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The Ecological Crisis in Britain

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Sebastian Berg

Editorial: The Ecological Crisis in Britain

Sebastian Berg, Hanne Bolze and Christian Schmitt-Kilb

Ecology is widely debated. Effects of climate change are difficult to ignore – record numbers of forest fires during Central Europe's heat wave in the summer of 2022, large-scale flooding in Pakistan in August and September, but also widespread die-back of ash trees in Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. On the one hand consensus seems to have arisen, not only among professional environmentalists but also large sections of the public, that we are experiencing a climate crisis (among and interdependent with other crises, such as the acidification of oceans, the depletion of soils and species extinction) that is likely to become grimmer and end in 'climate catastrophe'. On the other, we tend to get used to rapid changes such as extremely dry summers – the photo on the title page shows the almost dried-up Fish Pond Lake in Harewood Park, Leeds, in late summer 2022. Belief in any ameliorative effects of the annual global climate summits (COPs) with their discussions of CO2 quotas, trading schemes, and declared commitments, meanwhile is in terminal decline. As a consequence, discourse has altered over the last years. Scientifically, blatant denial of climate change now has the same credibility as the teachings of racist phrenology or the ideas of the flat earth society. However, denialism has not disappeared – see the warnings against climate alarmism by Jacob Rees-Mogg, Britain's newest former Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. At the same time, denialism has been partly replaced by what Michal Mann (in *The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet*) has called "inactivism" – the attempt to convince people that climate change is not the result of the corporate policies of big companies but of our own individual actions and that, therefore, systemic change is not the solution. Why else should BP have been keen to popularize the "carbon

footprint" idea in one of the most cynic greenwashing shams in recent history?

Even though the existence of a serious crisis is now widely accepted, it remains contentious what to do with it. On the one hand, the everyday understanding of 'crisis' invites to look for easy solutions (the 1973 oil crisis could be tackled by temporarily restricting private car use, acid rain by adding catalysts to combustion engines and filters to factory chimneys, ozone layer depletion by banning chlorofluorocarbons). For some time, the equivalent easy solution for the climate crisis seemed to be green growth, green capitalism, or sustainability. On the other hand, the Gramscian view on crisis is that the old dies but the new cannot yet be born. This understanding is behind philosopher John Foster's thesis that we live in a time after sustainability as a realistic strategy to create green growth within the parameters of a high-throughput capitalism whose emissions are growing rather than being reduced. This notion, albeit presented as critique, seems to play into the hands of those who accept the enormity of environmental crisis but simply argue that dealing with it is impossible in a democratic institutional framework, or too difficult, or too expensive (which for some of them amounts to the same). Adaptation and resilience are their only realistic options. Only slightly twisted, this perspective fits with the opinion one of us recently heard a Conservative local politician expressing in England's North West: climate change might have its positive sides since it would allow climate refugees to resettle in sparsely populated Greenland rather than in crowded Britain.

Still, there are many who argue that something new could be born, provided the political will exists – claiming that dealing with the environmental crisis is a political challenge, not a technical or practical one. Those who take seriously the fact that human beings are interrelated with and dependent on not only their smartphones but the living world of this planet, have thus engaged in a rushed search for root-and-branch technological and political transformation that might appear unrealistic (although, what counts as realistic and unrealistic can quickly change as we have learned on several occasions over the last years). This applies to technological fixes such as carbon capture and storage or large-scale technotopias that aim at creating human-controlled, ai-equipped and digitised quasi-natures serving humanity's physical and ideally also cultural needs. But it might also apply to reflections on the need to skip capitalism and the capitalocene first and create a half-earth socialism or a salvage communism afterwards.

The latter might appear analytically sound and politically attractive. The question remains where the necessary revolutionary agency should come from. Everyday life and politics seem to be locked into a state of cognitive dissonance. As Green Party councillor Rob Nunney comments in this issue of Hard Times: "If you've got a problem of feeding your kids or keeping them warm, of course you're going to focus on that. You just haven't got the headspace to actually consider a massive issue such as climate breakdown." Similarly, despite the British parliament's declaration of climate emergency in 2019, there always seem to be more urgent issues filling politicians' headspaces – dealing with a pandemic, a war, a recession, a cost-of-living crisis, a gas shortage, a partying prime minister or another fighting and quitting. Solve these issues first, then go on to consider 'less pressing' environmental concerns. The proliferation of minor and major ecological disasters such as those mentioned in the beginning seems to have no discernible impact on this attitude. It is exactly this approach to environmental politics that is behind former PM Liz Truss's announcement of a new round of fracking in the UK and the fact that only four per cent of Conservative Party members saw climate policy as a top criterion when they had to choose Boris Johnson's successor.

It is our aim in this issue of Hard Times to give a couple of exemplary insights into how to understand ecological problems differently – as a most serious issue but neither as an insoluble crisis nor as one that allows to be postponed. Such an understanding has two dimensions. On the one hand it concerns our thinking about nature (or human beings' environment, or the planet and its non-human living world) and on the other our attempts to intervene and to act in order to protect, to maintain, and to support it via political, educational or other (including 'theoretical') practice. Hence the issue begins with Brendan Prendiville's historical overview on environmentalist activism in Britain, focusing in particular on the important roles social movements and the Green Party have played for a long time. Leo Grabowski's contribution takes issue with the claim made by, for example, philosopher Roger Scruton, that conservatism is the 'natural home' of environmentalism, and discusses the exploitation of environmentalism for projects closer to the Conservative Party's heart. Hence this article sheds light on the problems that emerge when environmentalism meets institutional and party politics. Kylie Crane's reflective text is an invitation to rethink our specific individual relationship with the non-human living world and our positions in the Anthropocene from a variety of perspectives inspired

by cultural and postcolonial studies. Hanne Bolze introduces a couple of recently published children's books that encourage young readers to contemplate climate change, which is to massively influence their lives, and help them find both personal and political responses to it. Among other things, she raises questions on the anthropocentric or ecocentric perspectives that these texts suggest, questions that in different form are also raised by radical environmental activists. Alexander Kurunczi looks into one of their groups, Extinction Rebellion, that has provoked antagonism and anger but also experienced a high level of support in Britain with their recent non-violent direct action 'rebellions'. He calls for an activist practice, which prioritises a form of solidarity that reaches beyond humanity, but also for solidarity among humans (internationally, since XR sees itself as a global movement, and in Britain), reminding us of important questions of environmental justice (that come up in Grabowski's, Crane's and Nunney's reflections too). The last two contributions zoom in on two cities. Tina Pusse advocates local initiatives and local politics as an arena in which practical changes can be implemented. Using the example of Galway, she shows ways of rethinking and reorganising cities that go beyond smart city scenarios and engage for example in rewilding exercises and can possibly provide ideas, insights, and practical experiences to be used in wider contexts and in larger schemes. Rob Nunney, in an interview, gives insights into his experiences as a Green Party city councillor in Manchester – the city, it could be argued, in which industrialism, the ideology of the benefit of economic and industrial growth based on increasing material throughputs, was first translated into practice. He reflects on the chances and limits of dealing with the destruction of the environment and with climate change in municipal politics in general and in the context of a massive Labour Party majority on the city council in particular.

