CJN!’s Poznan statement (CJN! 2008) leading to an awareness of the terms amongst some CJA activists, but predominately due to the direct influence of key CJN! members at the CJA gatherings. Lastly, the final commitment - which aimed for ‘a total systemic transformation of our society’ - was enthusiastically supported with a considerable amount of good humour given the breadth of the statement, yet encompasses the ‘anti-systemic’ and anti-capitalist sentiments that had been inherited from the alter-globalization movement of movements.

Crucially, the decision to support the inclusion of the discourse on reparations and ecological debt was not the result of a comprehensive collective understanding of the concept. Indeed, writing in April 2010 Nicola Bullard, senior associate with the Bangkok based NGO *Focus on the Global South* and a founding member of CJN!, suggested that ‘perhaps there is no definitive definition of climate debt, but as social justice movements and activists, it is useful to have a common vision of what we mean, and what we are asking for’ (Bullard 2010). Rather than a coherent and agreed understanding of the concept - which arguably had not been broadly developed or circulated amongst CJA activists - the rationale behind including the discourse largely stemmed from a desire for networking, acting in solidarity with the ‘global South’, and the strategic potential for working with widely respected organisations such as *La Via Campesina*. For many North European activists, the reparations and climate debt discourse had been interpreted as emanating directly from movements in the ‘global South’, and its adoption as a CJA goal appeared to be a step towards building a ‘global movement for climate justice’ and a principle for collaborative action. As one CJA activist later suggested, ‘people in the north have to be very careful on this list and in other fora to [not] simply reject the question of reparations, since they are some of the key demands from southern movements’ (Anon 5).

Notably, a handful of participants expressed their discomfort with the potential implications of supporting the inclusion of reparations and ecological debt within CJA’s Network Goals. In the first instance, the concept of reparations appeared as a discourse engineered as a ‘demand’ that would be issued towards governments, thus contributing to a ‘legitimation’ of the UNFCCC. Furthermore, ‘climate debt’ had been presented as an issue of the ‘North’ being indebted to the ‘South’, which had been critiqued by some as obfuscating a more central question of class exploitation, both historically and in the present (see *Section 8.4*). Despite these protestations, by the end of CJA’s March meeting, an action concept had been broadly decided upon and a political framework had been agreed using a consensus decision making process. Taken together, these ‘network aims’ would become interpreted as the rationale for the *Reclaim Power* action, especially with respect to shaping the ‘Peoples’ Assembly’ that was to take place within the perimeter of the Bella Centre.

#### 7.4 Contesting the post-political: “Climate Change is Not an Environmental Issue”

Following the substantial outcomes of the CJA March meeting, there were three further international meetings of the CJA network prior to the COP15, all of which took place in Copenhagen. With hindsight, these meetings were predominantly orientated towards either logistical issues - such as transportation, legal issues, kitchens, meeting spaces and accommodation - or the practicalities of the mobilization such as building the international profile of the mobilization, establishing how the media team would function and how CJA would organize during the COP15, or a more nuanced development of how the Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice day of action could unfold. Nonetheless, there were a series of events which were significant in CJA’s attempt to develop a politicized discourse on climate change.

On the Sunday afternoon of the June CJA meeting, representatives from the *Global Campaign for Climate Action* (GCCA) - an international ‘alliance’ of major NGOs - attended the meeting to explain their approach to mobilizing at the COP15 summit. The GCCA, which formed in 2008 and includes organisations such as *WWF*, *Oxfam*, *350.org*, *Avaaz.org*, *CaCC* and significantly *CAN*, initiated a campaign at the beginning of 2009 under the branding of *TckTckTck*. As was explained by the representatives, the sole aim of GCCA was to unite around a call for a ‘fair, ambitious and binding’ treaty from the UNFCCC process, which amounted to a call for legally binding emissions demands.

It was quickly established that the GCCA was essentially the public face for the *CAN* negotiating platform, and that the intention of the *TckTckTck* brand was thus to have a public presence in Copenhagen and manufacture ‘popular support’ behind *CAN*’s negotiating aims. The differences between CJA and GCCA was made clear by one participant who suggested that ‘emissions reductions isn’t a real demand because it doesn’t reach root of problem’<sup>14</sup>, and that the GCCA was merely contributing to the legitimization of the summit. Furthermore, the GCCA continued to maintain an indifferent position on the use of market mechanisms, thus reflecting the primary tension that had led the *CJN!* network to split from *CAN* during the COP13 in Bali. After gaining assurances that the GCCA would not attempt to delegitimize the CJA actions, the meeting agreed that the GCCA and CJA perspectives were incompatible, and representatives of the former were requested to disengage from CJA decision-

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<sup>14</sup> Notes taken on Sunday of June CJA gathering

making processes. As will be highlighted (see *section 7.5*), the GCCA's branding became highly contentious during the COP15 summit - especially after the *TekTckTck* brand was suffixed with the phrase *Time for Climate Justice*.

If the discussion with GCCA affirmed the desire amongst many CJA participants to construct a political discourse on climate change, a series of publications during 2009 helped provide a platform through which CJA participants could develop their own discourse on 'climate justice'. The two most substantial and widely distributed publications, both in the run up and during the summit, were the zines *Dealing with Distractions: Confronting Green Capitalism in Copenhagen and Beyond*, and *Why Climate Change is Not an Environmental Issue*. Although in both cases the zines were not explicitly branded as 'CJA' publications, they were both edited by network participants, collated articles from those active in the CJA and NTAC networks, and explicitly directed towards participating in these networks.



Fig 7.2  
Source: Personal files

These zines were broadly indicative of how the discourse on 'climate justice' had developed amongst participants in these networks. Crucially, and despite the CJA network goals that had been agreed at the March gathering, neither of these publications contained any discussion of the concepts of ecological debt, climate debt or reparations that were absolutely central to CJN!'s discourse on 'climate justice'. Rather, the distinction that both zines looked to make was the 'increasingly clear line... between those that believe that a solution is possible within the capitalist system, and those that don't' (Anon 2009a), and that climate change 'is not just an environmental issue... but

one symptom of a system ravaging our planet and destroying our communities' (Anon 2009b). Indeed, the overarching perspective of many of the articles was a reiteration or extension of the logic developed in *Twenty Theses Against Green Capitalism* (Mueller and Passadakis 2008), which was itself reprinted in the *Dealing with Distractions* zine.

As will be suggested (see *section 7.6*), by the time the mobilization had reached Copenhagen there was not a single coherent discourse of 'climate justice' that could be put in clear contrast to the carbon-fetishist discourse of 'dangerous climate change' that framed the UNFCCC process. Rather, there was a proliferation of meanings associated with the term 'climate justice', some of which could be clearly delineated and some of which - not least the relationship between CJA and CJN! - remained obscured. It was arguably only through the unfolding experience of the mobilization in Copenhagen that these different meanings could be brought to light, helping clarify the different attempts being made to politicize the knowledge of climate change.

#### *7.5 Attempts to enact the political: "System change not climate change"*

By the time of the COP15, which took place on the 7th-18th December 2009, a diverse series of protests and events had been organized outside of the UNFCCC summit in the Bella Centre (see *Fig 7.3*). Taking place in the DGI-byen centre, the Klimaforum09 was a large 'alternative' summit that ran throughout the period of the COP15 conference, providing a space for an extensive programme of workshops and plenary sessions ranging from discussions around 'sustainable consumption' to sessions on 'capitalism and the climate crisis'. Alongside this space for debate and information sharing, the Klimaforum facilitated the collective authoring of a 'global climate declaration', which became titled 'system change not climate change'. By the end of the conference, almost 300 organisations had signed the declaration, ranging from the Danish Communist Party through to a series of FOE national groups.

Although CJA had initially worked with the Klimaforum, with the possibility of sharing spaces and political platforms, CJA neither signed the final declaration nor co-organized any events. This separation resulted from the fact that despite Klimaforum initially signed-on to CJA's call-for-action at the COP15, they formally removed themselves in the run-up to the conference, allegedly due to political pressure stemming from their reliance on funding from the Danish Government. As such, despite CJA participants speaking in numerous workshops and panels, often to raise awareness of the CJA

mobilization, participation in the Klimaforum was limited to personal involvement and there was no formal engagement with CJA. As will be suggested (see *section 7.6*), the Klimaforum process - and the declaration in particular - was one of the competing voices contributing to the contested discourse of ‘climate justice’.

Date	Event	Group
7-18th	Klimaforum	Klimaforum
11th	Don't Buy the Lie! Our Climate, Not Your Business!	CJA, Klima Kollektivet
12th	Global Day of Action Demonstration including System Change, Not Climate Change! block	Various
13th	Hit the Production!	CJA/NTAC - nonaligned
13th	Farmer's action	La Via Campesina
14th	No Borders, No Climate Refugees!	No Borders Network
14th	Reparations for Climate Debt	CJN!
15th	Resistance is Ripe! Agriculture Action Day	Various, including La Via Campesina
16th	Reclaim Power! Pushing for Climate Justice!	CJA & CJN!

Fig 7.3  
Source: Personally compiled

Aside from the *Reclaim Power* action on the 16th, CJA had also agreed to support or endorse a series of other actions during the second week of the conference. On the 11th December - which is known as the ‘business day’ in which corporations have exclusive lobbying access to government delegates - the *Don't Buy the Lie: Our Climate! Not Your Business!* action brought together around 800 people to march on the Green Business expo that was taking place at the Copenhagen ‘Forum’, with the intention of ‘disrupting the discourse’ of those corporations involved in lobbying the COP15 (see *Fig 7.4*). This was the first action to take place during the COP15, and resulted in a heavy level of policing - around 80 people were ‘detained’ or arrested - that was an earlier indicator of the no-tolerance policing strategy that would be applied during the rest of the summit.

The 13th December witnessed the poorly organised *Hit the Production of Climate Chaos!* action, which aimed to mobilize numerous affinity groups to close down Copenhagen's harbour as ‘the global shipping industry is at the heart of capitalism, a key symbol of an industrial system that is based on growth and the use of fossil

fuels' (CJA 2009: 8). The HTP action had been organized by participants in both the CJA and NTAC networks, although neither network were 'officially' responsible for organizing the action. The action had been initiated in June 2009 by individuals who felt that the Reclaim Power action was both complicated and confusing, and allowed too much space for conflict between those who wanted to lobby the summit, and those who wanted to delegitimize it. As such, the underpinning rationale behind the HTP action was 'the understanding that the organisation of production in our societies needs to change', and thus an action was required which would clearly communicate the need for a 'strong climate movement that hits the problem at their source: The capitalistic production' (Anon 6). The action ultimately resulted in around 250 people - almost the entire demonstration - being kettled by the police, before being arrested and taken to a make-shift detention centre in Copenhagen's Valby district.



Fig 7.4

Source: Personal files

Aside from these specific actions, CJA and CJN! had agreed to participate in the major NGO march which had been organized for the 12th December, which attracted a reported 100,000 participants. The march had been organized into a few dozen 'blocks', facilitating groups with different messaging to participate in the march. Under a CJN!-proposed block entitled 'System Change not Climate Change', CJA and CJN! attracted thousand of participants to march behind their sound-truck that was emblazoned with banners and facilitated speakers from both networks to address the march. The banner slogans included 'Leave Fossil Fuels in the Ground', 'You Can't Have Infinite Growth on a Finite Planet' - both of which were common slogans on CJA mobilization flyers and press releases - and the notable 'FckFckFck the System' banner parodying the TckTckTck campaign's post-political engagement with the COP15 summit (see *Photo 7.1*). The march ultimately resulted in the preemptive arrest of 968 participants, later

ruled illegal by the Danish courts (KlimaKollektivet 2012), all of whom were detained overnight in the Valby detention centre.



Photo 7.1

Source: Magne Hagesæter. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/magneh/4197257379/>

As suggested above (see *section 7.4*), the suffixing of ‘time for climate justice’ to TckTckTck’s campaign branding attracted widespread criticism from participants in both the CJN! and CJA networks. As one CJN! participant blogged, the TckTckTck campaign was a ‘watering down of the term “climate justice”’ (Morningstar 2010), the term becoming co-opted and associated with carbon-fetishist calls for a ‘fair, ambitious and binding treaty’. Indeed, the TckTckTck campaign broadly reiterated the goals of CAN, focusing purely on carbon fetishist demands for emissions reductions to be embodied in a ‘fair, ambitious and binding’ treaty. The sound-truck banner, along with a city-wide stickering campaign, was thus part of a conscious attempt to delegitimize the TckTckTck campaigns uncritical adoption of the terminology of ‘climate justice’.

By the 16th December, there had been almost 1,500 arrests with only a handful of those being charged, police raids on the two principle sleeping venues - Teglholmen and Ragnhildgade - and a raid on the ‘candy factory’ workshop, which was being used to fix hundreds of bicycles for protestors to use on the *Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice! (RP!)* action. Although the framework for the RP! action had broadly been decided within CJA during meetings earlier in the year, the precise unfolding of the action was planned at nightly CJA meetings at Ragnhildgade. The decision was made to form into three ‘blocs’; Green Bloc was considered ‘low risk’ and would follow a sound-truck on an approved route to the fence of the Bella Centre, Blue Bloc was to be more ‘mobile’ and to arrive at the Bella Centre from a different direction, whilst the

Bike Bloc formed into a series of affinity groups that would ‘swarm’ to the Bella centre and act as fast-response groups to aid the progress of the other blocks.

Following a strategy meeting in Bangkok in early October, CJN! had agreed to co-organize and participate in the *RP!* action, facilitating what became known as the ‘inside/outside’ strategy; from the perspective of CJA’s action planning, this was considered a crucial step in making the *RP!* action a success. Thus, along with the aforementioned blocs, participants from within the summit - which included CJN! and CJA activists along with a handful of government delegates - were to stage a mass walkout of the Bella Centre, meeting the other blocks as they attempted to push through the perimeter fence to the Bella centre. When the ‘insiders’ and the ‘outsiders’ met at the perimeter a ‘peoples’ assembly for climate justice’ was to be held, in which a series of speakers would discuss a pre-agreed agenda.

Whilst this action plan had been confirmed months before the COP15, aspects of this strategy remained contingent until almost the day of the action itself, as closed meetings between CJN! and CJA activists revealed that certain CJN! affiliated organisations were not willing to walkout of the negotiations until it was ‘beyond doubt’ that the COP15 would not produce an ‘acceptable’ deal. However, by the 14th December it had become clear the UNFCCC secretariat was restricting NGO access to the conference, such that only 90 observers would be allowed access on the 16th. This prompted a ‘sign-on’ letter to be issued, supported by CJN! member organizations, which stated; ‘We believe that it is crucial to the outcome of the Copenhagen negotiations that civil society has access to these negotiations and we urge you to make sure that the true voices of the world are heard here in the Bella centre’ (Anon 7). Furthermore, a ‘Yellow (badge) Bloc’ was announced for the 16th, which was for all those with UN accreditation that had been ‘shut-out’ of the conference. It remained unclear as to who had made the decision to announce the Yellow (badge) Bloc - although it was circulated on the ‘Climate-09’ e-list and posted on the CJN! website (CJN! 2009c). Whilst some CJA activists voiced concerns that the Bloc may lead to the narrative of the action becoming about ‘excluded voices’, the Bloc was ultimately widely supported by CJA activists as an ideal way to bolster participation in the *RP!* action.



Photo 7.2

Source: Kris Krüg. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/kk/4195801110/>

On the day of the action, around 4000 people participated in the ‘outside’ blocs, reaching the fence of the Bella Centre at around midday. (see *Photo 7.2*) They were met with significant police violence - including the use of pepper spray, tear gas and baton charges - as over 250 people were arrested, spokespeople targeted by undercover ‘snatch-squads’, and the sound-truck confiscated. Numerous activists attempted to scale the perimeter fence, whilst others inventively attempted to use inflatable beds to build a bridge over the ‘moat’ of the Bella Centre. The ‘inside’ bloc had gathered around 150 people within the centre, including part of the governmental delegations of Bolivia, Venezuela and Tuvalu, and attempted to cross a footbridge outside of the Bella Centre to join the ‘outside’ blocs, only to be met with further police violence including the use of dogs. Whilst the various blocs attempted to meet on the outside, Evo Morales announced to the plenary - “we understand that there are lots of protests outside and inside, and there need to be. I don’t believe we will come to an agreement because there can be no agreement if it does not challenge the model that created climate change, which is capitalism” (Reyes 2009). Following an extended period of being ‘kettled’ by the police, the Peoples’ Assembly formed and lasted for around an hour, consisting of a series of speakers followed by small groups forming to discuss ‘real solutions’ (see *Photo 7.3*). The action ended around 5.30pm, as those still remaining marched back to the DGI-byen centre where the Klimaforum was located.



Photo 7.3

Source: Climate Caravan. <http://climatecaravan.wordpress.com/2010/01/29/reclaim-power/>

Whilst the *RP!* action was unfolding, Greenpeace activists gatecrashed a dinner for heads of state, organized by the Queen of Denmark, holding up banners stating ‘Politicians Talk, Leaders Act’ - a slogan that Greenpeace had promoted in the build up to the summit, including during the occupation of multiple coal power stations during the 2009 G8 summit in L’Aquila, Italy. Occurring the evening before the final day of the summit, Greenpeace’s press release stated that ‘We have only 24 hours to pull the world back from the brink of climate chaos’ (Greenpeace 2009). The final public event of the mobilization took place on Friday 18th, as around 2,000 people marched from Israels Plads to Slodsplads under the banner of ‘free the climate prisoners!’.

