Social Ecology
and the Right to the City

Towards Ecological and Democratic Cities

Edited by Federico Venturini, Emet Değirmenci, and Inés Morales
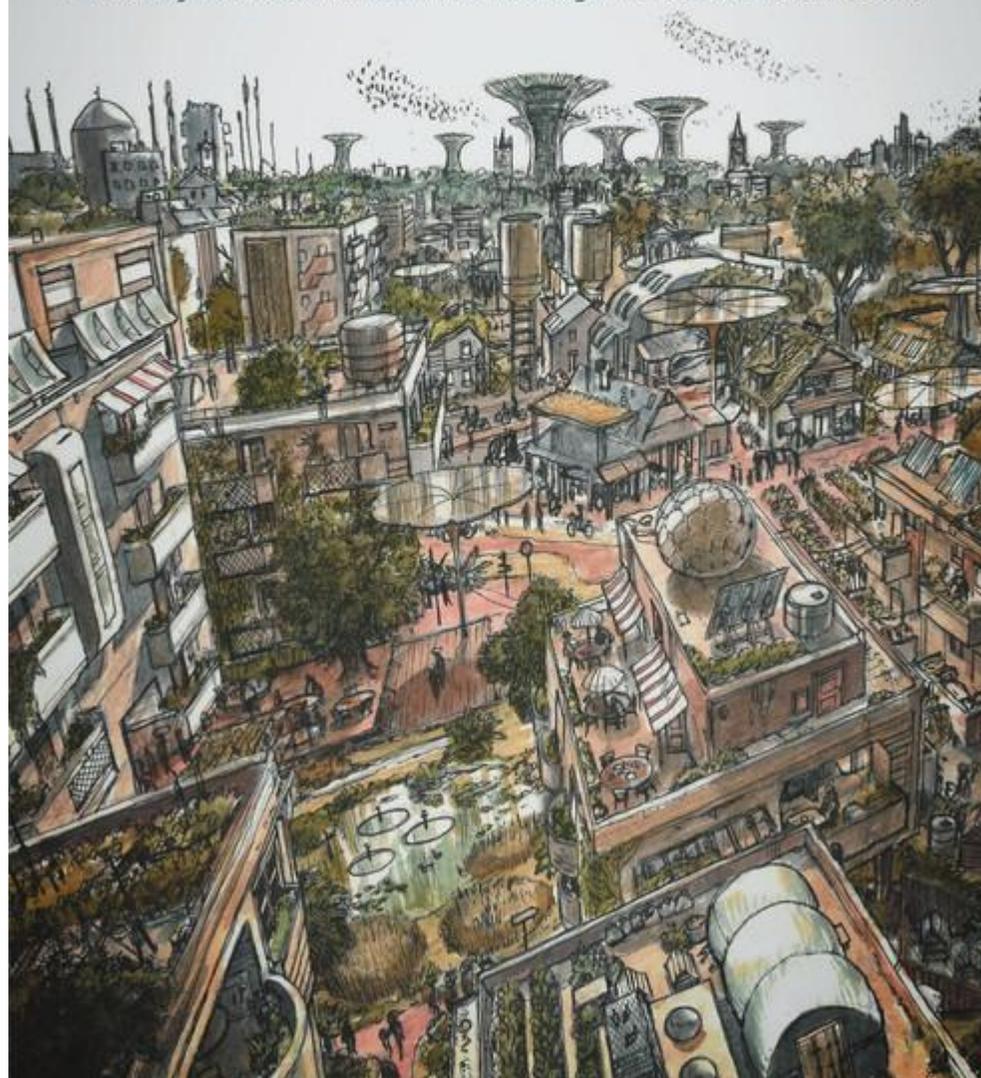
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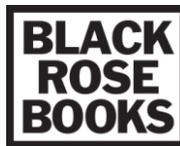
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Social Ecology and the Right to the City: Towards Ecological and Democratic Cities

Emet Değirmenci, Inés Morales, and Federico Venturini, editors

Montreal • Chicago • London

BLACK ROSE BOOKS

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Direct Democracy, Social Ecology, and Public Time

Alexandros Schismenos

One could argue that since the dawn of modernity, humanity has been in a situation of constant crisis. Today we find ourselves amidst a nexus of crises: an economic crisis, a political crisis, and an ecological and anthropological crisis where both the human and natural environments are threatened. The privatization of public time and space, under the false identification of public with state, transforms social geography and the public architecture of life. We are also witnessing a rapid transformation of national politics under the grid of transnational networks of power, combined with a revival of nationalistic rhetoric as a means for manipulating populations.

