

WHAT DOES

GREEN

ANARCHY

MEAN

TODAY?

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FERAL DISTRO

Compost, not posthuman.

~Donna Haraway

Evoking the spirit of Fredy Perlman, let us say that there is wild joy left to be had by those who continue to dance the circle dance. Green anarchy, as a framework for thinking, seeing, writing, acting, living, is and remains inspiring to many who desire a world of passion, freedom, and wildness. In this regard, however, it is vitally important to reframe and rethink in order for a particular set of ideas to feel dynamic and alive.

In this essay we present a vision for what green anarchy means today. First, we reject the dualism that defines anarcho-primitivism. The world is far more complex than reducing everything to civilization or hunting and gathering. Second, we remain conscious and skeptical of the Western, academic institution of anthropology and its inheritance of colonialism, racism, and eurocentrism. Third, we acknowledge the importance of coming to terms with eco-extremism and engaging with the ideas in a meaningful way, regardless of whether we agree with every aspect of the movement. Fourth, we revisit some of the sacred concepts of green anarchy and question whether they remain meaningful in today's world. Fifth, we attempt to reignite interest in our history by re-engaging with some of the foundational documents of green anarchy. Sixth, we insist that sophisticated critical analysis is not the same thing as postmodernist obfuscation. The solution to a valueless, abstract, theoretical discourse cannot be reductive, one-dimensional, essentialism. Finally, we must understand that the world is different than it was twenty years ago. Global warming and climate catastrophe are no longer marginal ideas. As green anarchists we must decide what that means to us. We are no longer crying in the wilderness.

Black Seed was founded with the notion of maintaining some sense of continuity with *Green Anarchy* magazine as well as pushing forward and beyond, honoring the past and recognizing our debt to those who came before us, but also committed to vitality and growth. From the start *Black Seed* was very explicit in this regard, especially in terms of its grounding in the lived experience of those struggling to understand the world as well as the indigenous voices, which have not been stamped out and silenced despite centuries of attempts to do so. *Black Seed* reminded us that indigenous people are still here and they are still fighting. And even more, it forced us to confront the world not merely in the realm of abstract theories but as a lived reality.

Thus we continue to chart a new direction for green anarchy. We believe that the ideas deserve better than they have lately received. When there is nothing new to say, conversation becomes stale and devolves into narrow-minded bickering. Regretfully, this is exactly what has been happening over the last decade or so. Far too often green anarchist discussion devolves into dogmatic feuds and personal grudges. If people are not inspired, if they are having boring conversations, the horizon for life and action likewise appears bland and lackluster. If the conversation is so narrow that it is only capable of promoting a select few authorized avenues for action then people will be easily discouraged. We know there are opportunities for meaningful engagement out there. It is likewise very clear that certain ways of thinking, discussing, and acting have reached a point where they can go no further. Part of the problem has been the terms of the discourse.

This is where the distinction between green anarchy and anarcho-primitivism is relevant. In the case of the latter, there is an unfortunate tendency to reduce the world, in its vastness and complexity, to a Manichean binary. There is only civilization and not-civilization. This critique is so totalizing that it leaves very little room for nuanced thinking or joyful action. Paleolithic-or-bust is not a compelling battle cry. The one thing that a totalizing critique is good for is dogmatism. If, as green anarchists, we dismiss agriculture, technology, cities, or any kind of mediated experience or symbolic culture, we simply won't have much left to do. And we will have to write off the experiences of the vast majority of human communities that have existed for the last several thousand years.

In illustrating the new kind of vision that we are promoting here, let us think of Donna Haraway,

choose not to. This is not meant to be read as an attempt to chastise. Our hope here is to open an exciting new chapter for green anarchy, one that is bold, alive, and dynamic. One that sees possibilities for joy, radical freedom, and profound kinship with the world.

We will not prevent the catastrophe from coming. It is here. It has been here, long before we acknowledged or named it. We need a form of critique and action that is flexible, honest, and sophisticated to keep up with the world. To end by making kin with Starhawk and ecofeminism, we conclude with a poem:

Breath deep.

Feel the pain

where it lives deep in us

For we live, still,

In the raw wounds

And pain is salt in us, burning. .

Flush it out.

Retrieved from Black Seed Issue 5, available at theanarchistlibrary.org or littleblackcart.com

Suggested reading: *Symbiogenetic Desire* by Bellamy Fitzpatrick, *How the Stirner Eats Gods* by Alejandro de Acosta, *The Unique and its Property* by Max Stirner

keep in mind John Moore's words, when he writes "*At best, then, anarcho-primitivism is a convenient label used to characterise diverse individuals*" As time goes on, the diversity of the ideas and individuals who adopt this label seems to be fading. It appears to have become more of a group affiliation and dogma. The people who are comfortable with the term resemble each other more and more (young disaffected white males) and their ideas become less and less distinguishable.