#### *7.6 The competing accounts of ‘climate justice’*

The mobilizations in Copenhagen illustrated that the discourse of ‘climate justice’ was far from coherent, with clear distinctions existing between major NGO coalitions such as TckTckTck and CJA/CJN!. Furthermore, despite the tactical alliance between the latter two networks that developed across the period of mobilization, the discourse on climate justice remained fractured, and discrete differences emerged between the two networks. Furthermore, the UN’s decision to remove accreditation from a large number of NGO participants resulted in a significant change to the narrative of the *RP!* action, further distorting the already fractured discourse of climate justice that had been emerging over the previous year.

In the first instance, the *TckTckTck: Time for Climate Justice* branding exercise was widely recognized to have nothing to do with constructing a radical political discourse

on climate change, and was thus publicly targeted by activists associated with both CJN! and CJA. In calling for a 'fair, ambitious and binding deal' based on CO<sub>2</sub> targets, *TckTckTck* fully iterated the post-political carbon fetishist framework, the suffixation of 'justice' being nothing beyond the recognition that the effects of rising global surface temperatures have an unequal global distribution. The explicit division made at the 2007 Bali meeting between CJN! organisations and the CAN - for which *TckTckTck* is broadly the 'public' face - suggests that the attempts of the latter to appropriate the discourse of 'climate justice' revealed (at best) a complete failure of mainstream environmental NGOs to either understand or attempt to build a politicized discourse on the climate.

The more obvious 'climate justice' alliance was between CJA and CJN!, who co-organized the *System Change not Climate Change* bloc on the 12th and the *Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice!* action on the 16th. Both used the term 'climate justice' as a key signifier for their mobilizations, and there was an evidently shared position regarding a rejection of all forms of carbon trading - drawing an explicit distinction between themselves and the CAN. For CJA, this critique was formed explicitly through the lens of 'green capitalism', rejecting carbon trading as a mode of capitalist expansion which would lead only to the further expansion of the capitalist system and thus the exacerbation of the 'biocrisis'. Indeed, CJA's opposition to the COP15 was primarily framed through this system-critical perspective - the narrative being reiterated in movement publications, workshop talks and press releases - and the primary logic of the *RP!* action had been precisely to attempt to delegitimize the UNFCCC as an institution facilitating capitalist expansion.

This rejection of carbon-markets - especially in the form of the REDDs and carbon-offsetting - is echoed by CJN!, although the network's statements have tended to emphasize not the systemic critique of 'green capitalism' but how these 'false solutions' are used as a cover 'to allow polluters to avoid reducing emissions domestically... [and to] accelerate the privatisation and corporate take-over of the natural world' (CJN! 2008). Nonetheless, statements from member organisations such as *La Via Campesina* suggest that despite slightly different terminology, the system-critical perspective is certainly circulated amongst some member organisations:

'The capitalist economy, based on the over-exploitation of natural resources and human beings, will never become "green." It is based on limitless growth in a planet that has reached its limits and on the commoditization of

the remaining natural resources that have until now remained un-priced or in control of the public sector' (LVC 2012).

Despite this shared analysis of 'green capitalism', the core of CJN!'s 'climate justice' discourse - that of 'climate debt' and 'reparations' - featured only circumstantially in the political rationale of CJA. From the initiation of the mobilizations in 2008 through to the unfolding of the actions themselves, the inclusion of these concepts usually came not from 'within' CJA but as direct interventions from CJN! participants. Furthermore, when these concepts were included, the justification was often that, as European activists, we ought to 'take heed' and 'respect' the demands of the 'Global South' - thus arguably forgoing much of the critical assessment that was afforded other questions. Indeed, as late as a *RP!* planning meeting on the 7th December, neither the discourse on 'climate debt' or 'reparations' were included in the key messages; the decision being taken at CJA's October gathering to collapse these terms under the banner 'climate colonialism' (see *Fig 7.5*). Nonetheless, even the term 'climate colonialism' was met with trepidation by some CJA activists; as one of the 'media' working group suggested, "I'm still a bit worried about 'climate colonialism'. I think it's possible that we could end up wasting time trying to get this message through.... or maybe not. It's just that I think it's a really complicated idea, and we're only just about getting the press to understand carbon trading"<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Agreed Media Messages for the Reclaim Power! Action**

1. The climate crisis shows that it's impossible to have infinite growth on a finite planet. False solutions like carbon trading will not solve the climate crisis.
2. These elitist and undemocratic talks are part of a political and economic system that puts corporate profits before the needs of people.
3. The market based solutions being pushed in the UN Climate talks lead to 'climate colonialism' through land grabbing and accelerating the transfer of wealth from the exploited to an elite.
4. We need system change, not climate change. Come and join those creating and fighting for a world which is both just and sustainable.

Fig 7.5  
Source: Personal files

As such, despite the similarities in the critique of 'capitalism' as the root cause of the problem, it is arguable that throughout these mobilizations the CJA/CJN! alliance did

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<sup>15</sup> Discussion on CJA media-team Crabgrass page, 'Key Messages', 25.11.09

not derive from a homogenous understanding of what ‘climate justice’ meant. What may have appeared as a somewhat unified discourse was rather a strategic relationship between these networks, and indeed between the parties to these networks. As later elucidated upon in the *Space for Movement* booklet published in 2010, whilst these networks ‘share a common basic analysis of the historical responsibility, distribution of consequences and rejection of market solutions’ (Collective 2010: 29) as an essential underpinning of any discourse of climate justice, the broader discourse and political direction of the climate justice narrative remains contested.

Ultimately the decision of the UN to drastically reduce NGO accreditation in the final days of the COP had a significant impact on the unfolding of the *RP!* action, overshadowing these important political differences and foreclosing the potential for a popular exploration of this variegated discourse. Those CJA! activists whom expressed concerns regarding the late addition of the ‘Yellow ‘badge’ bloc’ to the *RP!* action were arguably vindicated, as a joint CJA/CJN! press release on 16th led with a quote from Michael Dorsey of CJN! stating;

‘The surgical removal of non governmental organizations underscores the lack of democracy inherent in these negotiations. The United Nations process has systematically failed the world’s marginalized countries and consistently excludes those that would dare support and fight on behalf of those countries. The only way to avoid catastrophic climate change is fully supporting and including peoples movements like the very ones illegitimately removed from this process’ (CJA 2009b).

Rather than fulfilling the aim of ‘delegitimizing’ the summit as an institution integral to the promotion of green capitalism, the messaging drifted towards outrage at the ‘exclusion’ of indigenous voices, social movements and the ‘Global South’ from the UNFCCC process. Occurring simultaneously to the *RP!* action, a separate Friends of the Earth (FOE) ‘sit-in’ action took place inside the Bella Centre in protest against the removal of their accreditation, providing a highly photogenic confrontation between Yvo de Boer and the FOE protesters (Watts, van der Zee et al. 2009). As such, the framework of ‘delegitimizing’ the COP15 had been partially distorted into a question of access, and the failure of government representatives to listen to those voices on the outside.

This ambiguity concerning what precisely ‘delegitimizing’ meant was echoed in the call for ‘System Change, Not Climate Change’ - a slogan which resonated perhaps more than any other during the COP15 mobilizations. Chosen as the name for the CJA/CJN! bloc on the 12th, it became adopted as the title of the Klimaforum’s declaration, and the final CJN! statement on the COP15 was entitled ‘Call for “system change not climate change” unites global movement” (CJN! 2009). As Tord Björk, a prolific commentator and FoE Sweden activist noted, ‘The message System change not Climate Change was the common demand from all mass activities’ (Anon 8). Yet as one movement participant suggested, ‘whilst for many of us the intent of such a line was definitively revolutionary, if a bit rhetorical, for many others it took on no more than a protest call for ‘our leaders’ to sufficiently reign in the market economy so as to solve climate change’ (SourDough 2010).

### *7.7 Conclusion*

This chapter has argued that, despite the fractured and incomplete discourse on climate justice, CJA had approached the COP15 with an explicit attempt to produce a politicized discourse of climate change. The declaration that ‘climate change is not an environmental issue’ sent out a strong signal that the mobilizations were attempting to move beyond a post-political epistemic frame of climate change. In orientating the intention of the *Reclaim Power!* action towards delegitimizing the COP process, the action was not simply ‘anti-government’ but orientated towards disrupting the entire carbon-fetishist discourse that framed the problematic as one of ‘carbon-emissions’. Nonetheless, where the discourse of climate justice perhaps faltered was in the inability to suggest that, if climate change was not an environmental issue, then what kind of issue is it? If we shouldn’t be talking about carbon emissions but about systemic change, then many of the demands or ‘solutions’ that were echoed around the People’s Assembly - such as ‘leave fossil fuels in the ground’ - fell short of constructing a different way of understanding the problem of climate change.

Despite the inconsistency of the ‘climate justice’ discourse, the collaboration between CJA and CJN! had provided the relationships to further develop the discourse, and to begin to build an antagonistic and politicized understanding of climate change. Indeed, what was clear from the CJA and CJN! mobilizations was a shared desire to constitute climate change as a socio-political problematic, one that required a fundamental

epistemological shift regarding the nature of the problem, how it was produced, and thus who were the agents of change. Whilst the Copenhagen mobilizations may have opened up the discourse of climate justice and provided the seeds for the emergence and consolidation of a radical anti-capitalist ecological praxis, there remained a dissonance on the meaning of climate justice and the potential for the discourse to both connect and inspire new forms of political activity.





## **Chapter Eight: The CMPCC & the Fracturing of Climate Justice**

### *8.0 Introduction*

The previous chapter examined the ‘climate justice’ mobilizations that had emerged prior to the COP15 in Copenhagen, with a specific focus on the leftist NGO network *Climate Justice Now!* and the direct-action or ‘street-ready’ network *Climate Justice Action*. It was suggested that whilst these two networks ‘share a common basic analysis of the historical responsibility, distribution of consequences and rejection of market solutions’ (Building Bridges Collective 2010: 29), they have substantially different genealogies and divergent understandings of the discourse of climate justice. Indeed, by the end of the COP15 mobilizations, it was evident that whilst the discourse on climate justice broadly united those who were looking to politicize the issue of climate change and move beyond a carbon-fetishist framework, there was considerable disagreement - or at least a lack of understanding - on the content of the climate justice discourse.

This chapter thus traces the post-Copenhagen attempts to develop the discourse of climate justice, and to seize the potential momentum behind a discourse that cast itself in opposition to a post-political frame of ‘dangerous climate change’. It is argued that the discourse diverged according to two core themes; the development of a critique of ‘green capitalism’ on the one hand, and an expansion of the theme of ‘climate debt’ on the other. It is argued that whilst both of these themes were a conscious attempt to build a politicized discourse, they ultimately failed to synthesize a coherent political discourse. It is also noted that the failure to produce a coherent discourse prevented the emergence of a coherent politicized praxis on climate change, which by late-2010 resulted in the complete demobilization of anything that resembled a (global) radical anti-capitalist ecological movement.

Whilst many movement participants agreed that ‘the movements for climate justice did not win any huge victory in Copenhagen’ (Cutler 2010), it is arguable that the mobilizations had forced open the potential to develop a politicized knowledge of climate change that facilitated a radical praxis on the climate. This potential to develop upon a new radical discourse was arguably seized by the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, who in response to the failure of the UNFCCC announced a *World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* (CMPCC). Held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010, the conference would bring together more than

35,000 participants to pursue an alternative, critical strategy to that of the UNFCCC. Following Morales' statement that 'the real cause of climate change is the capitalist system'(Vidal 2009), the CMPCC appeared as the central site for the continued development of an antagonistic and political interpretation of 'climate justice'. If Copenhagen had been the primary site for creating a break between the carbon-fetish and climate justice, then the CMPCC was a key site for developing the latter into a political force.

Following the mass mobilization for the COP15, CJA as a network faced the commonly recognized problem of 'post-summit' demobilization that had been experienced by previous counter-summit movements. CJA had nonetheless asserted as early as its March 2009 meeting that it intended to be a network that existed beyond the COP15, and that the mobilizations in Copenhagen were thus part of a broader process of building a global movement for climate justice. Meeting in Amsterdam at the end of February, CJA tentatively agreed to send emissaries (of sorts) to the CMPCC, delivering an 'open letter' to participants of the conference. The same meeting also led to the drafting of a document entitled 'What Does Climate Justice Mean in Europe?', signifying a clear attempt by CJA participants to contribute to building a politicized discourse of climate justice that developed upon and beyond the critique of 'green capitalism' that had been articulated in the lead up to the COP15.

The chapter suggests that just as CJA and CJN! had divergent understandings of climate justice during the COP15 mobilizations, the experience of the CMPCC and the consequent handling of the outcomes failed to bring together the threads of the heterogeneous discourses. Indeed, rather than providing the impetus for an alternative climate justice 'movement from below', the CMPCC largely reproduced the 'naively overambitious global reform agenda' (Bond and Dorsey 2010: 287) that had prevailed during the COP15. By the end of 2010, the CJA network had collapsed and CJN! had reverted to type, focusing energies on lobbying the COP16 in Cancun to accept the global reform agenda produced at the CMPCC. Indeed, I would argue that the inability to generate an anti-capitalist praxis within the discourse of climate justice arguably contributed to the cessation of radical climate movements in the UK and elsewhere, reflecting the general failure to create political strategies for dealing with climate change that went beyond 'point of emission' style direct-action or lobbying governmental institutions.

### *8.1 Post-COP debates: climate justice as anti-capitalism?*

Despite the CJA's intention to continue organizing after the Copenhagen mobilizations, very little effective work had been done to establish either *how* the network would continue organizing, or indeed how the COP15 mobilizations fitted within a broader strategy of developing climate justice movements. The 'where next?' sessions held at the end of Copenhagen mobilizations largely (and understandably) were dominated by reflections on the immediate unfolding of the actions and police repression, whilst a large proportion of established long-term participants were either imprisoned, exhausted, or still involved with on-the-ground logistical and press work. Nonetheless, utilizing the e-list for planning, CJA held its first 'post-Copenhagen' meeting in Amsterdam on the 27th-28th February 2010, bringing together around sixty people based in at least six European countries. Whilst this was a smaller attendance than during the pre-Copenhagen mobilizations - the March meeting had brought together upwards of 160 participants - it was nonetheless considered a significant attendance given the anticipated post-summit mobilization slump.

Aside from logistical questions (such as website maintenance and internal communication), the Amsterdam meeting was dominated by three strands of discussion; the 'What does Climate Justice mean in Europe?' discussion paper, the Bolivia conference and associated Open Letter, and planning for a future Day of Action. An earlier discussion of the COP15 had agreed that the UNFCCC process had effectively delegitimized itself - primarily through the introduction of the Copenhagen (non-)accord - and that whilst the climate justice mobilizations had not been as effective as they could have been, a space had nonetheless been created to develop and promote a discourse on climate justice. What tied together the three threads of the Amsterdam meeting was thus a shared desire to expand upon the meaning of 'climate justice', developing it beyond a critique of green capitalism and towards a politicized discourse on climate change that facilitated new fields of action.

Participants in the Amsterdam meeting generally made clear that the carbon fetishist discourse on dangerous climate change was something to be directly surpassed by any climate justice discourse. As one participant suggested, climate justice must be the 'opposite of the NGO approach that treats climate as a single issue. We cannot build a movement that way because people need to see that it is related to social justice' (CJA 2010b). Consequently, rather than focussing on direct action as an implicitly political

mode of action, it had become imperative that CJA ‘think strategically about direct action, instead of trying to just reduce emissions’. This is a marked difference from the carbon-fetishism that had either implicitly or explicitly underpinned much of the activity that constituted the UK’s radical climate movement prior to the COP15; the imperative for action became one of political strategy, which would not rule-out spectacular actions at coal-power stations *per se*, but would render the logic of ‘reducing emissions’ as *apolitical* and thus an insufficient basis for action. Indeed, one participant went as far as suggesting that in constructing a discourse on climate justice, ‘it’s important that we approach climate change *not as the first and foremost issue*, but rather think about climate as a way to think about other issues’ (CJA 2010b).

In attempting to expand upon a politicized discourse of climate justice, participants in the Amsterdam meeting collectively authored a discussion paper entitled *What does Climate Justice mean in Europe?*<sup>16</sup>. The intention of this discussion paper was threefold; in the first instance, despite the importance of resisting their implementation, opposition to various forms of carbon trading did not constitute a positive basis for common political action. The discussion paper thus attempted to conceptualize different fields for political action - incorporating reflections on energy, migration, food and agriculture, the military, the EU, and more expansive considerations on solidarity and the values driving production and consumption - and to construct a thread between these fields that could be interpreted as a heterogeneous struggle for ‘climate justice’.

Secondly, it was hoped that the discussion paper would contribute to defining what a movement for climate justice looked like, and how exactly CJA could have an effective role in contributing to this field of struggle. With the previous tactical commitment to ‘direct action against carbon emissions’ having been considered an *apolitical* form of activity, CJA activists were committed to finding new modes of operation, new forms of struggle that could be rationalized as constituting a ‘movement for climate justice’. Lastly, by framing climate justice within the context of ‘Europe’, the intention was neither to separate or privilege ‘Europeans’ as the agents of change, but precisely the opposite; rather than pursuing a tendency of fetishizing the ‘global south’ as a privileged political actor, it was to ask how those that reside in Europe could take direct responsibility for affecting and contributing to a global yet heterogeneous social movement. The discussion paper concludes that:

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix II - *What does Climate Justice mean in Europe?* discussion paper

‘Climate justice means recognising that the capitalist growth paradigm, which leads to over extraction, overproduction and overconsumption stands in deep contrast to the biophysical limits of the planet and the struggle for social justice... Fundamentally, we believe that we cannot prevent further global warming without addressing the way our societies are organised – the fight for climate justice and the fight for social justice are one and the same’<sup>17</sup>.