In order to clarify the current crisis—a *crisis of significations*—it may be useful to delimit, schematically, some areas of its manifestation. I use the term "significations" in the Castoriadean sense, namely, the "pre-eminent element in and through which the social-historical unfolds" (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 201), which includes the dominant norms, purposes and attitudes that characterize a specific society. The purpose of this article is to correlate central aspects of the crisis of established significations in order to highlight the opportunities for social emancipation that emerge through collective forms of direct democracy inspired by social ecology that create a free public time. I use the term "public time" as defined by Cornelius Castoriadis, as the "dimension where the collectivity can inspect its own past as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as domain for its own activities" (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 281).

My main point is that the creation of a free public time implies the creation of a democratic collective inspired by the project of social ecology. The first and second parts of this article focus on the modern social phenomena correlated to the general crisis and the emergence of the Internet Age (Castells, 2012). The third and fourth parts focus on new significations that seem to inspire modern social movements and the challenges that modern democratic ecological collectivities face. I use the term "social ecology" as defined by Murray Bookchin: "Social ecology is based on the conviction that nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems" (Bookchin, 2006, p. 19). And I use the term "democracy" exclusively in the original, true meaning, of direct democracy where society is self-governed by the equal participation of every individual to political decisions and functions, as opposed to a modern representative democracy or republic, where political decisions rest in the hands of an oligarchy. In this sense, a truly democratic political collectivity is a truly ecological collectivity and vice versa.

Aspects of the Global Crisis of Significations

The globalization of power and market mechanisms has spread the net of bureaucratic capitalism across the globe and stretched it to its limits, both internally and externally. Internally, because capitalism waives the requirement to provide a coherent meaning for the populations it dominates. It deregulates processes that are necessary for social cohesion, and ensures a psychical internalization of norms for the purposes of the system among the majority.

Externally, because the capitalist political and economic system, which was never actually controlled or regulated, is unable to fulfil both its general purpose, namely the unlimited dominance of rationalistic control and capital growth, and the specific purposes of elites and trusts that constitute the power network of globalized bureaucratic capitalism. A fraction of this network was revealed in the Panama papers imbroglio (Obermayer and Obermaier, 2016).

The system has approached its natural limit as available resources, both environmental and human, appear close to exhaustion. Besides capitalism's unlimited ambition, there is a destruction limit onto the brink of which we walk blindfolded—the brink of natural disaster, environmental disaster, social disaster, and even nuclear disaster. The whole range of nightmares and dystopias stand like potential realities before us.

The core values of Western societies have been reduced to the capitalist irrationality of economic growth. Formerly prosperous civilizations have been subdued by imperialism, their cultures destroyed by the advance of colonization and capitalization. Both the inner collapse of communal and social values within Western societies and the external destruction of other communities and cultures have resulted in a modern society that is incapable of creating social significations that constitute a positive common meaning towards a positive common future. Ultimately, this process has undermined the foundations of social belonging and identification, producing a world where the only value afforded any kind of worth is monetary. Money in itself is only a measure of value and, in this sense, is actually valueless.

The most recent and visible aspect of this multifaceted crisis of significations is the economic crisis associated with the burst of the subprime mortgage bubble in 2008. However, this process actually began in the 1970s during the OPEC oil crisis, which saw the surrender of North American labour unions and the launch of Reagan and Thatcher's neoliberal doctrine. The main feature of this doctrine was the triumph of closed interest groups that promoted a version of capitalism even more predatory than the New Deal or the European social-democratic versions of post-war capitalism—those at least had provided some degree of social security measures. State authorities swiftly and voluntarily abolished financial regulation tools that formally kept multinational private capital in check. Society also adopted the "Shock Doctrine", which Friedman characterized as

modern capitalism's core tactic for the subjugation of societies and the dismantlement of labour (in Klein, 2007, p. 6).

The construction of huge megacities smothered the urban public space under a network of commercial zones. The basis of societal cohesion, the spirit of community, withered away. When community between people vanishes, the communal bond between nature and society is also shattered. The privatization of urban public space began under what can be described as a false conflation of the public and the State. As Murray Bookchin understood, it was a consequence of the failure of collective initiatives that had "stagnated as moribund relics of an era washed away by the social reaction of the 1990s, or regrettably, [had] become purely privatized" (Bookchin, 1995).

The implementation of these policies fundamentally altered the social geography and the public architecture of the city. Major cities became dense population hubs with energy demands in excess of the levels formerly required by entire countries. Inner-city landscapes became divided into three discrete zones with exploitative relations—housing blocks for the majority, mansions for the dominant elites, and ghetto jungles for marginalized minorities. A vast network of markets divides and at the same time connects these isolated zones under the circulation of products. As cities expand, the foundations of community and the conditions for democracy narrow, transforming cities into hives of private cells where circulation replaces community.