In the passage from "Back to Basics" we see the familiar call for something new, though it still remains unclear what is new. We can also see in the passages above a reiteration of the call to use everything available to us in seeking to develop responses to the world around us. John Moore felt that among new courses for action was the creation of

communities of resistance—microcosms (as much as they can be) of the future to come—both in cities and outside. These need to act as bases for action (particularly direct action), but also as sites for the creation of new ways of thinking, behaving, communicating, being, and so on, as well as new sets of ethics—in short, a whole new liberatory culture. They need to become places where people can discover their true desires and pleasures, and through the good old anarchist idea of the exemplary deed, show others by example that alternative ways of life are possible.

It has been decades since Moore wrote these words and it is not clear that many such communities have been attempted.

Another point, which has been discussed in previous issues of *Black Seed*, is that there seems to be a growing lack of interest in action among green anarchists. In its early years green anarchy was largely defined by its commitment to militant direct action: animal liberation, black bloc tactics, arson, sabotage, etc. This raises the question, has the primitivist project failed because it's been difficult for anyone to do much more than attend primitive skills workshops and fantasize about homesteading? Primitive skills and homesteading are, of course, wonderful and may be desirable to many. But it is difficult to claim that these choices have any relevance beyond one's own personal lifestyle; they simply do not threaten techno-industrial society. Again, there is a relationship between how we think and how we act. As we have said, new ways of thinking, talking, and dreaming can lead to new ways of acting and living.

In recent years an overwhelming amount of green anarchist writings and discussions have centered around domestication and rewilding. When *Green Anarchy* magazine put out their "Back to Basics" series, for instance, the pamphlet on rewilding was twice as long as any of the others. If we are serious about avoiding the lapse into an increasingly insular, marginal, dogmatic, and out of touch sideshow, let us not hold any idea above critique.

Let's be serious about asking ourselves if ideas, even foundational ones, are still playing the kind of inspiration and galvanizing role they once did. As the ancients ask, does this grow corn or not? Is rewilding, a concept ultimately born from the discourse of wildlife conservation (conserved by whom and for whom?), really an idea and path of action that challenges techno-industrial society? Perhaps the answer will be an affirmative yes. But if that's the case, let's really get into it without relying on the fact that for the past twenty years everyone has been treating the question as settled.

It also seems that green anarchists need to be mindful of the ways that these foundational ideas and core assumptions interact with notions of purity that are ultimately indistinguishable from religious ideas that are so often mocked and derided in green anarchist circles. This is not to say, however, that there is anything wrong with accepting the spiritual or religious implications of green anarchy. The old anarchist maxim "No God, No Masters" may need to be revised.

What's wrong with rewilding, or learning primitive skills? Absolutely nothing. For that matter, there is nothing wrong with homesteading, hunting, going off the grid, or any other kind of lifestyle choice. These are all great things. The point is that they do not threaten or challenge civilization or techno-industrial society. As green anarchists, we need to make sure that we make space for action and ideas that do threaten or worse. We need to stand with those who act, even if we as individuals

admittedly a surprising choice. In her current work, Haraway urges us to make kin and compost. This is to say, we have to derive our strength from the confluence of forces, experiences, and substances that surround us and occur within us. By doing so we can find our kinship with fungus, termites, jellyfish. We can learn to live like moss and be cousins to the wolves once again. Use everything! is the credo of the compostist. We are not in the position to look back over thousands of years of human communities and blithely disregard everything that does not fit a prescriptive vision. If the experiences of a particular community teach us something important about how to negotiate a place for freedom and wildness in the world, we will not ignore them because they are agriculturists.

Civilization is such a broad term that carries so many different kinds of meanings to different people. It can only ever be a massive catch-all label that we use for convenience. We cannot treat it as a scientific, objective fact. Civilization is imprecise, both linguistically and in reality.

In this devastated world we are compelled to muddle through ruins and fragments. There may not be a holy grail buried beneath the rubble but we have much to work with if we look. Does the modern appropriation of northern paganism by racists and nationalists mean that there is no value to be found in the eddas and the sagas, for instance? That is a lazy conclusion, just as it is lazy to denounce indigenous cultures because they practiced some version of something historians have called "slavery," while the cultures that informed the worldview of those very historians and anthropologists were responsible for largely wiping out those indigenous communities and imposing a brutal global system of colonialism and industrialism. Again, if the only positive vision of uncivilized life is restricted to communities that meet specific criteria established by a handful of authors, then we are left with very little.