This discussion paper, which was consensually supported by the gathering as an open working document, was the most prominent statement to emerge from CJA following the COP15 mobilizations, and explicitly attempted to contribute to the framing of the climate justice discourse. Notwithstanding the central problem of how these diverse elements could manifest themselves in social struggles and how CJA would be capable of fomenting or contributing to this, the discussion paper was explicit in suggesting that the ‘climate crisis’ could only be addressed through diverse and wide-reaching social transformations that do not necessarily recognize ‘climate change’ as that which resonates between the diffuse moments of struggle. CJA’s ‘long term vision’ was thus not concerned with placing ‘action on climate change’ at its core, but rather the question of fomenting a transition from the present, in which decision-making was driven by the capitalist imperative for growth, towards societies where non-capitalist value systems guide an ‘ecological harmonious’ life.

Translated into German, French and Spanish, the discussion paper was intended to be circulated on a global scale and thus provide a core impetus in (re)shaping the climate justice discourse. Indeed, the discussion paper was one of the key documents - along with the Open Letter - that CJA distributed at the CMPCC, with the intention of responding to any misplaced assertions that ‘there is no anti-capitalist analysis of climate change in Europe’ (Chávez 2010) through revealing the anti-capitalist praxis on climate change that many activists were attempting to manifest. Indeed, the Open Letter to the CMPCC, which was produced by a working group following a mandate by the meeting, further emphasized that what ‘climate justice’ meant for CJA was directly confronting ‘the logic of profit’:

‘Our daily lives are increasingly colonised by capitalism, from the land we use and the shelter we need to the water we drink and the food we eat – in

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix II - *What does Climate Justice mean in Europe?* discussion paper

some parts of the world even our laughter has become commodified. We are forced into making decisions based on the logic of profit. From famine, war and oppression to dull and demeaning work, the climate crisis is only the latest symptom of this senseless system of endless economic growth on a finite planet' (CJA 2010).

What was clear in both the discussion paper and the open letter was a specific shift away from a concern with confronting climate change as an 'excess' of capitalism, and towards the centrality of confronting the economic rationale that is engendered by capitalism. Whilst the changing climate is still considered a 'crisis', it has become reoriented as one of the meta-consequences of capitalist rationality; thus questions of agriculture become reconsidered through the lens of 'food sovereignty', in which the focus is not 'what' is produced *per se* but the capacity for decision-making to be reclaimed from the logic of capital.

Whilst the Amsterdam meeting had not managed to develop strategies to manifest this developing discourse of climate justice in practice, it was clear that CJA had taken a substantial step in the process of constructing a radical politicized discourse on the climate. Furthermore, participants in CJA were aware of the potential for 'climate justice' to become a discourse that resonated amongst diverse and heterogenous actors, facilitating a move away from the liberal subjectivity of 'climate change activists' concerned with combatting 'dangerous climate change', and towards heterogenous subjects orientated towards the affirmation of post-capitalist rationalities. In other words, CJA was attempting to frame 'climate justice' as a discourse that looked to emphasize the 'everyday' as the site in which climate change was produced - not in a liberal sense of choosing to reduce ones car usage, but in the sense of finding strategies to replace the economic rationale induced by capital. As one participant suggested, 'the world has to look to movements. It has to be people's movements all around the world without one boss, without one direction' (CJA 2010b).

With CJA's emerging discourse of climate justice in an embryonic form, participation in the CMPCC was approached with caution. With the Copenhagen mobilizations having been interpreted as the opening of an antagonism between the development of climate justice and the dominant post-political account of 'dangerous climate change', there was a concern as to whether 'Bolivia [was] just a way to appropriate what was a confrontation in Copenhagen?' (CJA 2010b). As such, whilst CJA participants attended

the CMPCC, delivered the open letter and discussion paper to the conference, and organized a workshop, there was no formal participation of the CJA network in the conference. Rather, those that attended were mandated to perform the aforementioned tasks, along with establishing a method for successfully documenting and reporting on the CMPCC with respect to its significance for climate justice movements in Europe.

### *8.2 The emergence of the CMPCC: climate justice as counter-process?*

Announced by Evo Morales on December 20th 2009, only days after the UNFCCC had ended in the Copenhagen (non)accord, the *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* (CMPCC) was conceptualized as 'a broad forum to debate the causes and the solutions [of climate change] in an open manner, without excluding the representatives of the different peoples as was done in the "summits" of the governments'. Through analyzing the 'structural causes of climate change... proposals, strategies, and specific actions will be developed to attack the causes' (CMPCC 2010a: 4). As the conference program set out, the goals for the conference were to 'analyze:

1. The structural causes of climate change;
2. Propose alternative models for Living Well in Harmony with Nature
3. Discuss and agree upon a Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth
4. Work out the mechanisms that would permit carrying out a World Referendum on Climate Change;
5. Develop a proposal to create a Climate Justice Court' (*ibid*)

Given that Morales had stated that 'the real cause of climate change is the capitalist system' (Vidal 2009), whilst the conference program declared that 'either we continue down the path of capitalism and death, or we advance on the path of the world's people and the native nations for harmony with nature and the Culture of Life' (CMPCC 2010a: 4), the CMPCC was at least superficially a forum which shared with CJA the rudimentary assertion that if one wants to deal with climate change, they must necessarily confront the question of capitalism. Furthermore, occurring only months after the UNFCCC's self-delegitimization at the COP15, it was evident that the CMPCC had the potential to be highly significant event in shaping the discourse and praxis of

‘climate justice’. Indeed, the goals of the conference suggested the space for the formation of alternative practices and institutions that would be contrasted against the delegitimized UNFCCC process.

According to the Bolivian government, the conference brought together more than 35,000 participants from 142 countries, with almost 10,000 visiting Bolivia from abroad, including representatives from 48 governments. The overwhelming participation came from within Latin America, including substantial indigenous participation, followed by a significant number from North America. Europe and Asia were poorly represented – both relied on flights through Europe, which were largely disrupted by the eruption of the Icelandic volcano *Eyjafjallajökull*. Representation from Africa was also low; whilst the volcano may have had some impact, the cost of reaching Bolivia from much of the continent excluded the vast majority of potential participants. Nonetheless, a significant number of CJN! members were in attendance - including numerous ‘key’ members who had been in attendance prior to and during the COP15 - facilitating a pre-conference meeting that brought together around 60 participants.

Alongside 14 major panel discussions and more than 160 self-organised workshops, the main focus of the conference was the production of the ‘Peoples’ Agreement’. The ‘People’s Agreement’ was a collaborative process to construct a radical praxis on climate change, which from the outset had been framed within a discourse of climate justice - not least due to the inclusion of a working group on ‘dangers of the carbon market’. An online pre-conference process initiated 17 working groups - the majority of which were proposed by participants - and led to the preparation of the initial conference texts. The 17 working groups included; structural causes; harmony with nature; mother earth rights; referendum; climate justice tribunal; climate migrants; indigenous peoples; climate debt; shared vision; kyoto protocol; adaptation; financing; technology transfer; forest; dangers of carbon market; action strategies; and agriculture and food sovereignty.

Whilst the online process had been devised with the intention of ensuring those who were unable to attend with the possibility to participate, the dual language nature of the lists posed a serious problem to their functioning, whilst the majority of contributions were not focused on the collaborative authorship of a starting text; indeed, the online process broadly consisted in participants submitting existing NGO reports and position papers, often on behalf of their own organisation. Whilst legitimate concerns arose regarding the role of the Bolivian state in ‘cooking’ the initial texts to affirm existing

government policies, such as support for the Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) initiative despite considerable opposition to it during the online process, these problems were commonly considered to have been resolved through the CMPCC process.



Photo 8.1

Source: Personal photo

During the conference itself, the working groups were mandated to take the document prepared on the email lists, and through a process of debate over the two and a half days, work towards an expanded and clarified document. These 17 documents were then ‘trimmed’ down to four pages each, which were then presented at four plenary sessions - held in university and municipal sports halls (see *Photo 8.1*) - during which final interventions were made. Significantly, representatives of *La Via Campesina* and the MST intervened during the ‘action strategies’ presentation, demanding that all references to a ‘top-down’ organisation of social movements should be removed from the final declaration - although the final declaration maintained a less explicit reference to this initiative. Finally, the results of the plenary sessions were synthesized by a closed committee resulting in the final People’s Agreement (CMPCC 2010b), which was presented at a closing ceremony held at the Félix Capriles stadium on the 22nd April, at which various ALBA<sup>18</sup> heads of state (including Evo Morales and Hugo Chavez) were in attendance.

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<sup>18</sup> ALBA - the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America - is a left/socialist alliance amongst a number of Latin American member states.

Only four days after the end of the conference, Venezuela made an official submission of the People's Agreement to the UNFCCC, allowing it to be included for consideration at the intercessional meeting in Bonn, June 2010. The Bonn meeting was one of many UNFCCC intercessionals held throughout the year, the role of which was to prepare a negotiating text for consideration at the COPs; the following conference being the COP16 in Cancun, Mexico, at the beginning of December 2010. Pablo Solon, Bolivia's then ambassador to the UN, summarized the contents of the formal submission thus;

- '50 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2017
- Stabilising temperature rises to 1C and 300 Parts Per Million
- Acknowledging the climate debt owed by developed countries
- Full respect for Human Rights and the inherent rights of indigenous people
- Universal declaration of rights of Mother Earth to ensure harmony with nature
- Establishment of an International Court of Climate Justice
- Rejection of carbon markets and commodification of nature and forests through the REDD programme
- Promotion of measures that change the consumption patterns of developed countries
- End of intellectual property rights for technologies useful for mitigating climate change
- Payment of 6 percent of developed countries' GDP to addressing climate change' (Solon 2010)

Although the proposals became included in a draft negotiation text, they were included 'in brackets' meaning there was no guarantee that the proposals would end up in the final document that would be submitted for negotiation at the COP16. However, by the end of November the UNFCCC Ad-Hoc working group on long term action had proposed a new document for discussion at Cancun that eliminated all the proposals which had been devised at the CMPCC (Bolivia 2010). Indeed, the outcomes of the COP16 were ultimately a 'rehashed version of the Copenhagen accord, which had been widely condemned the year before' (Buxton 2010), resulting in the entire CMPCC submission being excluded from the UNFCCC process.



Photo 8.2

Source: Personal photo

Concurrent with the CMPCC's formal process, and occurring in an emptied restaurant hall outside the main university complex in which the CMPCC was being held, an 'alternative' working group known as *Mesa 18* (literally the 18th Table, or 18th working group) had been organized (see *Photo 8.2*). Responding to a pre-conference organized by the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ) - a national indigenous council representing peoples of the highlands of Bolivia - the Mesa 18 had been organized by groups 'wanting to highlight the contradictions between the Bolivian government's external discourses on capitalism and the Rights of Mother Earth, and its ongoing support for domestic mega-projects and reliance on extractive industries' (Collective 2010: 35). As Carlo Crespo Flores, a sociologist at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón and one of the organizers of the Mesa 18, outlined:

“What we saw in Copenhagen is that externally our president is the defender of the mother earth of nature, but internally he is doing the opposite - we have seen this, this is our experience. And then we realised that they were trying to hide these internal contradictions, and we thought, why don't we do an event, a table, where we make these visible, these internal themes, the contradictions of our president?”<sup>19</sup>

The *Mesa 18* had initially applied to become a formal working group of the CMPCC process, but following a meeting at which it was rumoured that government officials attempted to dissuade the organizers from establishing the 18th Mesa, the working group asserted itself as a 'parallel process'. The conscious decision to position the 18th Mesa as a parallel process, and not as a counter-summit, was made to prevent any

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<sup>19</sup> Taken from an interview conducted for the *Space for Movement?* booklet

assertions (including from the government itself) that the working group was an anti-government initiative, but rather a collaborative yet critical pursuit of dialogue between social movements and the ruling *MAS* party. Indeed, the participants of the 18th Mesa collectively (and physically) ejected two right wing MP's who had attended with the alleged intention of capitalizing on the dissent to fuel right-wing anti-government discourse. Notwithstanding complications and heated debate, the *Mesa 18* produced its own declaration that strongly rejected all forms of neoliberal development, extractivism and the transnationals behind them, and those NGOs and governments that support such initiatives. The final statement made clear that;

‘to challenge climate change humanity needs to remember its cultural collective communitarian roots – this means building a society based on collective property and in the communal and rational management of natural resources, where the peoples decide in a direct way the destiny of natural wealth in accordance with their organising structures, their self determination, their norms and procedures and their vision of how to manage their territories. History teaches us that there is only one effective way to transform society and to construct a social alternative to capitalism, that is the permanent mobilisation and articulation of our struggles’ (Mesa 18 2010).

Lastly, alongside the formal CMPCC process and the *Mesa 18*, a series of broader mobilizations occurred within Bolivia, timed to coincide with the CMPCC with the intention of drawing on the potential global publicity for the summit. Firstly, around 300 Weenhayek, Tapiete and Guaraníes indigenous peoples from the Gran Chaco region carried out a demonstration against the Morales government - marching on Cochabamba - in protest of the authorization of oil operations in their territories, which violated their constitutional right to consultation (Building Bridges Collective 2010: 36). Secondly, in Potosí (the historical heart of colonial silver mining) local communities and workers took action against the San Cristobal Mining company, owned by the Japanese Sumitomo Corporation. Driven primarily by the contamination and dilapidation of the community water systems as a result of the silver, zinc and lead extraction, people blockaded and occupied the company's offices and transport operations, overturning trains full of mineral ore close to the Chilean border (Building Bridges Collective 2010: 36).

The *Mesa 18* and the mobilisations during the CMPCC are noteworthy in their own right, yet are especially significant when contrasted against the discourse of *Socialismo o Muerte* championed by Hugo Chavez at the CMPCC closing ceremony. Whilst the introduction to the CMPCC declared that it was ‘the nations, which are wrongly regarded as “developed”, [that] demonstrated [at Copenhagen] their enormous irresponsibility and their lack of real commitment to confront the problem’, and Evo Morales announced in Copenhagen that “we are the ones called to lead this fight to defend the Mother Earth and to make the Mother Earth be respected” (CMPCC 2010a), the events surrounding the CMPCC highlighted the fact that Bolivia and other ALBA nations are committed to ‘a new extractivism that maintains a style of development based on the appropriation of Nature’ (Gudynas 2010). As the *Mesa 18* declared, despite the talk of defending Mother Nature and establishing ecological harmony, ‘the development plans of these [ALBA] governments, including the Bolivian government, only reproduce the development model of the past’ (Mesa 18 2010).

### 8.3 *The divergent discourse of climate justice*

The mobilizations surrounding the COP15 had seen the amplification of the ‘climate justice’ discourse as an attempt to construct a political discourse on climate change, one that moved beyond the post-political fetishization of carbon emissions and towards developing new strategies to confront the root causes of climate change. As the previous chapter suggested, the rejection of market mechanisms was a shared defining element of ‘climate justice’, marking the substantial distinction between carbon-fetishist networks such as CAN/TckTckTck and the climate justice networks of CJA/CJN. Nonetheless, whilst ‘climate justice’ acted as a signifier for those who desired a political discourse on the climate, aside from the opposition of market mechanisms the actual content of any climate justice discourse remained highly contested.

Despite the relative internal incoherence of the climate justice discourse during the Copenhagen mobilizations, the self-delegitimization of the UNFCCC provided a rupture in the post-political discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’. As a conference billed as the ‘last chance to save humanity’, its failure struck at the heart of the post-political discourse; if we had passed the point at which it was possible for ‘humanity’ to intervene and prevent the coming of the *eschaton*, the entire narrative of ‘dangerous climate change’ becomes problematized (see *Section 9.5*). This rupture in the post-

political discourse thus provided a unique opportunity to develop and popularize a politicized discourse of climate justice - providing a new way of 'making sense' of climate change - contributing to an altogether new praxis on climate change. However, rather than moving towards a unified and coherent discourse on climate justice that could fill this potential, the unfolding events revealed a divergence in the discourse (and praxes) of climate justice.

Writing in late 2010, Patrick Bond and Michael Dorsey - both academics and climate justice activists - suggested that;

'climate justice activists had entered this terrain [of the COP15] with demands that the global establishment would simply not meet... As a result, the next stage of the CJ struggle was necessarily to retreat from the naively overambitious global reform agenda (politely asking Copenhagen and then Cancun delegates to save the planet) and instead to pick up direct action inspirations from several sites across the world... This represented the rise of 'poly-valent counter-hegemonic climate justice resistance movements' (Dorsey 2010), under the loose banner of CJ politics' (Bond and Dorsey 2010: 287).

For CJA, the concept of 'poly-valent counter-hegemonic climate justice resistance movements' (Dorsey 2010) arguably resonated quite closely with the attempt to outline how heterogenous forms of struggle must emerge, through all aspects of our reproduction, to challenge the 'mode of production based on the utterly unsustainable accumulation of capital' (Bond and Dorsey 2010: 313). The Discussion Paper and Open Letter were not conceptualized solely as a critique of 'green capitalism', limited to an account of capitalism working to enclose and dispossess social relationships and resources (through mechanisms such as REDD and carbon trading in general) under the guise of 'solving' climate change. Whilst this perspective remained pertinent in the critique of the UNFCCC, the critique of capitalism *per se* in causing climate change necessitated the search for new strategies that focused not on the 'excesses' of capitalism - such as tar-sands extraction, deforestation, or mountain-top removal - but in fomenting the 'general revolution of everyday life' (Vaneigem 1983).