The transformation of cities into zoned areas of product circulation stems from the expansive capitalist imagination of the Industrial Revolution. The phenomenon of modern urbanization is distinct from the development of cities as independent political entities—for example, just as urbanization had occurred in late Medieval Italy. Modern urbanization transforms urban communities into production and distribution hubs with little consideration for public human life and public social space.

Alongside the destruction of public social space and community, there has been large-scale destruction of the natural environment. The destruction of nature that began with the dawn of industrial capitalism has led to the current ecological crisis whose effects are evident in an undeniably emphatic way. There is no need to argue here for what everyone knows and witnesses in the perturbation of natural processes, extreme meteorological phenomena, and mass extinction of species. Scientists recently attributed the term Anthropocene (Carrington, 2016) to the period since the Industrial Revolution, elevating modern human activity to the level of geological forces.

These two types of crisis, economic and ecological, constitute a broader crisis of significations that includes the social, cultural and anthropological (Castoriadis, 1982). In the sense that the misguided signification of unlim-

ited growth has made a desert of the human environment itself, and in the sense that it seeks to dominate the totality of society, it has accelerated desertification on both the natural and the cultural dimension. The system has failed to legitimize its core impetus for growth, creating a hollow meaning that is reducible to bottom-line profitability.

In my opinion, the full implementation of the growth doctrine seems to be hindered by three main factors:

1) the exhaustion of natural resources;
2) the collective resistance of communities and the psychic resistance of individuals who create new, global networks of sociality at a time when traditional institutions are being dismantled; and
3) the fundamental contradiction within capitalism itself, which objectifies people while its function is based precisely on the exploitation of human ingenuity.

To the extent that the economic motivation of unlimited growth and profitability remains the dominant imaginary signification, the tension between systemic pursuits and the rapid self-destruction brought about by their achievement has resulted in a field of constant reproduction of the crisis.

Currently, the abandonment by the State, not only of financial regulations, but also of social services, deprives it of any social rooting. As a result, while a nationalistic propaganda still pervades all modes of discourse from entertainment to politics, the real strength of the Nation-State is declining. A globalised economy transfers power to international institutions, which help elites bypass national constraints. At the same time the use of a nationalistic rhetoric keeps populations under control within those constraints.

This blurs the precise borders between countries, as the distinction between interior and exterior liquidates, while war fronts multiply. Modern warfare and the rise of "anti-terror" campaigns creates new borders within societies, within cities, and across countries. At the same time, there are signs of a deep corrosion of republican representative politics, revealing the ever-present divide of interests and sentiments between society and the State. The Trumpian degradation of US politics signifies something by signifying nothingness, the representative void.

The decline of nation-state power is indicated not only by the enforcement of austerity by organizations like the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Central Bank on countries like Argentina and Greece,[1] but also

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1 In Greece, austerity measures were imposed by a Troika comprised of the IMF, the ECT and the Eurogroup, the unelected assembly of EU Ministers of Finance.

by the emergence of secessionist movements that have emerged in response to international politics (e.g. Cataluña). The local has become inextricably linked with the global. Societies are both local and global in the sense that everything that happens locally is projected globally, and what is displayed globally is diffused locally. There is no detached place since information has the ability to exceed geographical boundaries and spatial limitations, while satellites map every corner of the planet. When ecological or social disasters are viewed and felt around the world, a consciousness of global interdependency seems to be formed in terms of either common despair or common solidarity.

Murray Bookchin warned us that "unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of "grow or die", is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame other phenomena—such as technology or population growth—for growing environmental dislocations" (Bookchin, 2006, p. 20). Consequently, the project of ecology cannot be separated from the project of social transformation; social ecology thus implies a need to emphasise social equality and democracy.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the different aspects of the global crisis of our time are interlinked by the main social imaginary impetus of capitalist globalization, which is expansive growth and total exploitation of human and natural resources. The crisis is self-generated by the expansion of the capitalist system inwards and outwards. As this expansion reaches the limits of the human and natural environments, the political character of the problem cannot be concealed, nor can its ecological ramifications. The values of human liberation and natural balance remain interlinked with the principles of direct democracy and social ecology, which provide the conceptual framework of a different way of societal life.

The Problems of the Internet Age

We live in the first period in history when the urban population exceeds the rural. At the same time the city, as a political and social entity and unity, is being dismantled. It is being rebuilt into a set of segregated functions, with respect to public space and public time. Likewise, personal time is sliced into distinct occupations defined by production or consumption. Public time is also sliced into "zones of leisure" and "zones of labour", both of which are exploited for profit. Commodities of leisure are presented as common values while the vast majority of humanity is excluded from leisure and commodities. The division of wealth, exploitation of both workers and the unemployed, and the gap between privileged elites and excluded populations are now at the widest and deepest points in history.