As Haraway says "*we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections*"

The solution to a fractured world cannot be a rigid and unbending dualism. Donna Haraway is again useful here via the concept she is best known for, the cyborg. While green anarchist readers may immediately bristle at the use of term that is synonymous with technology, dehumanization, and militarism, it is important to note the subtleties of Haraway's conception of this figure. For Haraway, humanity has always been cyborgian. To take it further, all life bears cyborg features. When a bear uses a stick to draw ants out of a hollow tree, it is absorbing something alien and external into its own composition. Life is a coalescence of differences and distinctions. What does this mean? Simply put, we are never only what we are. The cyborg exemplifies hybridity as a condition.

As living, breathing, eating, shitting, fucking things, we are constantly absorbing and integrating the other into ourselves. As home to millions of microbes and bacteria, as the primary transportation system for countless species of viruses, we are and have always been much less than completely human. Ancient people understood that eating the flesh of an animal meant incorporating part of its spirit into themselves. This model for life and the world, as we shall see, carries with it radical potentialities for being. We are not who we think we are. We are, each of us, a multitude of things that explode in infinite directions and draw us constantly out of the borders of our being and penetrate beyond. We are a part of the multiplicity that we confront.

What does this have to do with green anarchy? In 1979 the editors of *Fifth Estate* wrote: "*Let us anticipate the critics who would accuse us of wanting to go 'back to the caves' or of mere posturing on our part—i.e., enjoying the comforts of civilization all the while being its hardest critics. We are not posing the Stone Age as a model for our Utopia, nor are we suggesting a return to gathering and hunting as a means for our livelihood*" In other words, the green anarchist vision has always been a hybrid one. It has always been a position that is based on responding to the crisis of techno-industrial society, as well as looking at contemporary indigenous cultures and communities of the past. The world we live in, as traumatized and horrific as it is, is real. We are not creatures of the Paleolithic, who, by the way, were themselves very likely not entirely what we assume they were. We stand, here and now, against the domination of the techno-industrial world even while we

are products of that world and inescapably influenced by it. We are strange, misshapen things. Partly this, and partly that. And we always were. Our challenge and our joy is born from this. To always be creating, dismantling. The cycles of decay and growth. There is no ur-moment. The symbol has always dwelt within us. Our claws and tusks are made for many purposes.

But we are also obliged to heed the ominous whispers in the darkness. There is a darker shade of green that runs through green anarchy, which we will not shy away from. It is a bloody vein that tracks through grisly pagan rites, the cosmic inhumanism of Robinson Jeffers, the savage violence of the primitive warrior, and the serene detachment of the daoist recluses. What these strands weave together is a vision of the world in which humanity does not sit upon a throne. We insist that the world was not made for man and as such the concerns of humanity and human society are not of primary importance. Following Jeffers, we must try to de-center our thoughts and our actions from the merely human perspective.

As the writers of the Dark Mountain manifesto put it, *“Humans are not the point and purpose of the planet. Our art will begin with the attempt to step outside the human bubble. By careful attention, we will reengage with the non-human world.”* As green anarchists we must be sensitive to what it means “to step outside the human bubble.” A vision of a world of spontaneity, joy, and desire, that boldly asserts a cosmic wholeness beyond human values will not resemble the kinds of leftist utopian visions that we are accustomed to. In his foundational “Primitivist Primer” John Moore writes *“Politics, ‘the art and science of government’ is not part of the primitivist project; only a politics of desire, pleasure, mutuality, and radical freedom”* In other words, the emphasis here moves away from traditional realms of social justice. Green anarchy is not about advocating for egalitarian politics.

This brings us to another point, which was always central to *Black Seed* and *Green Anarchy*, the role of anthropology. While it is certainly true that we rely on anthropological and ethnographic works to give us a picture of how many indigenous communities lived, as green anarchists, we cannot ignore the racism and colonialism that inspired and made possible much of that work. Furthermore, we absolutely cannot put forward a vision for a way of life that depends entirely on the truth or accuracy of these historically-situated anthropological studies. If we put anthropology forward as our main evidence for being green anarchists, that means we are accepting a whole series of assumptions based in fantasies of cultural superiority, hegemony, and scientific objectivity, some of the very pillars of civilization that we oppose. Anthropological works are taken seriously because they are academic and scientific. Ways of knowing that our ancestors have relied on for millennia are dismissed because they are mystical or superstitious. This is an imbalance that needs to be corrected within green anarchy. If we argue and fight against totalizing systemic thinking but uncritically fall back on anthropology as the foundation of our position, then we have a huge problem.