To conclude: all contributions share the perception that humans are in danger of losing much more than their chains (in some cases, golden shackles) – the less privileged their lives, the more privileged their relationship with and access to the non-human living world. If there is hope for saving and reconstructing an ecological system in which humans can co-exist with this world, this might happen via practical interventions into as many different political institutions, debates and struggles as possible, and in simultaneous critical reflection on them. With this issue we try to make a modest contribution to this task.

Political Ecology and Environmentalism in Britain

Brendan Prendiville

In this broad-ranging overview on the history of environmentalism in Britain, Brendan Prendiville (Rennes) analyses the different waves of ecological activism in Britain. He shows that environmentalism has followed the typical life cycle of social movements and was more visible during times of either radical socio-economic change or as consequence of concrete (often disastrous) events occurring in people's immediate environment and showing them the living world's and their own vulnerability. At other times, environmentalism lay dormant but did not disappear completely. The account thus shows both the continuity of green thinking and activism in Britain but also the differences in terms of activist movements' social composition and action repertoires.

Like many social movements, British environmentalism has moved in and out of history, becoming more or less visible depending on the social and environmental circumstances. Environmental groups and associations have existed in Britain since the 17th century[1] but in all that time, three periods stand out in terms of intensity, activity and support: the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, the late 1960s to the late 1980s and the early-1990s up to the present. These three periods, like the less active periods between them, are of course all part of an environmentalist continuum and there is considerable overlap between them in terms of narrative and action[2].

Victorian Environmentalism

The Victorian environmentalists represent the first organised opposition to industrialisation and the society it was creating. Albeit small in numbers, they were active on different fronts, such as urban development, pollution, access to the countryside and conservation-preservation.

According to environmental historians, the first private environmental group to be formed in Britain was the Commons Preservation Society (CPS)[3] whose stated aim it was to protect green spaces in and around London from development projects. This was the first tangible sign of a change in mentality towards the environment in Britain, at time when economic development was seen as an important factor of human progress.

The quality of Victorian life in the new urban areas was heavily impacted by the rise in the use of coal. "King Coal", as it became known, powered the industrial revolution within the country and then around the world, prompting popular identification of the national energy source with the imperial success of Britain. However, Britain's reliance on coal had serious environmental consequences. This seemingly obvious observation in the 21st century was anything but up to the mid-19th century, when coal was still considered, somewhat paradoxically, to be beneficial in health terms. Coal smoke was perceived as a disinfectant to miasma because "[the] carbon and sulphur it contained were seen as fumigants that could neutralize miasma" (Thorsheim 2006, 17). It was only with the accumulation of medical evidence in the second half of the 19th century, proving coal smoke was causing many respiratory illnesses and deaths and even damaging buildings (*i.e.* property), that coal burning was redefined as a major polluting source.

For those people who wanted to get out of town to breathe the fresh country air, and who could afford to do so, there was another problem of access to the countryside, given that much non-cultivated land was not accessible to the public. Even before the Victorian environmentalists appeared, there existed many ramblers clubs around the country. These clubs were principally located in the North of England and often situated in areas close to big towns where there were hills to walk up, and later, to cycle on. They were a reflection of the urban workers' desire and need to get out of the insalubrious cities at the weekends, but they often came up against the landowners' similarly strong desire to keep people off their property[4].

Conservationism[5] has long been an important strand of British environmentalism, illustrated as early as 1789 by the publication of Gilbert White's famous *Natural History of Selbourne*. A century later, the founding of the Selbourne Society for the Protection of Birds, Plants and Pleasant Places (1885) was both a tribute to White's ground-breaking work and a reflection of the increasing interest in natural history in late 19th century Britain. This interest could also be seen in the proli-

feration of "numerous local field clubs to promote the study of archaeology and natural history" around the country (Lowe and Goyder 1983, 18).

Perhaps the most well-known legacy of Victorian environmentalism is the National Trust (1895) which, today, is the largest organisation of its type in Britain by far, boasting a membership of just under six million members in 2020[6]. In many ways, the National Trust brought the concerns of different environmental campaigns together, which may explain its lasting appeal. Firstly, the campaign for access to the countryside, an issue which the CPS and the different ramblers' groups had been promoting for some time; secondly, the need to conserve natural resources as seen in the aforementioned local natural history societies and, thirdly, the concerns of preservationists[7] who, like the poet William Wordsworth, went to great lengths to preserve the beauty of places such as the Lake District in North West England.

Overall, Victorian environmentalism was a very diverse affair which had its strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths lay in its tightly-knit structure whereby activists saw each other frequently and built up a dynamic movement, albeit with few members. Its weakness was in the limits of its social sphere, restricted as it was, principally, to the upper classes. Nineteenth-century Britain had a very rigid class structure and the environmental movement was a reflection of this social reality. In retrospect, it appeared as a small environmental "Establishment" made up of aristocrats, church people and the upper-middle classes - people who had entry into the upper echelons of British society, which made their task easier. This comfortable social background no doubt influenced the tactics and ideological intensity of the Victorian environmentalists, who were not inclined to upset the social or political status quo. For the most part, they preferred tactics of persuasion to protest,[8] working through lobbies or the courts.

Modern Environmentalism

The 1960s in Britain was a time of great social change in which the new social category of "youth" was discovered, a group that harboured different tastes, aspirations and behaviour to mainstream society (Prendiville 1998). In terms of environmental politics, thinkers such as the California-based German philosopher Herbert Marcuse became an inspiration for many young people by putting into question modern technology, which he believed was standardising and dehumanising human beings more than it was liberating them (Marcuse 1969). In the British context, the economist

E.J. Mishan was equally radical, and prescient, in questioning the creed of economic growth, the Holy Grail for mainstream politicians and economists (Mishan 1979). Both of these writers were criticising modern society not simply for its form but also its content in terms of what the society produced, how it produced it and what it consumed. In other words, Marcuse, Mishan and the environmentalists were not only concerned with (re)distribution of wealth but also with production and consumption processes.