Within the current socioeconomic landscape the emergence of the internet has brought a new field of projection and reconstruction of public

and personal identities, enabling almost infinite possibilities. The digital person—fragmentary, but at the same time a multiplicity of representations of the natural person—brings forth a new problematic of the individual's relation to themselves and to society. It offers a worldwide surface for the reflection, projection, and re-creation of personal preferences and views, in a completely disembodied and virtual manner.

On one hand, the internet seems to provide a medium for even deeper personal fragmentation and isolation. Online, the user is at the same time invulnerable and vulnerable. Invulnerable as a digital self materially detached from its physical existence, vulnerable as a physical/psychical subjectivity with a social identity embedded in the broader social environment. The digital self is a patchwork of images, preferences, comments, trends, and contacts—a conscious reconstruction of the individual projected onto a virtual global public platform. Social cohesion of the personal image, which was formerly dependent on the natural presence of the individual, dissolves within the digital multiplicity of pseudo-personas. Personal identity loses its original foundation, the social significance of the individual's consistency as a singular, actual personality.

On the other hand, the internet, as a medium for direct and simultaneous global communication, has demonstrated many liberating capabilities: disseminating knowledge, socializing research, communicating societies, overcoming censorship, and overcoming ethnic and cultural exclusions. Although it has become an instrument of widespread control, it is also a tool for widespread solidarity and the emergence of new social movements (Castells, 2012). For the first time there is a global public time within a virtual space.

This global temporality that has formed in and through the internet is at the same time synchronic and diachronic. Nevertheless, it is not in accordance to social time, which is essentially local. Direct accessibility flattens the critical significance of information within its continuous flow, where information sets can be articulated into pseudo-narratives, and where the quantity of information ultimately constitutes the quality of meaning, however absurd. The fundamental properties of the Internet—speed and condensation—express precisely this principle of expansion through contraction.

Without a common criterion of value or truth, which is offered in the non-digital world—at least partially—by the social-historical reality and the real limitations imposed by society as the "objective" world (in the sense that it transcends subjectivity) or by "nature", the only criterion of value that remains is *popularity*.

At the same time, every marginal idea, whether radical and liberating or reactionary and obscurantist, now shares an ability of propagation previously limited to the dominant discourse. Every individual or group

now shares, at least in theory, the same potential public audience—the whole of digital humanity. Without a mechanism for proof of validity, validity is gained and lost through the flow of information itself. New online funding tools, such as crowdfunding, are widely visible to the public and offer money for projects that would otherwise be hopeless or even non-existent. This visible public surface seems unlimited in range, but is actually limited in scope as the majority of the Internet lies within unsearchable areas called the "Deep Web", which includes the "Dark Web", where black market economies flourish.

In sum, the internet has created new challenges for direct democracy, but one should always keep in mind that a precondition for democracy is a community that exists in relation to its natural environment—antithetical to the Internet. The emergence of new significations of global solidarity, liberated knowledge and free community has been augmented by the Internet, but in fact needs to take place in actual social reality.

The Emergence of New Significations

The twenty-first century has, thus far, been marked by financial crises, the implementation of neoliberal policies on a supranational level, the ascension of international financial organizations to a central decision-making level, the violent dissolution of local communities, and the fragmentation of public time. However, this corrosion has been met with successive revolts, the awakening of a universal solidarity and resistance, the creation of imaginary communities, and the spreading of the concept of the commons. The anti-globalism movement, the Occupy Movement, the movement of the Kurdish people in Rojava, and the Zapatistas movement as the first groups to use the internet as a means of global solidarity, are all examples of the dynamic struggle for autonomy and democracy. Although the outcome of these movements and social conflicts remains uncertain, the rise of the internet has meant they are now performed for a global audience with variable levels of involvement. Meanwhile, what is at stake is the future itself in the most comprehensive sense—the existence of a future.

Against every manifestation of a given crisis, new possibilities open, new significations emerge, and the values of solidarity and community are revived on a broader scale. They emerge within a radical political context, into forms of self-governed communities that aspire to direct democracy.