As a corollary to this, the role of the primitive or indigenous themselves within green anarchy must be considered. Too often there is a tendency to reduce traditional peoples and communities into static, one-dimensional figures to be blindly or superficially emulated, rather than recognizing them as dynamic, evolving cultures with their own histories and stories, which have their own sense of how they fit into the larger world. Again, to correct this would mean being willing to challenge the values and truisms that we are often unaware of and engaging with traditional communities in the world today rather than losing ourselves in daydreams and fantasies of a long-forgotten world, one that bears little or no resemblance to the reality we and the communities we claim to admire actually inhabit.

As we have said, if green anarchy does not stay engaged and connected to the world it will become increasingly tone-deaf and meaningless, it will become nothing more than a parody; like arguments about which forms of social media are acceptable and which are not. Thus, picking up where *Black Seed* 4 left off, we must consider the question of green anarchy and its relation to nihilism and eco-extremism. This has become an extremely divisive issue over the last several years. Concurrently we have also seen a dramatic intensification of techno-utopianism on the left and a worrying growth

in a kind of hybrid leftist vision of anarchy that enthusiastically embraces technology and utterly dismisses a nonhuman planetary perspective.

The bottom line is that there are no easy answers. *Black Seed* wants to remain with the trouble and continue to push through important issues that challenge us to our core. As we acknowledged in *Black Seed* 3, there are likely to be points of disagreement between some green anarchists and some nihilists. These disagreements are not insignificant but they also do not necessitate the kind of hostility and dismissiveness that have characterized much of the interaction between the two perspectives. The kind of energy and force that recent eco-extremists have shown both in their words and action clearly demonstrate what has been lacking in a lot of green anarchy over the last several years. Regardless of what individual anarchists feel about indiscriminate violence, nihilist eco-extremism has tapped into a current that resonates with many in the broader green anarchist community. Again, if we find an idea or a type of action challenging, we believe we have an obligation to dig into that discomfort and to engage with it, regardless of whether we end up agreeing with it or not. New paths can be charted, new formulations, new courses of action, new stories can be told. If, however, our resistance turns out to only be a vestigial form of leftist humanism then we have to consider other options.

Nihilist eco-extremism is also not the only other contemporary strand that can be woven into a broader green anarchist critique. We should be open to expanding our sense of what green anarchy can mean, rather than becoming increasingly dogmatic and myopic.

Let us ask together, can an idea or an action only work within a green anarchist perspective if it conforms to a fixed definition of what anarchism means? If the broad concerns and commitments are consistent, if there is even a marginal point of convergence that may give rise to inspiration and creativity, can we really afford to dismiss it because it doesn't fit into our own constructed identities? There is nothing free about that. The dominant form of anarchism that one sees, unfortunately, appears to have nothing whatsoever to do with freedom.

Sometimes looking forward and remaining engaged with the present requires a reevaluation of the past. Revisiting the history of green anarchy may also help us reorient, refocus, and revitalize ourselves. Once again, from his “Primitivist Primer” John Moore:

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as anarcho-primitivism or anarcho-primitivists. Fredy Perlman, a major voice in this current, once said, “The only -ist name I respond to is cellist.” Individuals associated with this current do not wish to be adherents of an ideology, merely people who seek to become free individuals in free communities in harmony with one another and with the biosphere, and may therefore refuse to be limited by the term ‘anarcho-primitivist’ or any other ideological tagging. At best, then, anarcho-primitivism is a convenient label used to characterise diverse individuals with a common project: the abolition of all power relations— e.g., structures of control, coercion, domination, and exploitation—and the creation of a form of community that excludes all such relations.

And from the “Back to Basics” series of pamphlets put out by *Green Anarchy* magazine:

Originary considerations have to do with how human life used to be, with who we have been and, in some fashion, may be again. Such investigations give us things to look at, to reflect upon; not as a source of an ideology to impose, not some ‘How It Must Be’ dogma. In this unprecedented and fearful time, the question of practice is open. In fact, maybe one thing many can agree on is that something new is needed. It seems to us that examining the beginnings of this ongoing disaster is a worthy exercise. Do we not need all the help we can get?

At this point, both of these passages were written more than a decade ago. A number of interesting issues are present here. First of all, we can see that even in its early days green anarchy was concerned about the same pitfalls that we address here. Namely, that we recognize the need to prevent green anarchy from becoming dogmatic, ideological, and prescriptive. We would do well to