A second interesting aspect of 1960s youth culture was the counterculture. Sometimes called the "underground", the 1960s' counterculture was a marginal social phenomenon which consisted in mainly middle-class children rejecting mainstream social norms. More significant, in terms of the environment at least, was the new vision of the environment which it embraced, that is, the environment not seen purely as a natural entity but as a multi-faceted reality. Caring for the environment did not simply mean building nature reserves, but also concerned economic and social systems, along with the narrative that supported them, and which were seen as causing environmental problems. For example, the alternative newspaper of the 1960s, *International Times,* criticised the "depletion of the earth's natural resources to satisfy artificially created cravings" (Denslow 1990, 96), reflecting its opinion that Western lifestyle was built on exploiting limited natural resources and excessive consumption.[9] Put another way, at the beginning of the 1970s, a significant part of British youth had a more holistic perception of the environment and the environmentalist movement was at a turning point. Social change had produced a different type of activist with different values who was more willing to protest and contest official decisions than their Victorian forefathers. As a result, the environmentalism of this period was of a different kind in terms of organisation, action and narrative, as illustrated by its two most famous groups, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. During the period 1971-1991, the growth in membership of both groups, along with other more longstanding environmental groups in Britain, was phenomenal (Table 1):

Table 1: Membership of selected UK environmental organisations

	1971	1981	1991
National Trust	278,000	1,046,000	2,152,000
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	98,000	441,000	852,000
WWF	12,000	60,000	227,000
Greenpeace		30,000	312,000
Friends of the Earth	1,000	18,000	111,000

Source: Carter 2001 (adapted), 133.

The narrative that accompanied these new environmentalists was based principally on two interrelated concerns: *i.e.* the limits to human action on the environment and the type of socio-economic development. In terms of the former, the 1972 publication of *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al.) came to incarnate the environmentalist belief that the Western model of post-war Fordism was coming to an end. In terms of the latter, the concern was to create an alternative type of socio-economic development illustrated by the concept of sustainability, which can be divided into the five components of environmental protection, ecological modernisation, quality of life, socio-environmental justice, and decision-making (Jacobs 1996, Christie and Warburton 2001). These five components are interconnected and there is much overlap between them.

As we have seen, environmental protection is a longstanding concern of environmentalism. However, during this period, the arguments and the form of campaigning evolved considerably, as illustrated by the Brent Spar campaign[10]. In 1991, this oil platform was declassified and Shell informed the British government that it would be sunk to the west of the Shetland Islands, a solution accepted by the government. Greenpeace, however, did not accept this decision and occupied the platform for three weeks (30 April–23 May), preventing the platform from being towed to its sea grave. It did this for different reasons: firstly, to protest against possible pollution; secondly, to prevent this becoming a precedent for other companies; thirdly, to show that the sea was not a dustbin and, fourthly, as a lesson to the wider public that pollution is part and parcel of our modern economy and that companies need to change their behaviour in

the same way as citizens should. On the level of environmental strategy, it also demonstrated that it was possible to modify governmental decisions if popular support was behind the action.

"Ecological modernisation" is the term used to describe the need for environmental and economic concerns to be reconciled with each other or, as John Drykek maintains, it is "the restructuring of the capitalist political economy along more environmentally defensible lines" (Drykek 1997, 145). This integration of the environment within the capitalist economy can take different forms, such as "green markets" or "green fiscal policy". In 2001, for example, PM Tony Blair declared: "We have led the way in integrating environmental and economic goals within a liberalised electricity market."[11] The Blair governments were also supportive of green fiscal policy such as the 1999 UK Climate Change Levy, whereby a tax on the industrial use of energy was levied to encourage a decline in fossil fuel-based energy as well as lowering National Insurance payments.

The third component of sustainability concerns the quality of life. In Western liberal countries, economic growth remains the most commonly used measurement of a society's progress and success. The higher it is, so the theory goes, the wealthier people are and the better their quality of life. In the run-up to modern environmentalism however, British economist E.J. Mishan had a different perspective on this, claiming that "the continued

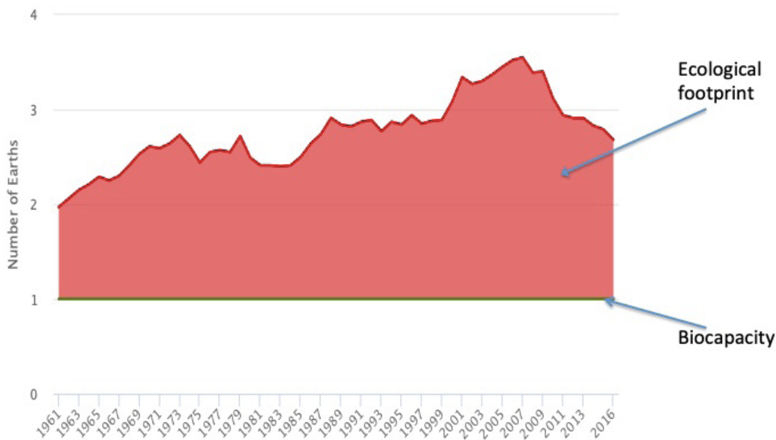

Figure 1: Ecological footprint (UK 1961–2012) [12]

pursuit of economic growth by Western societies is more likely on balance to reduce rather than increase social welfare" (Mishan 1979, 219). The environmentalists are also critical of economic growth in environmental as well as social terms. Environmentally, the limits to growth are increasingly visible, as the UK's ecological footprint illustrates (Figure 1).

Socially speaking, E.J. Mishan's comment, whereby economic growth could be accompanied by decreasing social welfare, was validated in the UK during the 1980s. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the British economy's growth in terms of GDP was high up to the end of the decade (Figure 2)…

… but so were inequality (Figure 3) and homelessness (Jacobs 1996).