What is apparent in recent years is a multifaceted resistance of societies. A resistance formulated not in terms of electoral representation, but in terms of direct democracy, within communal forms of life. The refutation of sovereign institutions becomes even more obvious, by the positive activity of social movements, by the creation of primary institutions of direct democracy, social solidarity and local self-government, to some

extent, like the aforementioned Zapatista communities, the Kurdish horizontal assemblies and, temporarily, the occupied factories in Argentina and Greece (VIO.ME in Thessaloniki). The VIO.ME factory was occupied by its workers in 2011, who decided not only to self-manage their working space, but to transform it into a space of democratic cooperation and political decision. A columnist of *The Guardian* described VIO.ME thus:

> For a start, no one is boss. There is no hierarchy, and everyone is on the same wage. Factories traditionally work according to a production-line model, where each person does one- or two-minute tasks all day, every day: you fit the screen, I fix the protector, she boxes up the iPhone. Here, everyone gathers at 7am for a mud-black Greek coffee and a chat about what needs to be done. Only then are the day's tasks divvied up. And, yes, they each take turns to clean the toilets. (Chakraborttya, 2017)

We should also note that the VIO.ME workers organized open assemblies with the local community, solidarity actions to immigrants and ecological movements. Most importantly they have criticized not only the structure of labour, but also the product itself. VIO.ME have decided against chemical products and now produce eco-friendly soap and cleaning products.

Against such examples of social movements organizing themselves using methods of direct democracy, the crisis of political representation and identity has largely manifested itself as a revival of nationalistic rhetoric. Still, global networks of solidarity challenge the validity of official borders, forming nodes of free social space and free collectivities that challenge the jurisdiction of the State.

Fukuyama's doctrine of the "end of history" (1992) is a symptom of the crisis of the association of public time with subjective temporality—a crisis of our relation to the past and the future, a loss of the future and a levelling of the past. Yet, social struggles and social movements can create new forms of free public time and an opening to a common future. A new ecological consciousness has arisen—democratic, anti-authoritarian, and connected to the environment. Pro-environmental protests and political struggles, such as the US anti-pipeline movement in Dakota and the anti-gold movement in Chalkidiki, Greece, provide the seeds for a new *sensus communis*, a new sense of common good and humanity.

We are also witnessing the emergence of new social movements, unrelated to traditional trade unions or parties, which do not seek to implement ready-made plans but to create a new open free public space and time. Besides the aforementioned movements, such urban grassroots networks are present not only in Western countries, but in many other parts of the world, including South America, Africa, East Asia, and Central/Eastern Europe.

These are movements without leaders—movements that seem fragmented, but which allow for the creation of free networks and mutual

complementary structures on many fields and places within the broader social-historical narrative, precisely because they have a common project and create a common meaning. That is, self-governing direct democracy without authoritative power, without party representatives, and without state officials.

And this indicates a different answer to both the crisis of political representation, and to the identity crisis of the individual who finds it difficult to identify with national state mechanisms. This is not because propaganda is insufficient, or because there is access to a wider world, but because these mechanisms themselves have been exposed to signify nothing except empty automations deprived of their original meaning and their old vision.

Democratic ecological movements redefine private and public relations in the sense that they create a free public space that belongs neither to private capital nor to the State. And this implies a free public time of social inter-action and political decision, like the *Nuit debout* movement—symbolically expressed by the creation of a prolonged month of March, and a significant example of the correlation between public time and political action.

The Political Significance of Public Time

Following major protests on 31 March 2016, against proposed labour legislation and the subsequent loss of workers' rights, the Nuit debout movement flooded the squares of French cities. The manifold manifesta-tions of this movement can be seen as a symbolic act with deep political connotations. The people who participated in the movement defied the official calendar by counting the days of March beyond 31, renaming 1 April as *32 March*, 2 April as *33 March*, and so on. This new "Martian" revolutionary calendar echoed the proclamation of Year 1, and the replacement of the official calendar, by the revolutionaries of 1792. The renunciation of the official calendar, however theatrical, is a French revolu-tionary tradition. It is a public gesture that exposes the deep dependence of authorities upon an established social temporality, both daily and historical.

By symbolically deregulating the official calendar, the movement defined itself as a historical event and widened its temporal horizon with the proclamation of a different social temporality. This symbolic expression liberated public space and created a common public time. Of course, this was never going to be enough to radically bend the established domination or derail the dynamics of regularity, but it reveals a certain autonomy and self-consciousness of the movement as a creator of its own free public time.

If one looks to the past, one can find many examples that underline the close dependence of political time on public space. Each society is structured in three realms: (1) the private sphere; (2) the private/public (i.e. the sphere of communication and culture); and (3) the purely public sphere—the field of political decision-making. In societies where political power lies within a state hierarchy, public functions, both cultural and

political, are subordinate to state power and private space–time becomes contracted and isolated.

The division of the day into equal hours is not natural (since the length of a natural day varies), but was an achievement of the monastic movement based on the needs of common prayer (division of the day into equal 3-hour periods). It was also the first disciplinary normality imposed on social temporality and the first attempt to measure time, regardless of the social activities of rural life (Landes, 1983). The bell tower became the regulator of public time, while public space was restricted to ecclesiastical courtyards.