Many of the participants within CJA thus desired a new praxis of climate justice, a collaborative search for heterogenous and plural forms of action that pushed societies towards post-capitalist futures. This perspective was perhaps made most clearly in a

statement explaining the rationale for the ‘System Change not Climate Change!’ international day of action, on October 12th 2010, which stated;

‘To struggle for climate justice, then, is to recognise that all these crises are linked; that the climate crisis is as much as social and economic crisis as it is an environmental disaster. To struggle for climate justice is at the same time struggling against the madness of capitalism, against austerity enforced from above, against their insistence on the need for continued ‘growth’ (green or otherwise). Climate justice isn’t about saving trees or polar bears – though we probably should do both. It is about empowering communities to take back power over their own lives’<sup>20</sup>.

The climate justice discourse that was emerging within CJA was thus developing a politicized discourse on the climate, namely, a focus on developing practices that intervene at the level of social reproduction, pursuing not only extrinsic questions regarding how societies are organized, but intrinsic questions of how capitalism orders quotidian experience and decision making. Nonetheless, despite the emergence of a politicized climate justice discourse, CJA largely failed to find strategies of intervention that moved beyond the limitations faced by the UK’s radical climate movement (see *Chapter 9*). The planned ‘System Change not Climate Change!’ international day of action ultimately manifested itself as a series of actions focused not on fomenting systemic change, but on confronting the excesses of capitalism, ranging from a protest outside a coal power station in Hamburg to the blockading of a Shell petrol station in London, Canada.

In the first instance, the CMPCC appeared to be contributing to the development of a similar, or at least compatible, discourse of climate justice. The People’s Agreement opened with a statement that appeared to both recognize and oppose the carbon-fetishist account of climate change, noting that ‘the corporations and governments of the so-called “developed” countries, in complicity with a segment of the scientific community, have led us to *discuss climate change as a problem limited to the rise in temperature without questioning the cause*, which is the capitalist system’ (CMPCC 2010b: emphasis added). This recognition of the post-political approach to climate change is emboldened by further paragraphs, which suggest that ‘humanity confronts a great dilemma: to continue on the path of capitalism, depredations, and death, or to choose

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix III - *System Change not Climate Change! Taking direct action for climate justice*

the path of harmony with nature and respect for life' (*ibid*). As such, one would have expected the Agreement to continue through attempting to articulate the links between the functioning of capitalism and its relationship to climate change, and attempting to provide some tentative initial suggestions on the steps 'poly-valent counter-hegemonic climate justice resistance movements' (Dorsey 2010) could take towards developing ecological struggles that focused on *capitalism itself*.

On the contrary, the Agreement defaults to articulating the 'demand [that] the developed countries commit with quantifiable goals of emission reduction that will allow to return the concentration of greenhouse gases to 300ppm, therefore the increase in the average world temperature to an average of one degree celsius', insisting that the 'Kyoto protocol [is] the route to emissions reductions' (CMPCC 2010b). Indeed, rather than exploring alternative fields of struggle and opening up new possibilities for social change, the declaration focused on the COP16, insisting that 'developed countries must agree to significant domestic emissions reductions of at least 50% based on 1990 levels' (*ibid*). As such, despite the initial recognition that it is capitalism itself which must be addressed, thus inviting a consideration of the link between ecological and 'anti-capitalist' strategies in the broadest possible sense, the declaration returned to reiterating carbon-fetishist demands rationalized through PPM and °C.

The inclusion of these carbon-fetishist targets reflected, to an extent, the composition of the CMPCC. The inability for an individual to participate in more than one or two working groups meant that one had to be quite strategic in choosing which working groups to contribute to; for example, many of the more progressive organizations (such as La Via Campesina and Carbon Trade Watch) committed many of their members to the 'Forests' working group, which was largely focussed on the controversial issue of whether to reject or support REDD. It is a plausible hypothesis that those participants immersed within a carbon-fetishist perspective - and who interpreted the CMPCC as another tool to be used in lobbying the UNFCCC - may have focused their participation in working groups such as 'Shared Vision' (which became overwhelmingly concerned with emission and temperature targets) rather than 'Structural Causes'. With individuals and groups constricted to participating in what they perceived as the most pivotal issues, the final Peoples Agreement was arguably less an 'agreement' than a mishmash of perspectives shoehorned into a single document.

Aside from reduction targets, the Agreement also included demands for the commitment of 6% of developed countries GDP to addressing climate change, the rejection of carbon

markets (including REDD), the removal of borders to climate migrants, the adoption of a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (see *Fig 8.1*), the full recognition of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within the UNFCCC negotiation process, the recognition of climate debt, and the abolishment of intellectual property rights on technologies useful for mitigating climate change.

### **Proposal for a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth**

- The right to live and to exist;
- The right to be respected;
- The right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free of human alteration;
- The right to maintain their identity and integrity as differentiated beings, self-regulated and interrelated;
- The right to water as the source of life;
- The right to clean air;
- The right to comprehensive health;
- The right to be free of contamination and pollution, free of toxic and radioactive

Fig 8.1

Source: <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/programa/>

Some of these demands can be understood as fitting in with the 'reactive' strategy of resisting the expansion of 'green capitalism'; most obviously, the rejection of carbon markets (including REDD) continued on the basis of refusing the enclosure of forests and the atmosphere in the name of 'solving' climate change. Less obviously, the demand that the UNFCCC fully recognize UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UN 2007) had a key strategic value in making REDD harder to implement. Whilst the autonomy and self-determination of indigenous peoples ought to be respected in their own right, the effect of the UNFCCC fully recognizing the UN Declaration would necessitate issues of governance, land tenure reforms and consent taking centre stage (cf. Dooley, Griffiths et al. 2008), issues which have largely been overlooked in existing REDD schemes (Cabello and Gilbertson 2012; Fairhead 2012).

Taken alongside the Proposal for a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, the affirmation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People also helped to build a new rhetorical anti-capitalist device. Through affirming the rights of Indigenous people to self-determine, or equally to assert the right to be 'free of contamination and pollution', one constructs a form of moral boundary against

ecological destruction and capitalist colonialism. Whilst such a declaration of the rights of Mother Earth has a certain utopian quality to it, what remains less clear is how such rhetorical devices contribute to the construction of an anti-capitalist ecological politics.

#### *8.4 Climate Debt and/or class antagonism?*

Of the remaining proposals - including the abolishment of intellectual property rights, a 6% commitment of developing countries GDP to combatting climate change, the abolition of intellectual property and the freedom of movement for 'climate refugees' - the framework of 'climate debt' remained essential for making sense of the demands. Whilst Naomi Klein's assertion that 'climate debt is about who will pick up the bill' (*Klein 2009*) is a simplistic interpretation, it nonetheless summarizes a relatively nebulous conceptual tool that has been used as a framing device for much of the discourse that emerged on climate justice.

The underlying principle of climate debt is that historically - at least since the beginning of colonial eras and the industrial revolution - the Global North has systematically utilized an unequal proportion of the total available 'atmospheric space'; the Global North has been responsible for an estimated 75% of total greenhouse gas emissions, despite having only around 20% of the world population. As such, in 'over-using and substantially diminishing the Earth's capacity to absorb greenhouse gases - denying it to the developing countries that most need it in the course of their development - the developed countries have run up an "emissions debt" to developing countries' (*TWN 2009*). These emissions are also responsible for an unequal distribution in adverse effects, such that despite the 'Global North' being responsible for the majority of emissions, it is people in the 'Global South' that face the majority of the impacts. As such, another component of the concept of climate debt is the 'adaptation debt', namely the responsibility of the Global North to cover the majority of the adaptation costs in the 'Global South' (*South 2009*).

Through the lens of 'climate debt', it has been possible for voices within networks such as CJN! - but also numerous governments including Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Paraguay, Venezuela and Malaysia - to talk about financial transfers not as 'aid', but as reparations for the eco-colonial history of the Global North. As Lidy Nacpil of *Jubilee South* puts it, 'climate finance is not aid or assistance but part of reparations that [are] long overdue' (Nacpil n.d.). In the most simplistic formulation, this means framing

adaptation and mitigation funds within the UNFCCC process as an issue of achieving ‘climate justice’; the demand for 6% of *developed countries* GDP to be committed to addressing climate change is thus derived from the historical responsibility of ‘developed’ countries. Indeed, aside from the concept of legally binding targets, one of the core reasons the Kyoto Protocol continued to receive support from CJN! is its recognition of ‘common yet differentiated responsibility’, which theoretically provides the basis for including the discourse of ‘climate debt’ in the negotiations.

Aside from financial transfers being framed as reparations, the concept of climate debt also facilitates the less obviously associated demands to abolish intellectual property rights on technologies useful for mitigating climate change, and to remove all borders to those forced to migrate due to climate change. In the case of the latter, the logic that follows that given the ‘Global North’s’ historical emissions, those countries need to take responsibility for those forcefully displaced through climate change induced events. In the context of intellectual property, the case is made that enclosing knowledge to these technologies is done only so as to allow further accumulation of profit in the ‘Global North’, and as such removing barriers to these technologies would be one of the ways the ‘Global North’ could repay the climate debt to the ‘Global South’. Furthermore, the responsibility of the ‘Global North’ to reduce carbon emissions becomes framed as an issue of ‘giving back’ the atmospheric space that was taken from the ‘Global South’, and thus is an issue of restorative justice.

The thrust of this account of climate debt, and the reasoning that it became such a central part of the discourse for many of the ‘Global South’ NGOs, was its capacity to politicize the issue of climate change. As Naomi Klein suggested in her widely circulate *Rolling Stone* article on the topic,

‘American environmentalism tends to treat global warming as a force that transcends difference: We all share this fragile blue planet, so we all need to work together to save it. But the coalition of Latin American and African governments making the case for climate debt actually stresses difference, zeroing in on the cruel contrast between those who caused the climate crisis (the developed world) and those who are suffering its worst effects (the developing world)’ (Klein 2009).

In other words, the concept of ‘climate debt’ strives to address the depoliticization (*qua* liberalization) that results from the epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’. For

many of the individuals and organisations within CJN!, through placing the concept of climate debt at the heart of the discourse of climate justice, a line of politicization is drawn between the 'Global North' as those responsible for climate change, and the 'Global South' as the victims. The 'injustice' is therefore a claim being made by the 'Global South' against the 'Global North' as perpetrators of climate change.

There are a number of pedestrian observations that can be made concerning the discourse of climate debt. In the first instance, irrespective of the developing discourse on climate debt, the demand for '6% of developed countries GDP to be committed to addressing climate change' would not realistically be met by a global elite; it appears as a continuation of the strategy of issuing 'demands that the global establishment would simply not meet' (Bond and Dorsey 2010: 287). Furthermore, the tendency to reduce the issue of climate debt to an accountancy issue (cf. Botzen, Gowdy et al. 2008) - whereby 'injustice' can be measured by putting a price on a unit of carbon, calculating historical emissions and thus putting a one-off price on injustice - fails to produce a strategy for confronting questions of structural inequality and responsibility, instead submitting an economic demand to the extant negotiation framework.

However, the more central critique of the concept of 'climate debt' is not to be found in the difficulty of implementing the subsequent demands or the potential dangers of quantifying a qualitative problem, but with the fact that it leads to 'the obfuscation of internal class antagonisms within states of the Global South [and North] in favor of simplistic North-South dichotomies' (Simons and Tonak 2010). In other words, in generating an anti-capitalist ecological politics, the line of contention is not between the 'Global North' and the 'Global South', but the class dynamic between capital and labour. This is not to suggest, of course, that this class dynamic has not manifested itself historically as a huge net flow of wealth from countries predominantly based in the Global South (problematically termed 'developing countries') to those in the Global North (equally problematic 'developed countries'). However, this critique of climate debt maintains that by focusing on North/South relations, one is missing out on the infinitely more complex arrangement of capital and labour that needs to be redressed.

Some commentators on the concept of 'climate debt' have countered that terms 'North' and 'South' are in fact about political economy as opposed to geography, and as such there exists 'a South within the North and a North within the South' (CJA 2010b, Anon 5). Referring to North and South as categories of political economy is progressive to the extent it recognizes that capitalism does not primarily function along spatial lines

(although undoubtedly has spatial manifestations (Harvey 2006, Soja 2010)), but as a dynamic between labour and capital. However, if the categories of ‘North’ and ‘South’ are to be understood as categories of political economy, then it becomes unclear as to whether they are similes for ‘rich/poor’, or perhaps even ‘capital/labour’. Either way, in making such a distinction it becomes clear that the problematic of capitalism cannot be addressed through a reductive suggestion that the ‘North’ owes a debt to the ‘South’, but rather that ‘capital’ - and those who have accumulated it - is indebted to the labour which produces all wealth.

One of the problems posed by recognizing this primarily as a problematic of political economy, rather than geography, is that climate reparations could not be a simple financial transaction to Southern governments, as there is no guarantee - indeed it is more than likely - that these resources will be put toward developing buoyant markets and expanding capital-labour relations, whether ‘green’ or not. Nonetheless, Patrick Bond has suggested, ‘we need Climate Debt paid, but directly to the victims of climate chaos, and mechanisms need to be established to do so’ (Bond 2010a); one possible way of achieving this could be ‘simply passing along a monthly grant – universal in amount and access, with no means-testing or other qualifications -- to each African citizen via an individual “basic income program” payment’ (Bond 2010c: 110). Such a proposal side-steps the problematic that the enclosure and appropriation of labour occurs on a global scale, and that any form of ‘redistribution’ would need to equally include ‘the south in the north’ and not just the ‘south in the south’. Indeed, the crucial weakness in the concept of climate debt comes with Bond’s acknowledgement that:

‘it is important to note that ecological debt results from the unsustainable production and consumption systems adopted by elites in the Northern countries, which are to some extent generalised across the Northern populations. Hence *even poor and working-class people in the North, often through no fault of their own*, are tied into systems of auto-centric transport or conspicuous consumption, which mean that they consume far more of the Earth’s resources than do working-class people of the South’ (Bond 2010c: 110).

Such an admission effectively condemns *all* individuals in the ‘North’ to be indebted to the ‘South in the South’, irrespective of the alienation of their everyday life (in a Marxist sense), the involuntary compulsion to submit to precarious labour conditions etc. Indeed, if we treat Bond’s use of ‘working class’ in the technical Marxist sense of a

relationship between labour and capital (as a former student of the Marxist Geographer David Harvey, this seems appropriate), the class dynamic is rendered secondary to the geo-political distinction between North and South. Furthermore, it neglects the extent to which - whether as small-scale cocoa farmers or multi-national oil executives - large proportions of the 'Global South' are also functionaries of capitalist social reproduction. This is effectively the limit scenario of 'climate debt', where it is ultimately shown to be a concept that falls short of contributing to the emergence of an anti-capitalist ecological politics. In failing to account for why people 'through no fault of their own' are compelled to continue reproducing capital and thus driving further climate change, it fails to confront the operation of capitalism on its own terms. Rather than contributing to the development of strategies for working 'in, against and beyond' (Holloway 2010) capital to produce new forms of social reproduction, climate debt casts the problem in histo-geographical terms that ultimately neglects to address the capital-labour dynamic behind these inequalities.

#### *8.5 Post-CMPCC: The incoherence of climate justice*

The failure of the COP15 to produce any form of successful 'deal' on climate change - something which was not only unsurprising but deemed impossible by the vast majority of 'climate justice' activists - arguably resulted in a substantial delegitimization not only of the UNFCCC, but of the discourse of 'dangerous climate change'. In failing to successfully respond to the clarion call of 'our last best chance to prevent dangerous climate change' - a narrative which had brought more than 100,000 to the streets of Copenhagen alone - the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' took a significant blow (see *Section 9.5*). What, after all, happens to the narrative of 'dangerous climate change' once we are committed to passing the apocalyptic 'tipping point'? Perhaps resignation to the now-inevitable 'climate catastrophe', or maybe a redrawing of the discourse so as provide a new 'more accurate' tipping point?

With the discourse of 'dangerous climate change' in a certain amount of disarray following the COP15's (inevitable) failure, the challenge post-Copenhagen was for the discourse on 'climate justice' to mature to the point where it opened up new ways of rationalizing and acting on climate change. Specifically, this meant developing a politicized account of 'climate justice' that went beyond a rejection of carbon-trading as the perpetuation of 'green capitalism', and towards identifying how 'poly-valent

counter-hegemonic climate justice resistance movements' (Dorsey 2010) could emerge capable of confronting the 'mode of production based on the utterly unsustainable accumulation of capital' (Bond and Dorsey 2010: 313). This required more than refusing the strategies of 'green capitalism', but defining new ways of rationalizing climate change and thus the elaboration of new fields of intervention.

In the post-Copenhagen era, the CJA network expanded upon the logic that 'you can't have infinite growth on a finite planet' to articulate that the struggle for climate justice amounts to 'struggling against the madness of capitalism', such that 'climate justice isn't about saving trees or polar bears... it is about empowering communities to take back power over their own lives'<sup>21</sup>. This marked an explicit shift away from the parameters of a carbon-fetishist understanding of climate change, suggesting that it is not enough to simply name capitalism as a historical cause before proposing ultimately carbon-fetishist 'solutions', but that capital itself (as the social organization of experience) must be confronted. Following Evo Morales' statement that 'the real cause of climate change is the capitalist system' (Vidal 2009), the CMPCC appeared as the central site for the continued development of such a politicized interpretation of 'climate justice', one which would put the development of heterogeneous strategies for a new anti-capitalist ecological movement at the top of its agenda.