The fourth component in the sustainable equation is the need to put an end to social and environmental injustice. In terms of the former, despite being the fifth richest country in the world[15],"more than one in five of the UK population (22%) are in poverty - 14.5 million people"[16] and the re-appearance of food banks in the UK is another sign of an unsustainable society[17]. The link between poverty and an unhealthy environment was revealed in a ground-breaking study of 2001[18] and, more recently, a study published in

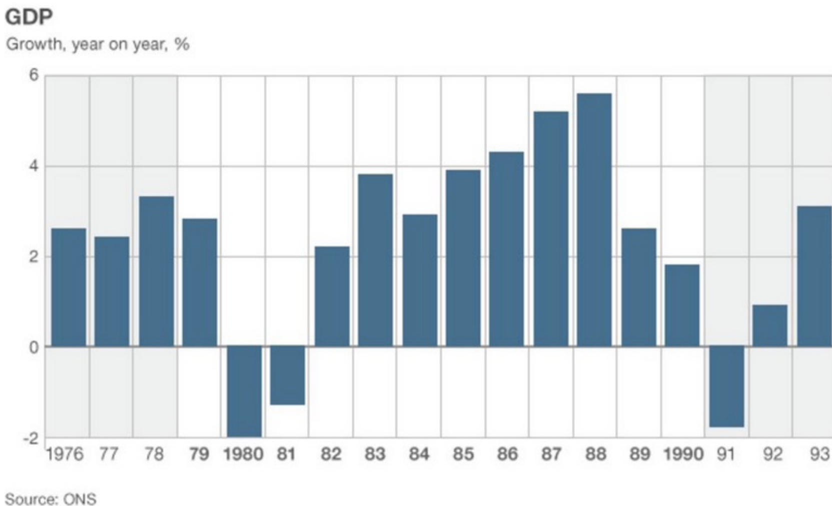

Figure 2: GDP (UK 1976–1993)[13]

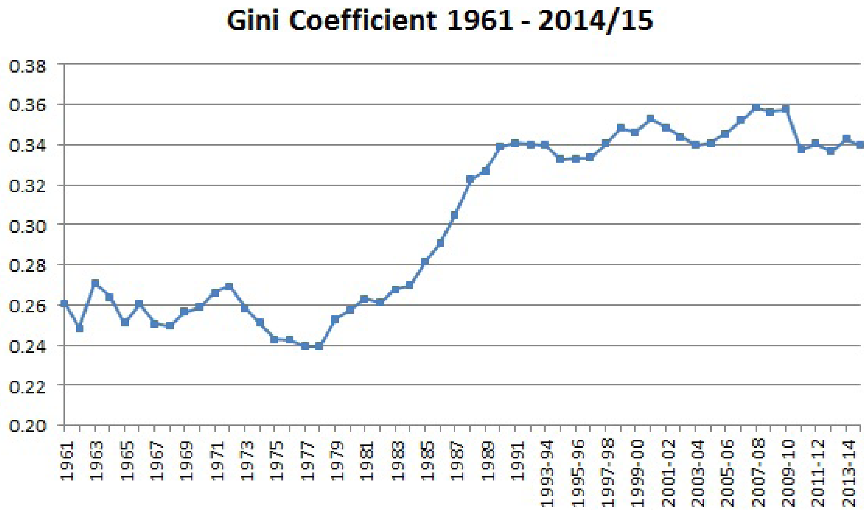

Figure 3: Income inequality (UK 1961–2014/15)[14]

2015 found that "[the] most deprived 20% neighbourhoods in England had statistically significant higher PM10 and NO2 concentrations after adjustment compared to the least deprived 20%" (Fecht et al. 2015, 201–210).[19]

The final dimension of sustainability is political and lies in the possibility (or not) for ordinary people to be informed of and to participate in decisions that affect their local environment. This can be seen in terms of the need for a form of environmental citizenship, or eco-citizenship, creating environmental rights to supplement the social rights citizens have won throughout history. Such rights were created by the European Union in 1998[20].

These five aspects of sustainability make up the narrative of modern environmentalism that goes beyond that of the Victorian environmentalists in examining the root causes of environmental damage and finding them in the socio-economic system of Western countries.

Ecologism/Political Ecology[21]

Andrew Dobson describes the distinction between (modern) environmentalism and ecologism in the following way: *The principal difference between the two is that ecologism argues that care for the environment . . . presupposes radical changes in our relationship with it, and thus in our mode of social*

and political life. Environmentalism, on the other hand, would argue for a "managerial" approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption. (Dobson 1990, 13)

Political ecologists put forward an alternative, ecocentric[22] vision of society and politics, examples of which can be seen in the radical environmentalism of the 1990s and in the more institutional form of the Green Party.

Green movement

British environmentalism became more radical[23] in the early 1990s, reflecting a wider form of generational political frustration that went beyond environmentalism but within which the environmentalist dimension was an important factor (Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). The younger environmentalists of this early post-Thatcher period were disenchanted with institutional politics in general & green politics in particular. So for many environmentalists, there was a kind of political void at the beginning of the 1990s into which stepped the group Earth First! (UK).[24] Its strategy was based on "the use of direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants".[25] The most significant of these protests was against the Conservative government's road building plan, first formulated in a White Paper of 1989, *Roads for Prosperity* (Department of Transport),[26] which gave rise to large mobilisations around the country over a period of five years. More recently, similar action repertoires can be seen in the country-wide fracking protests in opposition to the Conservative government's plans to drill for shale gas, which began in 2011 and continue up to this day.

Radical environmentalism, however, is not purely a question of adopting more confrontational strategies but also of demonstrating the importance of what has been termed "lifestyle politics", that is a form of "ecologist praxis"[27] whereby activists live out their environmentalist paradigm in the here and now by linking everyday life to political activity. During the road protests, for example, be it in the countryside or in the inner cities, camps were set up in which eco-protesters (called "eco-warriors" by the media) led an ecological lifestyle in a communal setting for the time the camp was allowed to exist by the powers that be. These camps became known as "Temporary Autonomous Zones" (TAZ) within which "do-it-yourself" (DIY)[28] political action became the norm.

Green Party Billboard (ernie nell CC BY 2.0)

Green Party

The British Greens[29] could be seen as the official face of political ecology, and not simply because it is a recognised political party. It also holds a similar ecocentric vision to the radical environmentalists, accompanied by an alternative political narrative. This is not to suggest that the environmentalist movement is the social movement wing of the Green Party any more than the Green Party is the political wing of environmentalism, radical or modern. However, there is a certain degree of axiological and political convergence between them.