When political power was transferred to the cities in the late Middle Ages, at the time of the invention of the mechanical clock (around the thirteenth century), the new symbol of public time first appeared on the towers of the rulers, as power leaned towards the secular sphere. The mechanical clock bridged the feudal and proto-capitalist worlds.

Industrial organization required more accurate measures, while time units were diminished to picoseconds (10^{-12} seconds). The dominance of economic activities over other social functions, the dominance of the capitalist imaginary, and the primacy of production transformed social life in terms of functionality. Conflict between the State and society meant conflict over public time and public space.

The mechanical watch, when it became a portable pocket or wrist watch did not mean an inconceivable personalization of social time, but the colonization of personal time by regulatory mechanisms that already organized productive public time.

The recent neoliberal attack on nature and society marks the concession of state-managed public space to private capital, granting its full privatization. It also signifies the transformation of private time in terms of productivity, since the equation of time with money, a fundamental principle of capitalist production, is rooted in the equation of the user with the product. The globalization of information and product circulation organizes the regulation of private time on a global level, under a variable but unified timetable of financial procedures.

On the other hand, the global diffusion of information produces cracks in the dominant social temporality and regularity, offering opportunities for the creation of social networks beyond the dominant constraints. Under these conditions political time becomes "dense", and seems to expand and contract depending on the social occupation and recreation of free public space.

But the social background of modern human existence—the urban landscape of megacities—is a problem in itself. The modern city is not an ancient democratic polis, but rather, as Aristotle would claim, *Babylon*. Modern collectivities create, within the urban network, new and free egalitarian social spaces, like Nosotros in Athens or Micropolis in

Thessaloniki. They are self-managed and open to anybody, hosting a wide range of social and self-educational activities. They utilise a form of direct democracy at the levels of individual participation and collective decision-making. Nosotros was founded in Athens in 2005, in the centre of Exarcheia, by an anti-authoritarian initiative, while Micropolis was founded in Thessaloniki in 2008 amidst the December riots. Both are based on principles of direct democracy, equality, and actual creative participation.

Since their inception, a constellation of free social places have emerged in other neighbourhoods and in smaller Greek towns such as Ioannina, Larisa, and Komotini. They form a network of political, social and cultural activities without any exclusions or separations. Seeds of new democratic forms of life, perhaps, but against the dominant paradigm they face tremendous pressure and depend upon remaining open to the broader society. They alter the social landscape of the city through their activities. These are not self-referential, but refer to society, interacting with and acting on the city. They embody the project of a democratic ecological society, albeit in a limited but inspiring manner, both by their activities and their presence, which depend on individuals interacting with mutual respect for one another.

Democratic ecological collectivities, which explicitly combine the project of social ecology with the project of direct democracy, must move beyond the collegial and create institutions of education and communication marked by cohesive political activity across a wider social-historical field. We may, perhaps, schematically designate four moments of political time to autonomous collectivities. They all involve and presuppose a public conflict with established authorities.

The first moment, when the collectivity first opens up to society, involves the initial creation of a broader social environment. The creation of free social spaces seems to be the limit of this moment. If this limit is not exceeded through connection with broader society, free social spaces can become self-referential and, sooner or later, collapse internally.

If this limit is exceeded, then we proceed to the next moment, which can only occur within society—that is, beyond the collective since the activity of the collectivity exceeds the collectivity itself. It involves the co-creation of networks of solidarity, communication and action on local, regional and global scales. It involves the creation of free open public spaces. It means creating a limited public space–time for communication and a limited public space–time for political decisions.

Opening a free public space presupposes a break with state and capitalist mechanisms. It is an initial step. The second step is explicit self-determination to enact institution-building through direct democracy and public deliberation, in order to realize autonomy in terms of social functions and a complete rupture with the State. I use the word "autonomy" not in reference

to the Italian "*autonomia*" or to the Kantian concept, but as defined by Castoriadis: "the self-positing of a norm, starting from some content of effective life and in relation to this content" (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 401). In this sense, social autonomy is direct democracy as it is essentially linked to the autonomy of the individual and enabling society to create its own institutions.

We can imagine explicit self-determination if we consider a self-sufficient local network that is not subject to state or capitalist taxation or oversight. It constitutes a fundamental division between free communities and the State. However, it is not yet an autonomous society until a complete public space is established along with a public time for free communication, yet with limited public space–time for political decision-making.