In actuality, whilst there still existed 'a common basic analysis of the historical responsibility, distribution of consequences and rejection of market solutions' (Collective 2010: 29), the CMPCC failed to contribute to the development of praxes for a new anti-capitalist ecological movement. On the contrary, the final 'Peoples' Agreement' appeared to be yet another phase in the 'naively overambitious global reform agenda' (Bond and Dorsey 2010: 287), a series of demands immediately being issued towards the elites within the UNFCCC. In general the demands that emerged from the CMPCC - from the demand for industrialized nations to reduce their emissions through to the rights of 'climate migrants - generally emanated from within the specific framework of *climate debt*.

Through casting the 'Global North' as debtors on a global atmospheric balance sheet, the concept of climate debt was an attempt to politicize climate change through suggesting that 'we're not all in this together', but that there exists a global disparity between those who are responsible for climate change and those who are liable to feel

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix III - *System Change not Climate Change! Taking direct action for climate justice*

(or are already feeling) the effects of it. As the previous section (*Section 8.4*) suggested, this focus on the geo-historical responsibility of the 'Global North' for the majority of anthropogenic GHG emissions - which, as a crude generalization, is historically accurate - necessarily leads to the obfuscation of the global class dynamic that defines capitalism, and as such results in strategies which fail to contribute to the development of an anti-capitalist ecological movement. Rather than redressing the division between labour and capital (which undoubtedly has spatial manifestations), the concept of 'climate debt' comes dangerously close to framing the discourse of 'climate justice' as a blame-game that renders the 'Global North' as a historically (and uniformly) responsible entity.

Throughout the mobilizations prior, during and after the COP15, the discourse of climate justice - if the contributions of NGOs such as *TckTckTck* are rightly discounted from the contested 'climate justice' discourse - was thus arguably composed of two thematics; the concept of 'climate debt' on the one hand, and a more explicitly anti-capitalist approach on the other. Whilst climate justice was thus a vehicle for rejecting the post-political discourse of 'dangerous climate change', augmented through inclusive rhetoric such as 'system change not climate change', it failed to manifest itself as a coherent discourse that provided a politicized praxis on the environment. In other words, despite the rejection of carbon-trading on the grounds that it is a form of 'new enclosures' - recently termed 'green grabbing' (Fairhead, Leach et al. 2012) - there failed to emerge a coherent discourse of 'climate justice' that facilitated the delineation of new fields of intervention.

Ultimately, by the end of 2010 the CJA network had collapsed whilst CJN! had reverted to type, primarily focusing energies on lobbying the COP16 in Cancun (and subsequent COPs) to accept the global reform agenda produced at the CMPCC. Whilst political 'cracks' (Holloway 2010) opened up and resonated on a global scale in the months following - ranging from the explosion of the Arab Spring at the end of 2010, through to the Occupy movement, and widespread anti-austerity protests across Europe - the contested discourse of climate justice arguably failed to seize the potential of the post-COP15 moment to forge a politicized praxis on the climate. As Tadzio Mueller (a long-term participant in the CJA network) recently summarized, 'there is... no longer a global climate justice movement to speak of. But that does not mean that the struggle for climate justice has disappeared' (Mueller 2012: 79).





## **Chapter Nine: Discussion/Conclusion: Towards an anti-capitalist ecological politics?**

### *9.0 Introduction*

The overall focus of this research, founded in my committed and critical participation within the radical climate movement(s), is concerned with the implicitly depoliticizing nature of the dominant narrative on climate change. More specifically, I have aimed to trace attempts within these movements both to recognize the limitations of the post-political narrative, and to construct a politicized discourse of climate change that facilitated new critical strategies of intervention. To this end, through an engaged and collaborative process of militant ethnography, this thesis has attempted to respond to Erik Swyngedouw's 'appeal to rethink the properly political [and] to re-establish the horizon of democratic environmental politics' (Swyngedouw 2010: 2), working within the radical climate and climate justice movement(s) to address the shortcomings of the 'post-political' knowledge of climate change.

This concluding chapter thus looks to review the contributions of this research. Firstly, it offers a brief account of the experimental methodology of militant ethnographic research, exploring the interplay between knowledge and practice and consequently reviewing the structure of the thesis. Secondly, it provides a summary of the thesis itself, outlining the key theoretical arguments made throughout the thesis and grounding them within the unfolding praxis of the radical climate movement(s). Thirdly, it provides a discussion and some tentative conclusions on the movement(s) attempts to both acknowledge and surpass the limitations posed by the post-political account of climate change. Finally, the chapter will conclude with some suggestions for future militant ethnographic research on the subject of fomenting effective anti-capitalist ecological politics.

### *9.1 Reflecting on militant ethnography*

From its inception, this research sought to act in solidarity with the radical climate movement(s) in which I was a constitutive participant, critically engaging with the praxis of movement(s) so as to contribute to the development and realization of their goals. This did not mean putting myself 'at the service' of those movements at the expense of conducting rigorous research, nor did it mean substituting a naive

‘cheerleading’ for the criticality that all forms of research demand. Rather, this research was focused on being committed yet critical; *committed* in the sense that the research aims to contribute to the development of these movements from within, and *critical* in the sense of being willing to go beyond the praxis of these movements and to constructively interrogate the underlying premises of the movements themselves.

It is worth noting that this process of conducting militant ethnography - and this is largely by intention - is not dissimilar to processes of reflexive self-critique practiced (and appreciated) to differing extents by movement activists. To this extent, it is novel in that it does not attempt to claim some form of authoritative quality that is unobtainable to ‘non’-academics; rather, it is an attempt to intensify and extend processes of self-critique that already occur (to a certain extent) within movements. Perhaps most explicitly, respected movement journals such as *Shift* - which published fifteen issues between September 2007 and September 2012 - simultaneously offered both a focal point and an incentive to participants in ‘radical politics’ to ‘bridge the seeming gap between “talking theory” and “doing politics”’ (Shift 2012). More generally within the radical climate movement(s), although sometimes constricted by the necessities of a situation or (worryingly) resisted by those who deem such reflection a superfluous distraction, the process of critical reflection on the praxis of the movement(s) is often considered an important part of ‘doing’ radical politics. To this extent, I do not believe this thesis necessarily renders me ‘more qualified’ to speak on the politics of radical climate movements than other participants, nor does it serve as an objective account that excludes or disqualifies other accounts. On the contrary, it is a partisan and critical intervention, an interpretation of the limits and boundaries of the praxis of radical climate movement(s), and thus an invitation to be both contested and acted upon.

With these qualifiers established, the journey of this research began with my participation in elements of the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’. It was through this practice that the problematic of the ‘depoliticizing’ tendencies within the movement emerged, not as a fully fledged and informed critique, but rather as an oft-heard lamentation that we need to create the space to “reconsider our politics” or that we needed to “be more explicit about our anti-capitalist perspective” (cf. Charsley 2007). Either way, the concern over a ‘liberal’ tendency was something which emerged from within the movement(s), and not as an external critique or assessment of the movement.

From the inception of the mobilizations towards the COP15 in the middle of 2008, it was unclear to what extent the coalescing movements would either be aware of, or look to critique and surpass, the emerging problematic of the liberalizing tendency. As such, at the initiation of the mobilizations around the COP15 in Copenhagen it was unclear as to how - and why - movements were going to relate and intervene with the spectacle. As the mobilization developed, the intention to both critique and distance itself from the carbon-fetishist discourse became increasingly clear, and arguably by early 2009 it was clear this mobilization was looking to contribute to the development of a politicized discourse on climate change that would resonate far beyond the summit mobilization. Through active participation in the mobilization as part of the CJA network, an increasing clarity was brought to bear on the liberalizing problematic, and the earlier chapters of this thesis (see *Chapters 3, 4, 5 & 6*) were thus authored as an extensive attempt to both develop the critique of the post-political discourse of 'dangerous climate change' and to understand how it manifested itself within the UK's 'radical climate movement'.

Having established and named what I saw as the core post-political problematic of 'dangerous climate change' with the radical climate movement(s), the further phase of militant ethnography - which emerged during the COP15 mobilizations and extended throughout the events of 2010 - was orientated towards tracing attempts to manifest a politicized discourse (and praxis) of climate change (see *Chapters 7 & 8*). My further participation within CJA and the CMPCC was thus grounded upon an intention to contribute to the development of a politicized discourse of 'climate justice', hoping to be part of a political process that produced a new praxis on climate change. Ultimately however, by the end of 2010 the CJA network had disbanded and the CJN! network had refocused its energies towards the COP16 in Cancún (and later, the COP17 in Durban). As such, this process of militant ethnography came to an end at a point at which it could be claimed that 'there is... no longer a global climate justice movement to speak of. But that does not mean that the struggle for climate justice has disappeared' (Mueller 2012: 79).

Crucially, this process of militant ethnography meets its limits when it comes to questions of *who* and *what* precisely can be considered as part of the movement(s) for 'climate justice'. As the call for a day of action for 'System Change not Climate Change', issued by CJA during the Spring of 2010 asked;

‘What is this movement, and where are its edges? Movement is precisely that – movement. The movement is all those moments when we consciously push a different way of living into existence; when we operate according to our many other values rather than the single Value of capital. And now we are trying to make these moments resonate’<sup>22</sup>.

One of the political implications of this statement is that ‘movement’ is defined as the resonance of a diffuse and heterogeneous array of strategies and moments. In terms of this research, it is thus crucial to be realistic and suggest that, whilst I would hope that the theoretical contributions of this thesis may be brought to bear on future forms of movement organization, the research itself captured a very limited aspect of the milieu that CJA ultimately recognized as having the potential to constitute the climate justice movement(s). On the one hand, this can be seen through the absence of my engagement with struggles that may easily fit within a framework of climate justice, such as resistance to the construction of the *Belo Monte* dam in Brazil, the movement within Guatemala to declare principalities free of all mining, or the *NO-TAV* protests against the construction of a high-speed rail link between Lyon and Turin. On the other hand, the expansive understanding of what feasibly constitutes movement(s) for climate justice reflected one of the core political developments identified during this research, and as such points more towards the potentials for further forms of militant research rather than the limitations of the thesis at hand.

In general, this research has added to the limited corpus of works that have adopted a *militant ethnographic* approach - and *militant research* more broadly - following through on the assertion that one must recognize that they approach research as a partisan knowledge producer (see *Section 2.3*). In terms of what this research can contribute to the broader experience of *militant research*, perhaps the foremost point is the essential compatibility of remaining both committed yet critical. Once the theoretical wrangling is all said and done, the experiences of this research suggest that the possibility of being active and committed to an antagonistic social movement, whilst at the same time being able to ‘stand-back’ and provide critical reflection on the actions of oneself and others, is an eminently feasible task.

A specific concern from the outset of this research was the potential that, through maintaining and developing a critical position, I would face the possibility of

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix III - *System Change not Climate Change! Taking direct action for climate justice*

ostracizing myself as this ‘criticality’ came to pose a limit to my ‘commitment’ to the movement(s). In reality - and as the name would suggest - a ‘movement’ is not a static entity, but rather a trajectory that is actively shaped through the critical participation of individuals. As one exercises their critical reflection, they do not ‘drift apart’ from a static movement; on the contrary, it is precisely the active collaboration of critical perspectives that makes movements *move*. To this extent, ensuring that I collaboratively pursued a critical perspective had the inverse effect of that which I feared, ensuring that I wasn’t simply ‘along for the ride’ but rather resulted in my further integration in the momentum of the movement(s).

A further reflection on the process of *militant ethnographic* research is the importance of not ‘forcing’ a theoretical reflection for the sake of the research itself, or presuming that one has to possess a fully formed critique before moving forward. Although this thesis has presented three discrete ‘phases’ of research in which there is a clear rationale in moving from one phase to the next, the reality is that my engagements were based as much on intuition as they were clear theoretical reflections. For example, my participation in the CJA mobilizations were largely driven by a personal conviction that the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’ was in someway falling short, and that my engagement in the international mobilization may help reveal these shortcomings and thus contribute to a critical reflection and transformation of the praxis of the UK’s movement(s). Rather than occurring in discrete periods of ‘practice’ and ‘theory’, the development and application of theoretical reflections were thus part of a fluid *process*.

In summary, perhaps both these contributions to the field of militant research rest upon a fundamental premise that ought to be revisited in the case of any problematic that arises in future militant research projects; the purpose of ones research is to be *part* of the movement(s) themselves.

## 9.2 The ‘radical’ climate movement?

As the previous section (*Section 9.1*) suggests, the impetus throughout this research has been to act in critical solidarity with radical movement(s) on climate change. Specifically, this came to be manifested through an exploration of the prevalence of what Erik Swyngedouw termed the ‘post-political condition’ - a consciousness produced by the dominant discourse on climate change - within the radical ‘fringes’ of the green movement (Swyngedouw 2007: 2010), and the attempts to move beyond it in

producing a *politicized* discourse of the climate. The research thus looked to work through this problematic in practice, collaborating within the UK's 'radical climate movement' and the mobilizations towards the COP15 in Copenhagen and beyond, in attempt to contribute to the further development of effective anti-capitalist ecological politics.

Through my participation within elements of the UK's 'radical climate movement', it was evident that there was an attempt to draw a distinction between those considered as pursuing a 'liberal' strategy on climate change - such as major NGOs such as WWF and initiatives such as Transition Towns - and the 'radical' fringe. Predominantly recognized through the commitment to a diverse direct-action repertoire, incorporating tactics from action camps and office occupations through to the blockading of coal power stations, the 'radical' climate movement was at least superficially committed to developing a *politicized* discourse on the climate. With the 2006 Camp for Climate Action arguably signifying the inauguration of a four-year period of intense movement activity (see *Section 6.1*), the affirmation of the necessity to take 'direct action on the root causes of climate change' and the often restated commitment to anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives signified the potential for a *politicized* praxis on climate change to emerge, drawing a clear distinction with the 'liberal' green movement.

The theoretical claim of this thesis is that from the early/mid-1980s onwards, a specific discourse of 'dangerous climate change' emerged which helped consolidate a 'post-political condition' in which the potential for political contestation is foreclosed. At the core of the discourse is the concept of a single dangerous limit, where a liberal conception of universal humanity (sometimes expressed as 'all of civilization' or 'life as we know it') is posed as being 'under threat'. This combination of the dangerous limit in concordance with a discourse of humanity results in the *apocalyptic* imagination, in which the dangerous limit serves as an eschaton beyond which life-as-we-know-it is irretrievably lost/transformed. The eschaton takes on the specific form of a single climatic 'tipping point' which, as captured by the *100 Months* campaign, gives a specific temporal location to the universal threat faced by humanity. Furthermore, with 'humanity' under threat, the eschaton serves as a *moral limit* such that preventing climate change becomes a humanitarian imperative, whereby actions can be filtered into morally 'good' or 'bad' according to whether they contribute to exceeding the eschaton (see *Chapter 5*).

These mutually supporting characteristics of ‘dangerous climate change’ thus circulate around a ‘carbon fetishism’, such that the aforementioned characteristics are pinned to a temperature limit and associated atmospheric concentration of carbon. Reduced down into a huge carbon accountancy initiative, this carbon fetishism facilitates an *individualization* of concern, such that individuals are capable of being held to account according to universal moral principles based on their personal ‘carbon footprint’. In this emergent field of ‘being green’, a carbon asceticism thus guides individualized actions, ranging from purchasing ‘green’ soft-drinks through to more fundamentalist abstentions such as ‘going vegan for the planet’. This superficial field of contestation (over how ‘green’ an individual/corporation/government/industry is) is thus a substitute for any form of political contestation; whilst there may be prolific disagreement over *how* to achieve carbon reductions, there is no contestation over how we perceive the problem itself.

It is argued that the those in the ‘radical’ climate movement, although not utilizing the discourse of the ‘post-political’, sought precisely to reveal and critique this post-politicized discourse on climate change, instead looking to produce a ‘radical’ critique that focussed on taking action on the ‘root causes’ of climate change. Nonetheless, it is argued that despite the initial attempts to build an anti-capitalist climate movement, the praxis of the movement - ranging from the occupation of coal delivery trains to the mass blockade of power-stations - became orientated towards the same post-political discourse that was uncritically iterated by the ‘liberal green’ movement. Whilst there was a general awareness that historically capitalism = industrialization = carbon emissions = climate change, the emergent praxis was not directed towards challenging the role of capital, but in focussing on climate change as an ‘excess’ of capitalism (see *Section 6.3*). For example, the vast majority of actions were grounded in a discordance between ‘the science’ - which implied the entire lexis of ‘dangerous climate change’ including the urgency imperative, the moralization, the apocalyptic imagination, and the central focus on carbon emissions - and the actions of polluters (such as airlines or power stations) who continued to emit ‘despite’ the science. Other actions made this rationale explicit, broadly demanding that we ‘read the science’ or that ‘we come armed only with peer reviewed science’, suggesting the issue of climate change was *precisely* an issue that surpassed any ‘political’ commitments.

The critique of this carbon-fetishist tendency was not wholly absent from within the movement itself, as various voices internal to the movement warned the movement was

‘losing contact with its anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian roots’ (Anon 2008) and becoming little more than ‘Friends of the Earth with D-locks’ (Archer 2007). The desire to overcome the limitations of the movement and produce a political praxis led to a tendency to move away from ‘points of emission’ style actions, instead focusing on banks involved in financing carbon-intensive industries (such as RBS), carbon-offsetting businesses, or supporting labourers at the Vestas wind-turbine factory in Newport (see *Section 6.2*). Despite the best intentions to move beyond a carbon-fetishist praxis, the tactics employed remained committed to the epistemic framework of ‘dangerous climate change’, the rationale for action remaining the discordance between ‘the science’ and those who invest in carbon-intensive industries.