Greens in many European countries, such as France or Germany, have made efforts to remain close to the wider environmentalist movement with varying success, depending on the period. Indeed, the UK Green Party was founded in 1973 in the wake of a failed attempt by the then recently founded (1970) *The Ecologist* magazine to create an environmentalist movement (Prendiville 2014). Subsequently, the British Greens seemed in two minds as to whether they really wanted to be a political party or whether they preferred to remain on the fringes of the political system. In 1995, Lynn Bennie et al. revealed that the Green Party members' ideology was a very diverse affair, revolving around four dimensions. Firstly "there was a left-anarchist dimension, characterised by a strong emphasis on social justice issues combined with demands for party decentralisation and a preference for Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA)". The second was a "decentralist dimension that is associated with a bio-centrist ideological outlook", which reflected a "certain reluctance to become involved in 'politics' of either the electoralist or direct action type", while the third and fourth dimensions were both electoralist in character (Bennie et al., 1995, 217–239).

Two years later, Paul Byrne was of the opinion that the Green Party was *in many ways much more akin to a social movement than a conventional political party . . . Its members are clearly primarily motivated by their beliefs, rather than the pursuit of power, and both its ideology and its organisation are at odds with the prevailing values of the political system and culture—the classic traits of a social movement.* (Byrne 1997, 150–157) And more recently, Sarah Birch maintained that the Greens still held an "anti-establishment philosophy of politics that views elections, representation and even parties themselves somewhat askance " (Birch 2008, 53–71).

These comments, spanning two decades and more, are a reflection of the long-running internal conflict among the Greens concerning the political direction their party should take. Sara Parkin saw it as a struggle between the "centralists and decentralists" (Parkin 1989, 222)[30] while Paul Byrne used the terms "realists or electoralists" and "fundamentalists" (Byrne 1997, 155). For much of the general public and the media, by the 1990s, British Green Party politics had become synonymous with minority party factional infighting and was, as such, of little interest. For the party members however, this infighting was an existential struggle over the *raison d'être* of their political party. "Mixed up in it was confusion about the actual role of the party – should it be contesting elections at all, or concentrating on campaigns and actions? Was party political activity an ecological activity in the first place?" (Parkin 1989, 222) This debate consumed a large part of the Greens' energies during the 1980s and 1990s and was resolved with a compromise strategy of firstly focusing on local elections with a view to obtaining a parliamentary seat in the medium to long-term. In 2010, the Green Party obtained their

No Fracking Way, pressenza, www.pressenza.com

first MP when Caroline Lucas won the Brighton Pavilion parliamentary seat, illustrating the apparent success of the electoralist strategy. However, the "radical Green agenda"[31] remains a part of the Greens' "Philosophical Basis" (PB), as does the call for "non-violent direct action" (NVDA) as an element of Green strategy. Moreover, as we have seen, the Greens' wish "to be part of a wider green movement"[32] and to retain their radical ecologist edge has been illustrated in their active support of the anti-fracking movement in the UK, along with the arrest of certain high-profile members.[33]

British political ecology, therefore, attempts to bring together a radical ecologist narrative and practice. At one end of the spectrum there is the group Earth First! (UK) which acts as a kind of ecologist avant-garde, manning the barriers against ecological damage of all kinds and putting into practice DIY lifestyle politics.[34] At the other end of the ecologist spectrum is the Green Party, which has a foot in both civil society and political society, and whose language and actions are, correspondingly, tamer. However, both of these organisations share an ecocentric vision whereby the natural environment has value outside of its usefulness to humans (*i.e.* it has intrinsic value) and should be protected for its own sake.[35]

Conclusion

This chapter was intended as an overview of British environmentalism and, given the timescale, classification is of the essence. We decided to adopt a three-fold classification which revealed dominant themes and action repertoires within each of these three phases:

Firstly, Victorian environmentalism, which can be seen as the first environmentalist reaction to the perceived damage caused by industrialisation, even if, as we have seen, other concerns were present (*e.g.* access to the countryside).

Secondly, modern environmentalism, which revolved around the debate on limits to growth and the concept of sustainability.

And thirdly, political ecology/ecologism, putting forward an alternative, ecocentric model for society.

As stated in the introduction, there is much overlap between the different phases of British environmentalism we have singled out, just as there is overlap in any social movement. That is to say, the aforementioned dominant themes and action repertoires were not exclusive to the periods in question, simply the ones that stood out and could be seen as defining features. For

example, during Victorian environmentalism, the main form of action was lobbying the government or going through the courts to prevent environmental damage. There were certain instances of direct action such as pulling down fences to allow ramblers access to pathways[36] but those were exceptions to the rule for a movement that, in the main, respected the social and political status quo. The modern environmentalists, on the other hand, brought direct action into the mainstream but were not averse either to more traditional methods such as lobbying the government. In fact, they became so good at it that, in the 1990s, the new generation of political ecologists believed their environmentalist forefathers had "sold out" to the "Establishment". As a result, they introduced another, more radical, dimension to British environmentalism, without breaking completely with what preceded them, as the presence of the Green Party illustrates. So, in retrospect, each of these phases was adding another layer of ideas and tactics to the evolving historical movement of British environmentalism.

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Endnotes

1 David Evans (1992, 34) traces interest in the natural environment back to The Temple Coffee House Botanic Club, founded in 1689.

2 Another way of visualising these three periods is that of concentric circles widening the sphere and influence of environmentalism over time.

3 Descriptions differ: Dwyer and Hodge (1996, 71) call the CPS a "preservation organisation", Pepper, "the oldest national environment group" (1996, 218), and Marsh, "the first and foremost conservation body" (1982, 39). The CPS today goes under the name of The Open Spaces Society.

4 The public's 'right to roam'

on private property in England remains an issue today as the Conservative Government's recent decision not to extend this right indicates (see https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/20/fears-over-right-to-roam-in-england-as-ministers-wind-up-review).

5 Conservationism: "An approach to land management that emphasises the efficient conservation of natural resources so that they can later be developed for the benefit of society" (Carter 2001, xvii).

6 5.95m in 2019/20 (https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/fascinating-facts-and-figures.

7 Preservationism: "An approach based on an attitude of reverence towards nature, especially wilderness, that advocates the protection of a resource from any form of development" (Carter 2001, xix).

8 This does not mean there was no protest (Sutton 2004, 38) but rather that it was the exception to the rule.

9 Other examples of this environmentalist critique could be found in the music associated with the counterculture such as "When the music's over" (The Doors, *Strange Days*, 1967) or "Big Yellow Taxi" (Joni Mitchell, *Ladies of the Canyon*, 1970).