In order for social autonomy to be realized, society must have the power to explicitly re-create its central institutions, namely politics, justice, and education, in a democratic and egalitarian manner. The people, as free individuals, must be able to establish laws by means of open public deliberation and through the establishment of direct democracy. This would presuppose abolishment of the State and subordination of the economy to democratic politics. But it also presupposes the psychical transformation of the individual to an autonomous, reflective and deliberative subjectivity. It presupposes a democratic education that cannot be separated from the experience of direct democracy in practice, via a praxis of autonomy. It also means establishing a complete public space and time for free communication, and a complete public space and time for political decision and action.

Back in 1969, Ecology Action East—a collective that included Murray Bookchin—published a statement that asserted, "We hope for a revolution which will produce politically independent communities whose boundaries and populations will be defined by a new ecological consciousness." It is now evident that this ecological consciousness is also a political consciousness that demands a self-reflecting direct democracy against hierarchy and economic growth— one that combines ecological and social struggles within the project of building a democratic ecological society. Under the global threat of disaster, this is the challenge facing communities and societies today; for the future remains, as always, open for societies themselves to determine.

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NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

Ercan Ayboga is an environmental engineer and co-founder of the Tatort Kurdistan Campaign in Germany for which he co-wrote the book *Revolution in Rojava*, published in several languages. While living in North Kurdistan he co-founded the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive in 2006, a long-term campaign against the destructive Mega Dam Ilisu on the Tigris River. Ercan is also engaged in the Mesopotamian Ecology Movement, a social movement in North Kurdistan.

Diana Bogado is architect and urbanist activist, and has researched rights to housing from an activist experience in occupations and squats in Brazil and Spain. She completed her doctoral thesis at Seville University (2012–2017), while her professional work ranges from teaching to scientific research. She has coordinated community participatory projects in Brazil, especially the construction of the Evictions Museum in the favela Vila Autódromo, in Rio de Janeiro, and has been engaged in the social movement "Stop Despejos" in Portugal. She has recently embarked on post-doctoral research on the right to housing and the Right to the City in Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra, (CES-UC), 2018–2019.

Daniel Chodorkoff is the co-founder and former executive director of the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont. For fifty years now, he has been actively committed to progressive urban and ecological movements. Chodorkoff has a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from the New School for Social Research, and was a long-time faculty member at Goddard College. He is a life-long activist living in Northern Vermont with his wife and two daughters where he gardens, writes, plays harmonica, and works on environmental justice issues. His essays on social ecology and community development have been published under the title *The Anthropology of Utopia*, and he is also author of the novel *Loisaida*.

Emet Değirmenci is a long-term social ecologist, an independent researcher in women and ecology, a writer, speaker, teacher, and forager, a re-indigenizing and rewilding enthusiast, and an ecological farm designer.

Eleanor Finley is a writer, speaker, activist, and organizer. Former Board Member at the Institute for Social Ecology (ISE), she participates in various popular education and organizing projects about libertarian municipalism. Eleanor is also a Ph.D. Student in anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research focuses on social movements for popular assemblies in a comparative and transnational perspective.

Magali Fricaudet is a French activist involved in anti-globalization and Right to the City movements. Professionally, she is a civil servant in charge of local democracy in a municipality in northern Paris. She lived in Barcelona for three years, in charge of coordinating an international network of cities for the Right to the City, UCLG Committee of Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights.

Havin Guneser is a Kurdish writer, journalist, women's rights activist, and a spokesperson for the International Initiative Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan. She is also a translator and publisher of the works of Abdullah Öcalan – the leading figure of the Kurdish liberation struggle imprisoned by the Turkish state on İmralı Island since 1999.

Metin Guven has, since the 1980s, been involved in social ecology groups and other libertarian organizations in Turkey, Australia, New Zealand, and the US. Metin was on the editorial board of the Turkish social ecology journal *Toplumsal Ekoloji*, and has also written for newspapers, magazines, and other journals.

Theodoros Karyotis is an independent researcher, translator and social activist based in Thessaloniki, Greece. Trained in sociology and social anthropology, he is active in grassroots movements practicing direct democracy, solidarity economy, and the defence and self-management of the commons. He has translated many relevant books and articles, and he is a regular op-ed contributor to roarmag.org in English and diagonalperiodico.net in Spanish. He is the coordinator of workerscontrol.net, a multilingual resource on workers' self-management, and sits on the Advisory Council of the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology.

Noel Manzano studied architecture in Spain, sociology in France, and now urban planning in Germany for his Ph.D. in the European Joint Doctorate program "UrbanHist". As an architect, he has worked on urban planning and social housing projects in Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and Barcelona. As a researcher, he has studied the conflicts over public space and urban renewal programs on the periphery of Paris, the social housing privatisation and squatting dynamics of Madrid, and, currently, the history of European informal urbanisation. Between 2014 and 2015, he studied in LeMetro, Laboratory of Metropolitan Ethnography of Rio de Janeiro. He has participated in social movements as the PAH (the Platform for Victims of Mortgages) and recently he collaborated in the birth of the Sindicat de Llogaters (Tenants' Union) of Barcelona.