It is thus summarized that although the intention of many within the ‘radical climate movement’ was to produce a radical praxis on the climate, the post-political discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ dominated the rationale of the movement. Although there were attempts to refocus the strategies of the movement towards a more explicit anti-capitalist praxis, the post-political carbon-fetishist perspective continued to be the framework which guided the praxis of the movement, not least in the form of a pervasive moralism and the conjuring of an apocalyptic imagery. To this extent, it is argued that despite the commitment to spectacular direct-actions and the *desire* to produce a ‘radical’ praxis, the ‘radical’ climate movement was indiscernible from those ‘liberal’ aspects of the green movement in its reiteration the post-political framework of ‘dangerous climate change’.

### *9.3 Copenhagen and the search for politicization*

At the time of the international call for mobilization towards the COP15 summit, which was issued in mid-2008 by the Danish KlimaX group and resonated amongst the ‘margins’ of the ‘green’ movement, it was not clear in the first instance as to how or why the mobilization would occur. As such, it was unclear as to whether the mobilization - which would bring together participants from ‘green’ movements in dozens of countries - would uncritically reiterate the epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’, or develop a critique thereof and look to produce a politicized discourse on the climate (see *Chapter 7*). As the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’ was finding itself unable to produce a radical praxis that surpassed the limits of the post-political discourse, my participation within the mobilization began with the anticipation

that there existed the potential for the emergence of a new politicized discourse that may facilitate new forms of action.

Over the 18 months leading up to the COP15, it became clear that a heterogenous discourse of 'climate justice' was to become a point of resonance amongst those who desired a *political* discourse on the climate, differentiating themselves from the carbon-fetishist discourse that dominated both the official negotiations and the narrative of major NGOs such as the Climate Action Network (CAN) and the *TckTckTck* brand. Whilst there were internal inconsistencies regarding now the CJA network should relate to the COP15 - which were broadly played out through extended discussion of the network's 'action strategies' - it was clear that CJA (and the broader discourse of climate justice) was orientated towards creating a political discourse that would be seen in contrast to the post-political 'anti-climate change' discourse.

As *Section 7.1* suggests, although the term 'climate justice' had emerged as early as 1999, it wasn't until the split between the CAN and the newly formed 'Climate Justice Now!' network at the Bali COP13 in 2007 that the term 'climate justice' began to be popularized. Partly influenced by active members of the CJN! network, along with the polemical Poznan statement circulated at the end of 2008, the mobilization towards the COP15 adopted the name 'Climate Justice Action' - the initial point of agreement being a complete rejection of carbon trading. Notwithstanding this agreement, CJA had emerged from a different historical lineage to the CJN! network, and thus needed to go through its own process in defining the political discourse that would hold CJA together as an organisation/network. By the beginning of 2009, participants in CJA had developed and circulated a critique of 'green capitalism' - most notably in the piece '20 Theses against Green Capitalism' (Mueller and Passadakis 2008) written by two participants in the CJA mobilization - which became broadly adopted as the core of CJA's discourse of 'climate justice'.

The popularization of the critique of 'green capitalism' served to guide the development of the principle 'Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice!' action concept which CJA would look to coordinate during the conference. Agreed upon at the March meeting of the CJA network, the logic of the RP! action was to delegitimize the COP15 negotiations as an instrument for forging 'green' markets, and to highlight the 'real solutions' in the form of the 'movement(s) for climate justice' that were coalescing outside of the conference itself. Although this action concept achieved wide-spread support, and ultimately became co-organized with the CJN! network, with hindsight it

appeared that ‘delegitimization’ meant different things to different people (see *Section 7.5*). In the first instance, there was a continuation of the critique of ‘green capitalism’ that pointed towards the COP’s as part of the problem of ‘green’ accumulation, thus the institution *qua* institution needed to be delegitimized as part of a broader critique. On the other hand, there were those that looked to ‘delegitimize’ the COP to the extent that it was excluding ‘popular’ voices and promoting ‘false solutions’, but that did not see the COP itself as part of the apparatus of capitalist accumulation - or at least, conceded that we nonetheless had to tolerate this given the urgency of producing a ‘fair deal’ to prevent climate change.

The milieu of mobilizations in Copenhagen were thus quite unique; with a highly concentrated field of NGOs, commentators, businesses and governments all preaching the necessity of ‘confronting climate change’ - most obviously in the 100,000 strong demonstration on the 12th December - there was no space for ‘radical’ elements to simply highlight the necessity of taking action on climate change. As such, any ‘radical’ elements in Copenhagen would necessarily be forced to outline a different narrative to the proliferation of voices iterating the discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’. During the Copenhagen mobilizations, the discourse of ‘climate justice’ acted as a form of signifier for those seeking to produce a *politicized* account of the climate, one that although internally incoherent nonetheless provided a form of resonance amongst those who believed that climate change was *not* an environmental problem but one that demanded revealing and tackling fundamental socio-political antagonisms.

At the end of the Copenhagen mobilizations, it was perhaps more than just an optimism of the will that led some to suggest that a global ‘movement for climate justice’ was coming into being (Russell 2010). The mobilizations towards the COP15 constituted an attempt to build an explicitly politicized discourse on climate change which ultimately occurred under the banner of ‘climate justice’ (see *Section 7.6*), thus taking a small step towards creating an effective political discourse on the climate. Nonetheless, whilst all those mobilizing under the banner of ‘climate justice’ shared ‘a common basic analysis of the historical responsibility, distribution of consequences and rejection of market solutions’ (Collective 2010: 29), there remained considerable divergence within the discourse. Furthermore, whilst the discourse was promising in terms of opening up new fields for political action, it remained to be seen as to whether a truly political *praxis* of climate justice could be forged.

#### 9.4 *The Fracturing of Climate Justice*

If the experiences of the UK's 'radical climate movement' had provided the impetus to pursue a politicized discourse on the climate (*Chapter 6*), and the mobilizations around Copenhagen found the germination of this politicization within a discourse of climate justice (*Chapter 7*), then the final empirical chapter (*Chapter 8*) of this thesis focused on the development and bifurcation of the discourse of climate justice in the months following the COP15. Whilst the summit mobilization around the COP15 had not provided the space to develop a concrete praxis of climate justice, the rupture to the coherency of the post-political discourse - precipitated largely by the UNFCCC's failure to meet its own hype surrounding the COP15 as the 'last chance' (see *Section 9.5*) - resulted in an unprecedented potential for the discourse of climate justice to consolidate itself as a politicized praxis on climate change.

Nonetheless, rather than a coherent discourse of climate justice emerging, it has been argued (see *Chapter 8*) the discourse appeared to diverge around two specific poles. In the first instance, CJA moved towards an account of climate justice orientated towards 'empowering communities to take back power over their own lives'<sup>23</sup>, and thus any praxis of climate justice became about delineating new strategies for intervening in, against and beyond the quotidian operation of capitalism. At the final substantial international gathering - which took place in Bonn in June 2010 - CJA considered building upon the different elements which had been highlighted in the *What Does Climate Justice Mean in Europe?* discussion paper, proposing a number of 'inquiries' as a step towards inciting heterogenous yet coordinated forms of struggle under the loose rationale of 'climate justice'. What resonated in this meeting was not a discussion of 'carbon emissions' *per se*, nor even climate change, but rather a theme of the 'social re-appropriation' of production ranging from agriculture through to energy production. Although these ideas never came into being (see *Section 9.5*), within CJA the concept of 'climate justice' had arguably segued into a reworking of a centuries-old question - how are processes of transformation towards post-capitalist societies initiated and augmented?

On the other hand, the process of the CMPCC affirmed the centrality of the concept of 'climate debt' at the heart of the discourse, and thus the corresponding praxis of climate justice was centered on claims of historical responsibility and demands for distributive

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix III - *System Change not Climate Change! Taking direct action for climate justice*

justice. This concept of climate debt effectively inserted an antagonism *within* the existing discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’, such that at its most simple it was possible to suggest that ‘climate debt is about who will pick up the bill’ (Klein 2009). As suggested in *Section 8.4*, whilst capitalism undoubtedly has spatial manifestations, the discourse of ‘climate debt’ has a dangerous tendency to conceal these manifestations in favour of a simplistic North/South distinction. Whilst it would have been hasty to write-off the emerging narrative of ‘climate debt’, and there may indeed remain the potential to weave the concept of climate debt with broader class analysis, there remained a tendency for ‘climate debt’ to be reduced down to a negotiation over *who* is responsible for *how much* of atmospheric GHG concentrations.

Ultimately, it is suggested that both these tendencies were attempts to build a politicized discourse on climate change, a move towards framing climate change not as an ‘environmental’ problem but as a function of deeper underlying socio-economic arrangements. Nonetheless, by the end of 2010 any semblance of a climate justice movement had all but dissipated; the last meeting of CJA took place in August 2010, the network effectively collapsing following the Global Day of Action on October 12th, which itself had largely repeated hackneyed forms of activity familiar to the ‘radical climate movement’. In the case of CJN!, although individual organizations (such as LVC) maintained their own activities, the network failed to move beyond its role as a lobbying group at international summits. This cessation of activity was mirrored within the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’, as the frequency of actions diminished throughout 2010, with the CfCA significantly deciding to suspend organizing as a network at the beginning of 2011. Whilst there are potentially numerous factors as to why the an effective climate justice movement failed to manifest itself (see *Section 9.5*), by the middle of 2011 it is perhaps beyond question that there was no longer anything resembling a ‘climate justice’ movement to speak of. Yet as CJA participant Tadzio Mueller has suggested, ‘that does not mean that the struggle for climate justice has disappeared’ (Mueller 2012: 79).

### 9.5 The cessation of movement(s)

Whilst it is perhaps impossible to account for the myriad reasons that contributed to the dissolution of the emerging climate justice movement(s), a series of significant hypotheses could be put forward. In the first instance, it ought to be recognized that the dominant knowledge of climate change throughout this period of study remained the post-political framework of ‘dangerous climate change’. Although the ‘System Change not Climate Change!’ bloc on the 12th December protest revealed the coalescence of the climate justice movement(s), it remained at the ‘fringe’ of a ‘green’ movement that was otherwise dominated by the post-political discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’. The majority of the 100,000 marching in Copenhagen were mobilized wholly within this post-political framework, hoping that the COP15 would in some way produce a ‘fair, ambitious and binding deal’ to ‘solve’ climate change. The proliferation of banners and placards on the march itself tended towards echoing slogans such as Greenpeace’s “Politicians Talk, Leaders Act” and “Bla bla bla... Act Now!” (see *Photo 9.1*). The failure of the COP to ‘solve’ climate change - against whatever standards adopted - dealt a major blow to the entire epistemic framework of ‘dangerous climate change’.



Photo 9.1

Source: Birmingham FOE. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/birminghamfoe/5342177803/>

As various commentators had stated, the ‘COP15 may very well be the last chance for the world to reach a consensus on measures to reduce GHG emissions and avoid climate chaos for the next millennium’ (Cope 2009). Fitting within the apocalyptic imagination and the urgency narrative, the COP15 had been constructed as the moment at which ‘humanity’ could prevent itself from being locked-in to surpassing the climatic *eschaton*, the tipping-point of-no-return which had been forecast to occur halfway through 2016 (NEF 2010). With the failure of the COP15 to fulfil its messianic role as

the saviour of humanity from climatic apocalypse, the discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ as whole was significantly ruptured. According to the logic internal to the discourse, with ‘humanity’ having foregone its opportunity to keep atmospheric CO<sup>2</sup> at a ‘safe’ level, the rationale for a continued carbon-fetishism dissipates, ‘humanity’ now locked-in to an irreversible climate apocalypse. In other words, with the dangerous limit now ‘virtually’ surpassed, all other aspects of the discourse become annulled; the moral discourse loses its validity, as one can no longer perform a ‘moral’ act on behalf of a ‘humanity’ that is already condemned; the urgency imperative dissipates altogether, as there is no longer any possibility to forestall ‘us’ reaching the *eschaton*.

For those whose ‘activism’ was defined by the post-political framework of ‘dangerous climate change’, the failure of the COP15 thus signified a (literal) evacuation of meaning. Indeed, there is now widespread recognition that there has been a collapse in ‘public concern’ with the issue of climate change since the COP15 (Scruggs and Benegal 2012), although the reasons offered - such as changes to short-term weather patterns (ibid; 507) - have avoided suggesting that the internal logic of ‘dangerous climate change’ had collapsed. Given the earlier claim (see *Chapter 6*) that despite the radical anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian rhetoric, the praxis of the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’ largely iterated the epistemic frame of ‘dangerous climate change’, it follows that the internal collapse of this discourse will arguably have resulted in an evacuation of meaning for many of the movement’s participants.

Whilst the destabilization of the post-political discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ may have contributed to a significant demobilization of public and ‘activist’ concern over climate change, its rupture also opened the potential for an emergent discourse of ‘climate justice’ to facilitate the politicization of the climate. As *Chapter 8* suggests, the discourse of ‘climate justice’ bifurcated according to two central themes, the first of which revolved around the framing of climate change as a question of an historical *climate debt* owed by the ‘Global North’ to the ‘Global South’. As *Section 8.4* suggests, whilst this framing appears as a politicization through suggesting that is Global North-South dynamics which are responsible for climate change, the notion is in fact ‘not particularly radical’ (Martinez-Alier 2003), and is essentially the demand that the negative externalities of the ‘North’ be financially accounted for (cf. Bond 2012: 117-142). Whilst it is unquestionable that many of those based in the Northern hemisphere have a proportionally greater historical legacy of carbon emissions, the

notion of ‘climate debt’ mistakenly bases its politicization on a simplistic geographical distinction. As Patrick Bond has warned;

‘There are certainly some in the CJ movement who would put the North-South contradiction ahead of internal class conflict as a priority for struggle, and while I’m not one of those, that tension is openly recognized and has been the source of frank debating as this broad global movement is organized quickly, without secretariats and enforced norms/values/processes. It’s not easy, and requires constructive criticism, not a writing-off of the nascent CJ movement’ (Bond 2010a).

As it has proven, there have been no visibly successful attempts to ground the notion of ‘climate debt’ within a Marxist critique of political economy, one which would require both recognizing ‘internal class conflict’ as the problematic of capital that needs to be addressed in the fight for ‘climate justice’, whilst at the same time exploring the questions of ‘spatial justice’ that are inherent to an account of climate debt. Whilst this may prove a fruitful field for future research, the absence of this discourse in the months following the COP15 resulted in the discourse of ‘climate debt’ failing to generate new political subjectivities and fields of intervention, instead leading to a new round of unrealistic demands aimed at global elites.

The other strand of ‘climate justice’ emerged from within CJA, especially documented in the Discussion Paper, the Open Letter to the CMPCC, and the 12th October call for a Day of Action (see *Section 8.1*). In a development of the critiques of ‘green capitalism’ that had orientated CJA during the mobilizations towards the COP15, the discourse shifted further towards an explicit anti-capitalism that went beyond the remit of climate change and towards a more generalized critique of capitalism as ordering social existence, thus binding us to the increasing consumption of global resources and thus the broader ‘biocrisis’. In effect, the CJA network was contributing to a discourse which stated that ‘the strict decoupling of economic growth and environmental destruction is not possible under capitalism’ (BUKO 2012: 1)<sup>24</sup>, and thus any form of climate justice movement(s) would necessarily be orientated towards deconstructing capitalism and constructing new social realities.

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<sup>24</sup> Some of the participants in the BUKO working-group were also involved in the CJA mobilizations.

Whilst indicative of what a 'radical ecological politics' may come to look like (see *Section 9.6*), the latter point was arguably one of the contributing factors to CJA's dissolution. In generalizing 'climate justice' as the broader desire to create other-worlds to that of capitalist social reproduction, all forms of 'climate justice' struggle must necessarily become orientated towards the producing strategies to move 'in, against and beyond' capitalism (Holloway 2010b). The development of the climate justice discourse as a generalized post-capitalist desire thus necessarily forced questions regarding *who* precisely was an agent of change in the climate justice movement(s), *what* constituted the fields of effective intervention, and *how* would these diffuse acts and struggles be brought to resonate together? In short, in attempting to pursue a politicized discourse of climate justice that placed 'internal class conflict' at the heart of its analysis, the CJA network had illustrated the necessity to return to fundamental questions of anti-capitalist organizing grounded in a Marxist (orthodox, autonomous, feminist, anarchist, post- or otherwise) understanding of class.

In short, CJA's understanding of 'action on climate change' had shifted from one in which 'concerned activists' took direct-action against points of emission (such as coal power stations), to a perspective in which *everyone* needed to participate in a revolution of everyday life. Simply put, the problematics which arose from this shift - not least regarding 'who' is the subject of change, and thus what role 'we' as CJA could perform - arguably went beyond the limits of what CJA as an organization was capable of addressing. From the perspective of considering what a general radical anti-capitalist ecological politics may look like, the world appeared a very different place at the end of 2010 than it did at the inception of the Copenhagen mobilizations at the beginning of 2008. From the Arab Spring through to the global Occupy Movement, the London riots in mid-2011, the Greek anti-austerity resistance, student protests against university fee increases and the Spanish *Indignados* movement, there was a proliferation of new fields of political intervention emerging. The extent to which 'climate justice' could have been a discourse that would resonate between these heterogenous moments, or provide any strategic purpose, is highly questionable.

There are thus perhaps two ways of interpreting Tadzio Mueller's statement that 'there is... no longer a global climate justice movement to speak of... But that does not mean that the struggle for climate justice has disappeared' (Mueller 2012: 79). On the one hand, there quite obviously remains substantial popular struggles against the development of capitalist mega-projects, such as the Belo Monte Dam in Brazil, that

quite easily fall within a hackneyed conception of what a ‘climate justice’ struggle may look like (however, see *Section 9.6*). Perhaps more crucially, it is to recognize that the struggle for ‘climate justice’ may begin to be conceptualized not only as traditional ‘environmental’ struggles, but as broader forms of social organizing that hope to reclaim quotidian decision-making from the value system of Capital. The extent to which these moments could, or should, come under the proper noun of ‘Climate Justice’, or perhaps the even broader ‘ecological struggle’, is thus open to question.