10 Brent Spar (owned by Shell plc) was one of the 400 oil platforms in the North Sea in operation since the 1960s.

11 http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080909042016/http://www.number gov.uk/Page1583.

12 www.footprintnetwork.org.

13 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22070491.

14 http:// https://economics.stackexchange.com/questions/13097/are-there-data-for-the-evolution-of-global-economic-inequality

15 https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/

16 https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/overall-uk-poverty-rates

17 https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/

18 Friends of the Earth. 2001. *Pollution and Poverty—Breaking the Link*. London: Friends of the Earth.

19 PM10: particulate matter 10 micrometres or less in diameter; NO2: Nitrogen dioxide.

20 https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aar-

hus-convention/introduction

21 The two terms are interchangeable in this chapter, as they are in A. Dobson's book (1991).

22 Ecocentrism: "A mode of thought that regards humans as subject to ecological and systems laws and whose ethical, political and social prescriptions are concerned with both humans and non-humans" (Carter 2001, xvii).

23 It is important to point out that "more radical" is not synonymous with "more violent". In British political ecology, non-violence is a fundamental value.

24 Earth First! (UK) was founded in 1991 by Jake Burbridge and Jason Torrance (Wall 1999, 46).

25 https://earthfirst.org.uk/actionreports/whatisef.

26 On the anti-roads protests, see Prendiville 2002a.

27 We use the term "praxis" here in the Gramscian sense of "uniting of theory of practice, thought and action, subject and object" (Boggs 1976, 17).

28 George McKay saw DIY protest in the 1990s as a form of counterculture, defining it as "a youth-centred and -directed cluster of interests and practices around green radicalism, direct action politics, new musical sounds and experiences" (McKay 1998, 2).

29 We will use the Green Party or the Greens interchangeably in this section.

30 At the time, Sara Parkin was a prominent member of the Greens but she resigned in 1992 (Burchell 2002, 114–117). A former nurse, she held "high-profile leadership roles in the UK Green Party and brokered and led The European Green Coordination, now the European Green Party". She then co-founded Forum for the Future with Jonathon Porritt and Paul Ekins (http://saraparkin.org/about/).

31 https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/philosophical-basis.html (PB111).

32 Green Party website: "Strategy" (PB501).

https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/philosophical-basis.html.

33 In August 2013, Green Party co-leader Caroline Lucas was arrested in Balcombe; in July 2017, Gina Dowding, Green County Councillor, was arrested at a fracking protest in Lancashire (http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-40497515) and in November of the same year, Jona-

than Bartley, Green Party co-leader, was forcibly removed from a fracking site in Yorkshire whilst giving a speech to anti-fracking campaigners

(https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/green-party-joint-leader-jonathan-bartley-dragged-along-road-by-police-at-yorkshire-fracking-protest-a3688386.html).

34 These lifestyle politics have an important function in introducing a cultural dimension into political ecology.

35 Greens: "The Green Party recognises the limits of humanity's powers to observe and understand natural processes and therefore recognises the necessity for protecting biodiversity for its own sake. The maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity is demonstrably beneficial to all life on earth, not just humans." (PB205) https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/philosophical-basis.html; Earth First!: "All natural things have intrinsic value, inherent worth [. . .] They are. They exist. For their own sake." (Radcliffe 2002, 196).

36 For example, in the Lake District during the 1880s. See Ranlett 1983.

Facing the UK's Historical Responsibility for Climate Change

with the Conservative Party in Government(?)

Leo Grabowski

Under much pressure to deliver on their Brexit promises, Boris Johnson and his Conservative Cabinet put environmental protection and tackling climate change very high on the agenda. While this is not the first time the Tories attempt to champion green conservatism, Boris Johnson declared the UK the world-leading country in environmentalism and the fight against global warming. In this article, Leo Grabowski (Bochum) examines the substance behind the rhetoric and evaluates the Conservatives' historical record on environmentalism in its interrelationship with their social policies and global projects.

Conservative Climate Leadership?

The Conservative government and especially the PM Boris Johnson seem not to get tired of praising their own efforts to fight climate change and environmental pollution. In fact, Boris Johnson used his speech at the COP26 in Glasgow to claim and emphasize the UK's leadership role on the world stage and to position the UK at the forefront of "the fightback against climate change" and "a green industrial revolution." And indeed, if you listen to Conservatives presenting their track record, you may get the impression that the UK has done remarkably well at environmental protection and that its targets to combat climate change are highly ambitious. Traditionally, the environment has not been the most important issue for the Conservative Party, and it is probably still not the first thing that comes to many people's mind when thinking of the Tories. However, in recent years the Conservative Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had some surprising environmental plans including challenges to farming subsidies, CCTV cameras in slaughterhouses and tougher penalties

for animal cruelty, the banning of ivory sales, campaigns against plastic bottles and bags, a ban on insect-harming pesticides (which has already been revoked by Gove's successor George Eustice in January 2021), and even the prospect of a post-Brexit 'green revolution' with sheer endless opportunities for the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra), as if the minimum environmental protection standards of the EU had kept the UK from tougher environmental commitments the years and decades before.

This is the context for the transformation Boris Johnson underwent from climate change sceptic (with a well-documented history of cynicism about climate science) to a seemingly enthusiastic advocate of green policies. Just in time for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), Johnson and Alok Sharma unveiled their *Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution*. In this article, I will focus on a prominent narrative in this *Ten Point Plan*, which also figures prominently in governmental rhetoric in recent times. I am referring to the claims that thanks to the Conservative Party the UK has been, is, and will be the world-leading nation when it comes to green technologies and environmentalism. Throughout the *Ten Point Plan* you find this narrative more than a dozen times, for instance in the following quotes: "Britain will lead the world into a new Green Industrial Revolution", "[…] Britain's world-leading expertise in green finance and innovation" or "Britain is already leading the way. Over the last 30 years, we have shown that economic success and environmental responsibility go hand in hand", "pioneering world-leading SuperPlaces that unite clean industry with transport and power", "to invest in making the UK a global leader in green technologies", "Britain as a leader in the green technologies", "Our action will cement our position as a global leader in aerospace", or "We will harness the international reputation of the UK's world leading financial sector to encourage private investment into supporting innovation and manage climate financial risk."[1]

According to this *Plan*, there is basically no environmentalist field where the UK is not the pioneering and/or leading nation. Another crucial part of this narrative is the claim that mainly Conservatives are responsible for the UK's leading position in the world and will make sure that it stays that way, because conservation and conservatism are "natural allies", as Theresa May put it in her Prime Minister's speech on the environment at the London Wetland Centre in 2018, praising her party's "proud heritage" regarding environmental protection. Let's have a closer look at what is problematic and

contradictory with this narrative and the rhetoric behind it.