Inés Morales Bernardos is a forest engineer, a specialist in agroecology and organic farming, and holds a Ph.D. in Natural Resources and Sustainable Management. Her most recent research interests are social reproduction, food politics and urban struggles with case studies in Madrid, Athens, Lisbon and Naples. Currently she collaborates with 'Surcos Urbanos', a professional initiative that works on sustainable urbanism. As an activist, she has been involved in autonomous and anarchists movements across Europe.

Brian Morris is emeritus professor of anthropology at Goldsmiths College at the University of London. He is a specialist on folk taxonomy, ethnobotany and ethnozoology, and on religion and symbolism. He has carried out fieldwork among South Asian hunter-gatherers and in Malawi. His writings include the books *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom* (1993), *The Anarchist Geographer: An Introduction to the Life of Peter Kropotkin* (2012), and *Pioneers of Ecological Humanism* (2012).

Jemma Neville has a background in human rights law and outreach. Her first book, *Constitution Street*, explores a year in the life of one street during constitutional change and an age of anxiety in Scotland and the UK. Jemma is Director of Voluntary Arts Scotland, the national development agency for community-led arts. She was the inaugural Community Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities, University of Edinburgh, and was shortlisted for the Guardian International Development Journalism Award.

Egit Pale spent his childhood in North Kurdistan, and is now a survey engineer. He was, for more than three years, on the editorial team of the Istanbul magazine *Toplum ve Kuram*. For several years Egit has been involved in the Mesopotamia Ecology Movement and, since 2016, he has also been strongly engaged in the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, a campaign against the destructive Mega Dam Ilisu on the Tigris River.

Alexandros Schismenos earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Ioannina in 2017. He is a member of the editorial team of *Babylonia* political magazine and has been an active participant in social movements since 2000. He is the author of three books and several articles published in Greece regarding contemporary social issues and political philosophy.

Marta Solanas Domínguez works as a teacher in Secondary Education, responsible for Coeducation, at Instituto Diamantino García Acosta, Sevilla. She studied architecture at Universidad de Sevilla, Spain, and finished her Ph.D. in Environmental Studies, with a thesis on cooperative

housing in Uruguay as a way of self-managing neighbourhoods (2016, UPO, Sevilla). She is a member of the research group *Estructuras y Sistemas Territoriales* (GIEST), Universidad de Sevilla. She participates as a housing rights activist at APDH–Andalucía (Human Rights) and is on the editorial board of the local journal *El Topo tabernario*.

Olli Tammilehto is an independent researcher, writer and activist. He has published ten books about global social-ecological issues including, most recently, *Stop the Progress of Devastation—The Societal Phase Shift* (Into Publishers, Helsinki 2017), in Finnish. He is a frequent contributor to various Finnish magazines and journals on global ecology, on war and peace, and on social movements and radical social change. In his lectures on environmental philosophy in the University of Helsinki during the years 1990–2001 he emphasized the approach of social ecology. For decades he has been active in various environmental movements, especially the anti-nuclear movement.

Federico Venturini is an independent activist-researcher. In 2016, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Leeds on the relations between contemporary cities and urban social movements. He holds an M.Phil. from the University of Trieste, as well as a master's degree in History and European Culture from the University of Udine, Italy. He has been a member of the Advisory Board of the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology since 2013, and the International İmralı Peace Delegation, organized by the EU–Turkey Civic Commission, since 2016.

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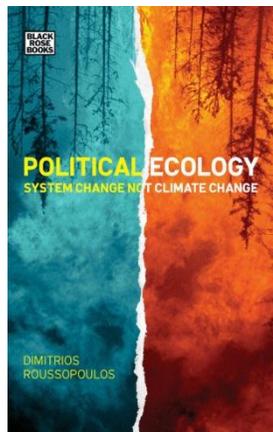**Political Ecology:**
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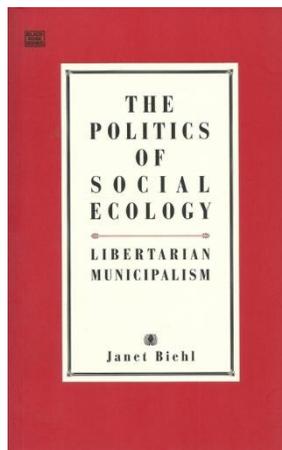
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