### *9.6 The environmental movement is dead! Long live the environmental movement!*

From the UK’s ‘radical climate movement’ through to the climate justice mobilizations around Copenhagen and after, there have consistently been those on the fringes of the ‘environmental movement’ looking to inject radical critique into an otherwise postpolitical discourse on climate change. These radical critiques have all broadly begun from the same assertion - it’s not possible to have a bearing on climate change without addressing its systemic nature, namely its inescapable relationship with capitalism. As this research has suggested, whilst this is a positive starting point in the process of producing a ‘politicized’ discourse on climate change, it has (more often than not) failed to lead to the emergence of an effective anti-capitalist ecological movement.

Perhaps a common reason for this false start is that capitalism is understood as an ‘historical’ phenomena; in other words the history of capitalist development, *qua* industrialization circa 1750, has resulted in a consistent rise in the carbon emissions, which are in turn responsible for an increase in global surface temperatures. Although this appears superficially radical in naming ‘capitalism’ as the cause of climate change, it remains wholly compatible with a post-political approach to climate change and thus insubstantial in developing a political praxis. In the most simplistic of terms, this historical naming of capitalism can easily be interpreted as “capitalism caused it, now how are we going to solve it?” - a logic that arguably prevailed amongst the ‘liberal anti-capitalist’ tendency within the UK’s radical climate movement, and that led to strategies that treated climate change as an ‘excess’ of capitalism (see *Section 6.2*).

Furthermore, a simple naming of ‘capitalism’ as historically responsible for climate change is more than compatible with a ‘green reformist’ policy agenda, one which would suggest that it is the historical ‘mismanagement’ of capitalism that has led to global warming, rather than capitalism *per se* (cf. Green New Group 2008).

Furthermore, as participants in the *Mesa 18* sought to point out, the fiery anti-capitalist rhetoric of Morales and other ALBA leaders failed to have any bearing on the neo-extractivism and industrial development that continues unabated in Latin America (cf. Gudynas 2010)<sup>25</sup>. On the other hand, and in particular with respect to some of the tenets of the ‘radical’ fringe of the environmental movement, it can easily result in the iteration of carbon-fetishist strategies that are indifferent to confronting capitalist accumulation, ranging from spectacular direct-actions through to a pervasive life-style moralism.

Whilst this naming of capitalism as ‘historically’ responsible is thus largely a dead-end, this research has suggested that some within the movement(s) for climate justice had attempted to construct an altogether different radical praxis (see *Chapter 7 & 8*). Rather than a separation of cause (capitalism) and effect (ecological degradation), it can be argued that a minimum requirement of any *radical* ecological discourse is one that recognizes capitalism *itself* as the problem, and thus the terrain of contestation. The critique of ‘green capitalism’ adopted within CJA was a productive step towards such a discourse, interpreting the ‘biocrisis’ not as one of capitalism’s ‘excesses’ but rather as a systemic outcome of capitalism itself. As we suggested in the *Space for Movement?* booklet, ‘climate change becomes a political issue... when we oppose the value of profit and the hegemonic aim of economic growth [and] when we challenge the social relations which have got us into this mess’ (Collective 2010: 81).

The extension of this logic is that any moment which contributes to a ‘radical ecological politics’ must necessarily be committed to producing some form of anti/post-capitalist praxis; the defining feature of a ‘radical ecological politics’ cannot be a fetishism such as ‘reducing carbon’, but a contribution towards realizing alternative, post-capitalist forms of social reproduction. Yet if the defining feature of radical ecological politics is a commitment to anti/post-capitalist praxis, then it must be asked to what extent an *ecological* politics can be distinguished from a more general anti/post-capitalist project(s)?

The response must be that we can no longer understand an ‘ecological’ politics as something separate from an anti-post/capitalist project(s), but rather as a component of such a general movement; only from the liberal post-political perspective can ‘being green’ exist separately to broader questions of social reproduction. This is absolutely *not*

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<sup>25</sup> There is not space to explore the development models of ALBA and the Latin American ‘pink tide’ in this thesis. Nonetheless, various voices suggest that the current form of neo-extractivism amounts to little more than taking a greater slice of the profits generated by multi-national corporations (cf. Ruiz Marrero 2011).

a suggestion that there aren't necessary battles to be had over what may typically be perceived as 'environmental' issues - from popular resistance to mega-dam projects on the Narmada, Yangtze or Xingu, to tar-sands extraction in Athabasca, or hydraulic fracturing near Blackpool. Rather, it is to suggest that at a bare minimum, it should be recognized that what holds these moments of resistance together are not the defence of a homogenous 'nature' (cf. Castree 2003), but rather a refusal of the unbridled operation of capital in heterogenous forms.

As a recent publication assessing and critiquing the 'myths of the green economy' summarized,

'The question of the *green economy* must not be reduced to CO2 concentrations, solar-energy subsidies and large-scale technologies. More is involved. It is a question of how the concrete relations of people and of society to nature are shaped. Today this all too often takes an unsolidaristic and nature destroying form. If this is to change fundamentally then social relations must be changed in the direction of a solidaristic and really sustainable mode of production and life' (Brand 2012: 39).

Moving forward, the challenge thus becomes to explore the extent to which we can reinterpret the lines of affinity amongst heterogeneous struggles, and to stitch them together through an understanding of them as *reconfiguring social relations*. Rather than seeing these diffuse moments resonating alongside one another as part of some form of socially detached 'environmental' movement, we should perhaps look to bring other aspects of these struggles to the fore. Through further collective militant research with these struggles - not least in searching for different embedded conceptions of ideas such as 'liberty', 'equality' and 'community' that liberalism claims to have settled - we can hope to produce new forms of political subjectivity that may lead these diffuse struggles to resonate not only with each other, but with a diversity of struggles previously considered unrelated.

A rich theoretical field that may provide useful tools in the building of a new radical ecological praxis may be found in recent work on 'commons' (Chatterton, Featherstone et al. 2012). Although a foremost radical theorist on 'the commons' has warned that the concept is already becoming 'neoliberalism's Plan B' and is thus not *inherently* anti/post-capitalist (Caffentzis 2010), the emerging discourse of 'the commons' has immense radical potential given its transversal nature. Indeed, the strength of thinking and

practicing ‘the commons’ is that it both begins to generate a new political subjectivity - as ‘commoners’ acting ‘in common’ - yet at the same time maintains the necessary heterogeneity required in addressing the background of crises we face today (De Angelis and Stavrides 2010).

Perhaps then, in producing a new discourse of what resonates between these moments, we can finally look not to mourn but celebrate the death of the ‘environmental’ movement. What we hope will rise from its ashes is a new way of articulating existing struggles, consequently opening up new fields (and thus new praxes) of contestation, and the generation of lines of solidarity with previously ‘foreign’ forms of struggle. If it is capitalist social reproduction that binds us to ecological degradation, can we not forge lines of mutual understanding - a new anti/post-capitalist subject (commoner?) in some form - that facilitates lines of recognition and communication between Ayamaran resistance to oil exploration and attempts to set up communal child-care provision in East London? Can we hope to form an understanding that one does not need to be chained to a tree, or superglued to the Department for Transport, to be directly contributing to the creation of new socio-environmental futures? As CJA declared, it is no longer ‘about saving trees or polar bears... it is about empowering communities to take back power over their own lives’<sup>26</sup>.

### *9.7 Postscript on the political*

Returning to the underlying premise of this thesis; it is not climate activism *as such* that forms the core of this thesis, but rather the problematic of how/what can contribute to instigating the revolutionary - political - systemic change demanded by the multiple crises we face. Indeed, the purpose of bringing a critical lens to these movement(s) was not so as to make proclamations regarding the nature of climate activism as such - although the problematic emerged from within debates regarding what constituted ‘the movement’ as being radically differentiated from ‘liberal’ NGOs (see *Section 2.5*) - but rather to consider what a critical understanding of these movements offers us in the broader consideration of constituting *radical* political mo(ve)ments.

This thesis has argued that the dominant discourse of ‘dangerous climate change’ mobilized by both ‘conventional’ political actors and a wide array of ‘public’

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix III - *System Change not Climate Change! Taking direct action for climate justice*

institutions - but also the vast majority of so-called 'radical' climate activism - serves to wholly (re)iterate the present socio-ecological condition in the sense that it *says nothing* about what must be held to account and what must change. Or rather, this discourse holds that *nothing must change*, in the sense that the apocalyptic panic regarding 'dangerous climate change' tells us that we must go beyond the call of duty - through management strategies, techno-fixes and austerity measures (whether at the level of the individual or society) - to ensure that everything we currently know *stays the same*. In the simplest of statements, we can say that this discourse of 'dangerous climate change' is fundamentally reactionary, offering no promise (or hope) of how worlds and possibilities may change, acting rather as a rallying call that we fully commit/submit to keeping everything the same. There is no better example than George Monbiot's 2004 rallying call that we need to riot *for* austerity (The Free Association 2008), something which seems even more deeply misplaced given the current conditions across Europe and elsewhere.

What, then, can our understanding of the non-political (or post-political) - illustrated by the 'radical' climate and climate justice movement(s) - tell us more generally about the nature of the political? And what does this mean in the wake of the 'radical' climate movement(s)? We can understand that the phenomenon of the 'post-political' is one in which the 'administration of social matters' takes place in accordance with the conditions of what is possible, where all possibilities (and thus impossibilities) are delimited by general frameworks that determine how things work. These 'general frameworks' are considered beyond question, and are the very 'system of constraints that limit the possibility of possibilities' (Badiou, 2009: 7). In what Badiou thus calls the 'State' or 'state of the situation', it is this system of constraints:

'which prescribes what, in a given situation, is the impossibility specific to that situation, from the perspective of the formal prescription of what is possible... For example, what is the State comprised of today with regard to its political possibilities? Well, the capitalist economy, the constitutional forms of government, the laws (in the juridical sense), concerning property and inheritance, the army, the police... through all these systems... the State organizes and maintains, often by force, the distinction between what is possible and what isn't' (Badiou, 2009: 7).

A critical perspective on present ecological crises can thus suggest that the political-ecological problem is not one of 'carbon emissions'; rather, *it is the given system of*

*constraints* which both results in, and leaves us irrevocably bound to, the exacerbation of processes of ecological degradation. Which is to say, a choice between present possibilities is both futile and apolitical, to the extent that there is really nothing substantive that can be said about such choices. A political-ecological intervention will necessarily be one that interrupts the given system of constraints that forecloses the possibility of possibilities, and thus in the same move opens up the *possibility of impossibles*. As Badiou continues, the proper term for a political moment is thus that of the *event*, in which:

‘an ‘event’ [is] a rupture in the normal order of bodies and languages as it exists for any particular situation... or as it appears in any particular world... An event is *the creation of new possibilities*. It is located not merely at the level of objective possibilities but at the level of the possibility of possibilities. Another way of putting this is: with respect to a situation or a world, an event paves the way for the possibility of what - from the limited perspective of the make-up of this situation or the legality of this world - is strictly impossible’ (Badiou, 2009: 6).

This therefore returns us to the familiar claim that ‘politics’ must be considered as the ‘art of the impossible’ which ‘changes the very parameters of what is considered ‘possible’ in the existing constellation’ (Žižek 2006: 199). As such, perhaps the term ‘radical’ can now be dropped altogether from our consideration of politics. Any moment worthy of being considered ‘political’ will by its very essence be ‘radical’, in the sense that it will necessarily serve to reveal the existing system of constraints not as ‘objective’ conditions but as utterly contingent. Surely this is at the root of those moments of revolutionary excitement during which it can be exclaimed that “it feels like new things are possible”?

Returning to the apparent impasse reached by those constituting the post-mobilization CJA, we can thus move towards disentangling the problematic of grounding a ‘radical ecological politics’. Firstly, we can understand that the radical adjective is now redundant, for what is at stake is purely whether we can understand an act as *political or not* - and we can say certainly that any fetish with ‘being green’ has no positive relationship whatsoever to the *political*. Secondly - which is really the inverse of the same point - any moment which opens up new ecological possibilities is one which *by necessity* will rupture the present parameters of the possible. New ecological futures are

necessarily ones grounded in the making-possible ways of existing that currently have no place in this world.

The near total collapse of activity related to the 'radical climate movement' from mid-2010 onwards was quite remarkable (see *Fig 6.1*). Perhaps this collapse - especially given the unprecedented emergence in the UK of student fee protests, the Occupy movement and UK Uncut - signified a form of watershed realization (whether implicit or not) that the praxis of the 'radical' climate movement ultimately failed to constitute an *event* or *rupture* to the system of constraints. We know that the radical-vitality shared by those who initiated and constituted the 'radical climate movements' (and others before them) was the desire that we find ways to 'demand the impossible' (Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, 2011); perhaps the collapse of the 'radical climate movement(s)' and explosion of these other popular-resistive moments can thus be interpreted as continued attempts to articulate this underpinning radical-vitality?

It remains unknown as to whether the proliferation of uprisings, occupations and interventions that have emerged in previous years - which are as diverse (yet somehow inarticulably linked) as the occupation of Tahrir Square through to the 'climate' of the Spanish 'Indignados' (Gerbaudo 2012), the popular 'seizure' of Greek hospitals (Libcom.org 2012), or the emergency disaster-relief undertaken by 'Occupy Sandy' in New York (Occupy Sandy 2012) - will be interpretable as a political event. Inevitably, there are always tensions and contradictions, not least as these explosive moments of potential become recuperated by demands or trajectories that serve only to reiterate the present system of constraints. Yet there are always those who are attempting to articulate the 'inarticulable' - where 'articulation' assumes its double meaning of both the connections between these different moments, and also finding ways to express these connections coherently.

A potential avenue for 'articulating' the present conjuncture - one that remains absolutely central in the project of constructing different ecological futures - is to move beyond the suggestion that what we are facing is 'multiple crises' (such as the 'environmental' crisis, the 'accumulation' crisis, the 'credit' crisis, the 'energy' crisis, the 'banking' crisis etc.). Rather than disassembling the present conjuncture, we should move to suggest that we have one single crisis - the general crisis of social reproduction - such that these other 'crises' are interpreted rather as 'functions' of the general crisis.

What is meant by the term a ‘crisis of social reproduction’? In short:

‘social reproduction encompasses the biological reproduction of human beings, it also includes the sexual and emotional labour required for the maintenance of relationships, and it involves the unpaid care and voluntary work undertaken in communities – [in] short, the work that goes in to reproducing labour power and life (Dowling, 2012).

Social reproduction is therefore the totality of what must be done so as to guarantee our continued existence. The political potential of this concept rests upon its double meaning; on the one hand, questions of how we guarantee our social reproduction are evidently important to ‘us’ as they pose the question of how we go about guaranteeing our ability to live. As ‘austerity’ becomes the guiding theme across North America and Western Europe, resulting in the savage cutting back of state-guarantees on social reproduction such as universal healthcare and free education, the general question of how we reproduce ourselves becomes ever-present.

Crucially however, the question of our social reproduction is also central to the functioning of capitalism, which requires that our *labour-power* is reproduced - but obviously at as little cost as is possible to the profit margin of capital itself. Indeed, this allows us to understand that ‘austerity’, which in the UK is accompanied by the discourse of the ‘big society’ (Kisby 2010), is precisely a question of shifting the burden of social reproduction off the shoulders of capital. As it stands, this means that the costs of social *reproduction* are being privatized and offloaded on to us - whether that means picking up the cost of education, having to care for sick relatives as the cost of healthcare becomes prohibitive, or having public pensions slashed - whilst the profits of social *production* are being increasingly siphoned into the hands of the few (which in the UK manifested itself most obviously in the transfer of £850 billion of public wealth into private hands in the so-called ‘bailout’ of the banks) (Plan C 2012).

This is a straightforward assault of capital against labour; which in real terms means the lives of the vast majority become increasingly austere and precarious whilst the lives of an elite few become increasingly wealthy. This is clearly reflected in the increasing disparity of income and the continued accumulation of wealth by the few - the share of the national income earned by the top 1% of income earners increased from 7.1% in 1970 to 14.3% in 2005 (Ramesh 2011), a trend which is continuing - despite the supposed ‘crisis’ of capital. If movements fail to put the question of ‘social

reproduction' on the agenda, the existing 'non-capitalist' social arrangements (which often means the nuclear family unit) will either struggle to absorb the costs of social reproduction, or fail to do so altogether with devastating consequences.

On the other hand, there is the potential for us to *collectivize* these processes of social reproduction, constituting new social relationships as we look to produce our lives *in common* (De Angelis 2007). Rather than purely taking on the burden of social reproduction in the interstices of capital, such a process could be associated with the burgeoning of *commons*, and a recognition of our political subjectivity as commoners, in altogether new forms of social production. When brought together with questions over how to access resources - whether through seizure, hard-won demands, or auto-production - this discourse has the potential to place the question of *how we live* at the heart of the supposedly 'multiple crises' we are facing. From the perspective of what new ecological futures could look like, the question of 'social reproduction' thus appears absolutely central.