Not Quite!

First of all, it should be pointed out that British politics is not as divided over climate policies as for the example its US counterpart. Unlike Republicans in the US, Conservative MPs by and large seem to accept the scientific consensus and have for example adopted net zero legislation or declared climate emergency in the House of Commons. This shifts the problem from accepting climate science in the first place to the question how committed Conservatives are to achieve climate and environmental protection goals. This is where the contradictions with the "proud heritage" of the Conservative Party begin. The Conservative track record on climate and environmental action is not as impressive as its portrayal. For example, a 2019 survey conducted by *The Guardian* in collaboration with the investigative environmental journalism group *DeSmog UK*, which rated MPs based on sixteen parliamentary votes since 2008, found out that Conservative MPs were significantly less likely to vote for climate action or environmental protection than MPs from other parties. Boris Johnson, who is acting as climate and environment champion now, received the worst possible environmental score of 0% among dozens of other Conservative MPs, while his cabinet scored 17% on average compared to the Labour shadow cabinet's average score of 90%. In contrast, Jeremy Corbyn scored 92%, the same result as Caroline Lucas, the only MP for the Green Party (Watts and Duncan, 2019). The Tories claimed that this sort of survey failed to constitute a legitimate way to determine MPs' green credentials. Apparently, for Conservative MPs, 'green rhetoric' is more important than green action or green voting.

This is confirmed by what many scientists, climate activists and environmental advisers say: Conservative governments lack serious commitments or plans to achieve their own climate goals. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the UK basically hasn't met any of its own legally binding obligations and limits since the Conservatives came to office in 2010 and it is almost unavoidable at this point that most environmental targets will be missed in the next years (Howard et al., 2019). Reiterating claims and insisting that "[t]he Conservatives have taken *world-leading* action to tackle climate change" with "manageable targets" (Laville and Taylor, 2019), like the former environment secretary Theresa Villiers, is just pointless if those targets are never met and especially if no real consequences follow from not meeting them.

It also sends interesting messages that since 2019 Conservatives have received £1.3m in donations from oil companies and businesses with links to Russian energy tycoons, airports, petrostates (UAE, Qatar and Bahrain) and climate-sceptic thinktanks like the *Global Warming Policy Foundation* (GWPF) (Thévoz and Williams, 2021). They also received £420k from businesses with interests in North Sea oil which could explain the continued support for drilling in the North Sea (Collett-White, 2021). These donations might also explain why Conservative governments take a stand for airport and road expansions or send mixed signals over plans for a new coal-fired power station or a possible end to the UK's moratorium on fracking.

New Green Conservatism

The first Tory to put environmental issues on the Conservative Party's agenda was David Cameron. In 2005, he introduced environmentalism to a Conservative Party that had previously shown little interest in the topic. However, Cameron and his advisers wanted to rid the Conservatives of their poor environmental reputation in an attempt to modernise the party for the 21st century. Under Margaret Thatcher, the UK had become known as the 'dirty man of Europe' for its pollution load and for its neglect of tackling the environmental problems of the time (pollution of seas and rivers, acid precipitation, waste disposal, etc.) despite emerging international initiatives. It was only in 1988 amid rising public and international concern for environmental issues that Thatcher half-heartedly acknowledged and addressed the serious threats climate change, ozone holes and environmental destruction posed. Her successor John Major did not make much of a difference. Not even the crushing election defeat in 1997 prompted a change of course for Cameron's predecessors. On this basis, it did not seem very promising to attack the New Labour government on their own at best mediocre record on environmental issues (cf. Carter, 2009).

In 2005 and 2006 however, things changed drastically. Cameron announced an unparalleled campaign with a much stronger focus on the environment and promised to initiate a 'green revolution' for the UK. This campaign, echoing earlier catchphrases and promises, was prominently accompanied by the slogan 'Vote Blue, Go Green' and the replacement of the old red, white and blue 'torch of freedom' logo with an oak tree with green leaves and a blue trunk. This new logo was meant to visibly symbolise the integration of environmental politics into the party line. In the following years, Cameron's public appearance can be characterised as an effort to sell and

advertise his new 'green conservatism', famously for instance with his trip to a glacier in Norway, apparently in order to witness the impact of global warming first hand, or his decision to go to the Parliament by bike, having a wind turbine installed on his house etc. (cf. ibid.)

Apart from such symbolic acts, Cameron also rhetorically emphasised his commitment for the environment in numerous speeches. Before flying back from Norway, he publicly declared: "I believe that tackling climate change is a key part of my ambition for the Conservative Party to lead a new green revolution. […] I know that eyebrows have been raised in some quarters by the prominence which I have given to environmental issues ever since I became Leader of the Opposition." (Speech in Oslo, Norway on 21 Apr 2006)

The question is indeed: why the sudden policy shift? When Cameron started the campaign in late 2005, only 6% of voters ranked pollution and the environment amongst the most important issues facing Britain, according to Ipsos-Mori polls. As mentioned above the reason was largely tactical and part of a broader modernisation initiative for the Conservative Party. "The primary strategic aim was 'brand decontamination': to expunge the image of the Conservatives as a 'nasty party' by embracing a set of 'caring' issues, including the environment." (Carter, 2009, p. 234) It was also a chance to get rid of the reputation as a party that would always put business interests over the wider public good. Besides, this repaint was meant to appeal to younger voters and women supporting LibDems and Labour. In addition, Cameron focused on making environmental protection attractive for the traditional conservative support base by connecting conservatism and conservation with values like patriotism, responsibility for future generations etc., similar to the 'green conservatism' Theresa May referred to later.

While Cameron's promises were strong in rhetoric and good publicity when in opposition, they turned out to be short-lived and inconsistent once he was in power (cf. Carter and Clements, 2015). As Prime Minister, he would appoint a fierce opponent of wind farms as junior energy minister and in 2013 he infamously demanded his government officials 'get rid of all the green crap' (green levies and regulations) for supposedly pushing up energy prices (Sparrow, 2013). The impact of Cameron's government scrapping the 'green crap' is still felt today with recent calculations concluding that energy bills in the UK could be almost

£2.5bn lower than they are if "spending on energy-efficiency improvements and introducing the 'green deal' efficiency scheme" (Evans, 2022) hadn't been cut off in 2013. Moreover, Cameron kept quiet about "the growth of climate science denial in his own party" (Green Alliance, 2013, p.10).