What, then, does this all mean for the formation of radical ecological movements? Can they simply 'adapt' so as to respond to the problematic of forming effective political moments? Or does the ecological movement as such need to 'disappear', reinvigorating itself as part of a wider desire for the impossible? As always, the answer is (disappointingly) that we cannot prescribe an effective politics; a moment of rupture cannot simply be offered in advance as an 'idea that works', for that would necessarily make it *compatible* with the present rather than a moment of rupture. What we do know is that repeating the praxis of the 'radical climate movement' experienced during the 2005-2010 parabola of activity is wholly reactionary and futile; any effective political moment that helps configure new socio-environmental possibilities will look, sound and feel altogether different. Perhaps viewing the present conjuncture through the lens of social reproduction will introduce a class perspective that has matured through experience and critique, one that provides a different way of viewing the conditions of the present and thus makes possible subjectivities and techniques that are altogether untimely. It is within such a parallax shift, articulated through a lens of social reproduction or otherwise, that something which could be considered a truly political-ecological event will occur.



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## **Appendix I**

### **A Call to Climate Action:**

We stand at a crossroads. The facts are clear. Global climate change, caused by human activities, is happening, threatening the lives and livelihoods of billions of people and the existence of millions of species. Social movements, environmental groups, and scientists from all over the world are calling for urgent and radical action on climate change.

On the 30th of November, 2009 the governments of the world will come to Copenhagen for the fifteenth UN Climate Conference (COP-15). This will be the biggest summit on climate change ever to have taken place. Yet, previous meetings have produced nothing more than business as usual.

There are alternatives to the current course that is emphasizing false solutions such as market-based approaches and agrofuels. If we put humanity before profit and solidarity above competition we can live amazing lives without destroying our planet. We need to leave fossil fuels in the ground. Instead we must invest in community-controlled renewable energy. We must stop over-production for over-consumption. All should have equal access to the global commons through community control and sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water. And of course we must acknowledge the historical responsibility of the global elite and rich Global North for causing this crisis. Equity between North and South is essential.

Climate change is already impacting people, particularly women, indigenous and forest-dependent peoples, small farmers, marginalized communities and impoverished neighborhoods who are also calling for action on climate- and social justice. This call was taken up by activists and organizations from 21 countries that came together in Copenhagen over the weekend of 13-14 September, 2008 to begin discussions for a mobilization in Copenhagen during the UN's 2009 climate conference.

The 30th of November, 2009 is also the tenth anniversary of the World Trade Organization (WTO) shutdown in Seattle, which shows the power of globally coordinated social movements.

We call on all peoples around the planet to mobilize and take action against the root causes of climate change and the key agents responsible both in Copenhagen and around the world. This mobilization begins now, until the COP-15 summit, and beyond. The mobilizations in Copenhagen and around the world are still in the planning stages. We have time to collectively decide what these mobilizations will look like, and to begin to visualize what our future can be. Get involved!

We encourage everyone to start mobilizing today in your own neighborhoods and communities. It is time to take the power back. The power is in our hands. Hope is not just a feeling, it is also about taking action.

**To get involved in this ongoing and open process, sign up to this email list:**  
[climateaction@klimax2009.org](mailto:climateaction@klimax2009.org)

## **Appendix II**

# **What does climate justice mean in Europe?**

*A discussion paper*

This discussion paper was drafted by a working group at the CJA meeting in Amsterdam in February 2010. Its purpose is to collectively explore the concept of climate justice in the context of Europe. Through providing this discussion paper as both incomplete and unending, we hope it will be useful as a tool in linking the diverse struggles throughout Europe and elsewhere, and strengthen the collective movement towards our visions of the future.

In choosing Europe as the terrain of this discussion, we are not separating ourselves from those struggling elsewhere in the world. On the contrary, through asking what the basis of climate justice is in on our own doorstep, and discovering how we go about implementing it, we are fighting for a better world for all.

The abject failure of governments to provide a political solution to the climate crisis in Copenhagen was unsurprising to those who, from the outset, understood the UN as an institution whose interests lie in extending the legitimacy of global capitalism and the nation-state. Those who placed their hope in the COP15, due either to naivety or necessity, left with a sense of disbelief. More and more are now coming to the realisation that it is social movements, not governments, that have the power to make the necessary changes to solve the climate crisis.

### **Linking with social struggle**

The solutions to systematic repression, exploitation, and the climate crisis are the same. Climate Justice means linking all struggles together that reject neoliberal markets and working towards a world that puts autonomous decision making power in the hands of the communities. We look towards a society which recognises our historical responsibilities and seeks to protect the global commons, both in terms of the climate and life itself.

### **Solidarity**

From the shanty towns of the Americas to the precariats of Europe, the global south is all of those, whether resisting or not, who suffer the impacts of the relationships of capital and domination. It is important to recognise that the marginalised in the geographic south are also the front line of the struggle for climate justice. Solidarity is the realisation of the common struggle. It is realising that the geography which divides us is insignificant compared to the strength of the values that hold us together – our shared affirmation of life and liberty in the face of exploitation and oppression. Solidarity means fighting for our own autonomy at the same time as we struggle against corporations and the relationships of capital that exploit people everywhere.

### **The EU**

Europe, including the EU, is historically responsible for climate change and social and environmental exploitation world wide. The EU as a political institution serves only to extend the interests of the wealthy and the powerful. Its Lisbon Agenda, and the more recent 2020 Agenda, looks to increase the dominance of European based corporations and extend the rule of capital into every sphere of our lives. Its pursuit of the Emissions Trading Scheme has pioneered a system that serves only to profit from our ecological crises, its Bologna process turns our universities into 'sausage factories', whilst the EU trade strategy looks to control access to natural resources and cheap labour for European corporations, continuing its historical legacy of colonialism through different methods. Overcoming institutions that override the autonomy of communities through tying us to capitalist growth is essential if we are to move towards an ecologically and socially just world.

## **Food and Agriculture**

Climate Justice is closely linked to breaking the circle of industrialised agricultural production perpetuated through WTO and European policies. Speculation on food as an industrial commodity and the domination of long unsustainable production chains by international capital threatens the biosphere and the lives of billions of people. This attack on food sovereignty and the planet must be met with a social struggle for food production defined by the needs and rights of local communities. This means redefining, re-localising and re-appropriating the control of our food and agricultural systems through engaging and acting in solidarity with existing struggles.

## **Military**

In Europe, as elsewhere, the military-industrial complex is one of the key actors in maintaining business as usual in the current dominant economic political system. Under the false promise of ensuring 'security' and in the 'war against terror', huge and ever increasing budgets are being spent on military and policing infrastructure. Often military ventures are thinly veiled attempts at securing access to foreign resources and ensuring vast profits for the arms industry. The real security threat we face cannot be addressed by armed force and social control. Social exclusion, poverty, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem collapse, and increasingly scarce resources leading to an escalation in conflicts and resource wars, are posing a far bigger threat than the ghost of terror, or any other imaginary foe created to mask the social conflicts that exists within and between our societies. The struggle for climate justice is about highlighting another concept of sustainable 'human security', which a military and policing force will never be able to guarantee. In practice by resisting changes in our global systems, the military and police apparatus is endangering security, not increasing it.

## **Migration**

Climate change is exacerbating factors which force people to migrate; lack of access to land or livelihood, failing agriculture, conflict and lack of access to water. The tiny proportion of those displaced who attempt the expensive and dangerous journey, are met with militarised border controls if they reach 'Fortress Europe.' Labelled 'illegals,' they are denied basic human rights and struggle to live in dignity, whilst providing a neat scapegoat for a range of social problems. The historical development of capital accumulation, colonialism and carbon emissions, means that Europe has a unique responsibility to act in solidarity with those who are displaced. In our free market

system only those with certain papers such as an EU passport and capital and commodities are free to move around the world. Those seeking a better life or moving to survive are increasingly denied this option. As well as fighting for the conditions for people to be able to stay in their homes and communities, we must also defend the principle of freedom of movement for all as one key aspect of climate justice.

## **Energy**

The need for constant economic growth also means an ever increasing thirst for energy. While there is sufficient energy in Europe we see that despite producing more and more energy, due to inefficiency and inequality, millions of people in Europe do not have access to affordable energy and are unable to heat their homes. Moreover our energy policy within Europe directly results in huge amounts of dangerous waste (nuclear and other), and vast levels of emissions which are rapidly destabilising the global climate. We must ensure that everyone in Europe has access to sufficient levels of energy which is produced in a way that does not damage or endanger people or the environment. We need to radically transform our ways of producing, distributing and consuming energy. This means leaving fossil fuels in the ground, democratising means of production and changing our attitudes to energy consumption. Energy resources should be in the control of communities that use them, and this means challenging the power and ownership of energy companies.

## **Production and consumption**

Europe has some of the highest concentrations of wealth in the world and consumes enormous amounts of resources, yet there are stark inequalities. Production and consumption should be based on values other than profit; this means changing the way we structure our social, economic and political relationships, and ensuring democratic control of the means of production. This will require expropriation and conversion not only of climate damaging companies and industries, but all spheres of life that operate according to the logic of capital. We need to challenge individualism in society and stop allowing ourselves to be defined as consumers, a de-humanising and restrictive identity. Social values must be based on human needs and not on ever increasing consumption, economic growth and competition.

## **Climate Justice in Europe**

Climate justice means recognising that the capitalist growth paradigm, which leads to over extraction, overproduction and overconsumption stands in deep contrast to the biophysical limits of the planet and the struggle for social justice. The historical legacy of European expansion/colonialism is a root cause of the current geopolitical inequalities, in which the global North is consuming the global South. Climate justice means addressing the inequalities that exist between and within countries, and replacing the economic and political systems that uphold them. The status quo is maintained through unequal exchange via unjust trade policies and unequal access to technological capacity. On a global level Europe is a centre of capital accumulation and thus socio-ecological exploitation of the South, however, internally in Europe there are huge inequalities in terms of race, gender and class. These are crucial issues that need to be addressed in the struggle for climate justice on a European level.

We hope that this discussion paper has helped to explore the concept of climate justice in the context of Europe, and we invite your comments to further this discussion.

Fundamentally, we believe that we cannot prevent further global warming without addressing the way our societies are organised – the fight for climate justice and the fight for social justice are one and the same.

### **Comments on the paper**

Send comments to [info@climate-justice-action.org](mailto:info@climate-justice-action.org) (please put *CJ in Europe discussion paper* in the subject line).

## Appendix III

### **System Change not Climate Change! Taking direct action for climate justice**

In 2009, indigenous peoples throughout the world called for a global mobilisation ‘in defence of mother earth’ on October 12, reclaiming the day that used to be imposed as ‘Columbus Day’. Responding to this call, and the demand for a day of action for ‘system change, not climate change’ issued by the global movements gathered in Copenhagen last year, **Climate Justice Action is proposing a day of direct action for climate justice on October 12, 2010.**

#### *Today, we know...*

For years, many had hoped that governments, international summits, even the very industries and corporations that caused the problem in the first place, would do something, anything to stop climate change. In December 2009, at the 15th global climate summit in Copenhagen (COP15), that hope was revealed as an illusion: a comfortable way to delude ourselves into believing that ‘someone else’ could solve the problem for us. That ‘someone’ would make the crisis go away. That there was someone ‘in charge’.

Today, after the disaster of COP15, we are wiser. Today we know:

- That we cannot expect UN-negotiations to solve the climate crisis for us. Governments and corporations are unable (even if they were willing) to deliver equitable and effective action on the root causes of climate change.
- That the climate crisis isn't a natural process, nor is it accidental. Rather, it's the inevitable outcome of an economic system that is bound to pursue infinite economic growth at all costs.
- That only powerful climate justice movements can achieve the structural changes that are necessary, whether it is through ending our addiction to fossil fuels, replacing industrial agriculture with local systems of food sovereignty, halting systems based on endless growth and consumption, or addressing the historical responsibility of the global elites' massive ecological debt to the global exploited.

Today we know that is up to all of us to collectively reclaim power over our daily lives. It is we who must start shutting down and moving beyond the engines of capitalism, the burning of fossil fuels, the conversion of all life into commodities, and the toxic imaginaries of consumerism. It is we who must create different ways of living, other ways of organising our societies.

Today we know that climate justice means taking action ourselves.

#### *The 12th of October: then, and now*

As the COP15 came crashing down, so did any remaining belief in the capacity of UN-negotiations to implement equitable or effective solutions. As they plan to stage their 16th summit in Cancun, Mexico, it is becoming clear already that the movements will need to put up a strong fight to stop any attempt to use the UN to profit from the crisis

through privatising our forests and carving up our atmosphere. But real and just solutions to the climate crisis will come from elsewhere – we must create other strategies, find other ways out of the crisis.

In the ashes of the COP15, a meeting of global movements proposed organising a global day of action under the banner ‘System Change not Climate Change’. Climate Justice Action, the network responsible for organising some of the disobedient actions in Copenhagen, took up this suggestion by calling for a ‘global day of direct action for climate justice’. Rather than once again following the global summit circus around the world, being forced into nothing but a reaction to their failures, we decided to set our own rhythm and our own schedule for change.

On the 12th of October, 1492, Christopher Columbus first set foot on the landmass that we know today as the Americas, marking the beginning of centuries of colonialism. Thus began the globalisation of a system of domination of the Earth and its people in the eternal pursuit for growth, the subordination of life to the endless thirst for profit. Latin America’s liberation at the beginning of the 19th century put an end to direct rule by foreign crowns, but failed to put an end to the exploitation of the many for the benefit of a few. Instead, this system has become ever more pervasive, reaching to the bottom of the ocean, to the clouds above us, and to the farthest depths of our dreams. This is the system that is causing the climate crisis, and it has a name: capitalism.

This day has recently been reclaimed by movements of indigenous peoples – those who first felt the wrath, the violence, the destructive force of this project – as a day ‘in Defense of Mother Earth’. On May 31, 2009, the IV Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples of Abya Yala (the Americas) called for a Global Mobilization “*In defence of Mother Earth and Her People and against the commercialization of life, pollution and the criminalization of indigenous and social movements*”.

Today it is all of us, and the entire planet, who increasingly suffer the fate that some five centuries ago befell the indigenous of the Americas and their native lands. Then, it was the colonisers’ mad search for the profit obtained from precious metals that drove them to wipe out entire cultures; today, it is capital’s search for fossil fuels to drive its mad, never-ending expansion, that still wipes out entire cultures, and causes the climate crisis. Then, they were enslaved and often killed to provide labour to the infernal machines of Europe; now, we are all enslaved and exploited to provide labour to the infernal machines of capital. Then, it was a continent and its people that was driven to destruction; today, it is a world and its people that is being driven to destruction. Today, we are all the global exploited.

Of course, not all life submitted to the rule of capital in a single day. Capitalism is a complex web of social relations that took centuries to emerge and dominate almost the entire planet. Nor will we bring down the entire system, or build a new world, in a single day. This day is a symbol, and symbols matter. This day is the unveiling of the root causes of the climate crisis – capitalism. It is an affirmation that – wherever you live and whatever your struggle – we struggle against capital and for other worlds, together.

### ***There’s only one crisis***

But why focus on the fight for climate justice at a time when, all around the world, people are losing their jobs, governments are imposing austerity measures, all while the banks are once again posting their exorbitant profits? Doesn’t the ‘economic crisis’

trump the 'climate crisis'? This perspective, however, looks at the world from above and outside of it. Seen from above, there is a 'climate crisis', caused by too much CO2 in the atmosphere, which is a threat to future stability and future profit margins; seen from above, there is an economic crisis, which is a threat to current stability and current profit margins; seen from above, there is an energy crisis, a food crisis, a water crisis... But from where we stand, there are no separate crises. There are only threats to our livelihoods, our reproduction – in short, our survival: it doesn't matter whether it is a physical tsunami that destroys our houses, or a tsunami of destruction wrought by recession. Either way, we end up homeless.

The reason we can't treat the apparently separate crises as separate? They are all symptoms of the same sickness. They are, all of them, the result of capital's need for eternal growth, a cancerous growth that is fuelled by the ever-expanding exploitation of social and natural 'resources' – including fossil fuels. Crisis is, in fact, the standard mode of operation for this global system.

To struggle for climate justice, then, is to recognise that all these crises are linked; that the climate crisis is as much as social and economic crisis as it is an environmental disaster. To struggle for climate justice is at the same time struggling against the madness of capitalism, against austerity enforced from above, against their insistence on the need for continued 'growth' (green or otherwise). Climate justice isn't about saving trees or polar bears – though we probably should do both. It is about empowering communities to take back power over their own lives. It is about leaving fossil fuels in the ground and creating socialised renewable energy systems; it is about food sovereignty against the domination of, and destruction caused, by industrial agribusiness; it is about massively reducing working hours, and starting to live different lives; it is about reducing overproduction for overconsumption by elites in the North and the South. Climate justice, in short, is the struggle for a good life for us all.

### ***Global movements for climate justice***

In April this year more than 30,000 people came together in Cochabamba, Bolivia, for the Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC). Together we produced a 'Peoples' Agreement' which offered a different way forward, a counterbalance to the failure of the neoliberal market driven 'solutions' peddled in the COPs. Despite its submission to the UN, it was completely ignored at the intersessional meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany.

The failure of the UNFCCC to respond to the Peoples Conference is of no surprise to us, and as was perhaps the intention of its submission, it has only further delegitimised the COP process. Perhaps most importantly, it has once again shown that it is only 'the movement' that can bring about real changes for climate justice. But what is this movement, and where are its edges? Movement is precisely that – movement. The movement is all those moments when we consciously push a different way of living into existence; when we operate according to our many other values rather than the single Value of capital. And now we are trying to make these moments resonate.

We invite all those who fight for social and ecological justice to organise direct actions targeting climate criminals and false solutions, or creating real alternatives. This means taking *direct responsibility* for making change happen, not lobbying others to act on your behalf, but through actively closing things down and opening things up. This is an open callout, we are not picking targets. But it is not a day for marches or petitions: it is time for us to reclaim our power, and take control of our lives and futures.