Boris Johnson Enters the Stage

After 2013, the environment played only a minor role in Conservative manifestos, so the question is why Boris Johnson (and to a lesser extent also Theresa May) picked up on the issue again. In fact, he has not just picked up on it but rather made it one of the main political issues of his premiership, fuelling expectations for government and even aiming higher than David Cameron, if only rhetorically. The reasons for this are, as I will show, purely strategic and economic. In the aftermath of Brexit, few British politicians were and are as much under pressure as Boris Johnson to deliver on his promise that the UK will be better off and more successful outside the European Union. He surely sees a great opportunity: in the years to come many countries around the world will be urged to implement environmentally sustainable legislation and technologies, potentially in search of guidance and a country with a forerunner role as partner. A leading position for the UK as a global champion in the fight against climate change will be a big advantage and make the country a much more attractive partner for other nations in its search for new trade deals around the globe. Based on an economic rationale, it thus makes a lot of sense to establish and portray the UK as *the* progressive force in environmentalism.

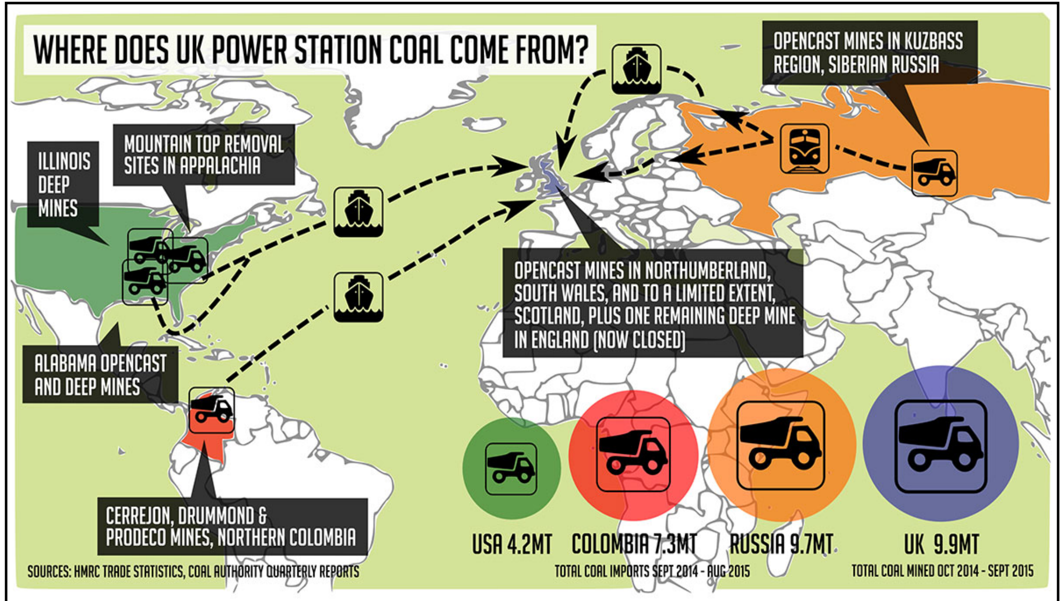
Unfortunately, Johnson and his government have a credibility problem and it is unclear why anyone should believe that tackling climate change is the UK's "number one international priority", as Johnson claimed in his COP26 speech. First of all, Johnson's stance on climate change and environmental protection has flip-flopped over the years. Just a few years ago in 2015 in a Daily Telegraph column, he publicly questioned climate scientists saying that unusually mild winters had "nothing to do with global warming" and in 2013 he was still having an "open mind" about theories of an imminent 'little ice age'. Apparently, it was only in 2019 that Johnson changed his mind due to a scientific briefing he received shortly after becoming prime minister. Telling other countries and the international community to "grow up" on the dangers and the seriousness of global warming in his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2021 is a bit rich coming from him. Accordingly, he got called for his hypocrisy afterwards.

So far, the actions of Johnson's government in terms of funding and spending do not match up with his rhetoric nor do they justify the claim that the UK held the global climate leadership. The continued subsidies for North Sea oil and gas with lower taxation rates for energy companies than Norway or other oil-rich countries, as well as huge amounts of government funding for carbon-intensive infrastructure projects such as the extension of Britain's national road network clearly speak against it (cf. Maxwell, 2021).

Nevertheless, the UK has indeed done better in reducing its carbon footprint than other comparable countries over the last three decades – at least at home. This is the result of the fact that the UK, as one of the most de-industrialised nations on earth, has offshored and outsourced large parts of production and industry. Since the 1980s, the UK's manufacturing sector has diminished by two-thirds, which accounts to the greatest de-industrialisation of any major nation (Chakrabortty, 2011). British goods designed for the British market and sold to British consumers with profits counted in the UK, shift, if manufactured abroad, the bulk of emissions during production processes abroad. A WWF report from March 2020 ("Carbon Footprint – Exploring the UK's Contribution to Climate Change") found that 46% of the UK's emissions come from commodities produced overseas to meet the demand of British consumers but are not counted as UK emissions. Facts like these are ignored or sugar-coated. At the same time, this report also found that "the overseas proportion of the UK's carbon footprint increased substantially – from just 14% in 1990."

Margaret Thatcher – an Eco-warrior?

Some of Johnson's attempts to set his own party's record on the environment straight and lend credence to green conservatism are just too easy to see through. His desperate attempt to rewrite the history briefly outlined above that declares Margaret Thatcher some sort of eco-warrior falls into this category. On a visit to Scotland in summer 2021, Johnson said: "Thanks to Margaret Thatcher, who closed so many coal mines across the country, we had a big early start and we're now moving rapidly away from coal altogether." He added with a laugh to the reporters: "I thought that would get you going." (Darmanin and Wickham, 2021) These comments did not go down well with the public, but they also reveal Johnson's blatant disregard for working-class people. It is cynical to present Thatcher's pit closures as green politics, violent measures which had devastating consequences for hundreds of thousands of people and



Red Pepper Magazine, https://www.redpepper.org.uk/from-russia-to-colombia-the-villages-destroyed-by-britains-coal-addiction/

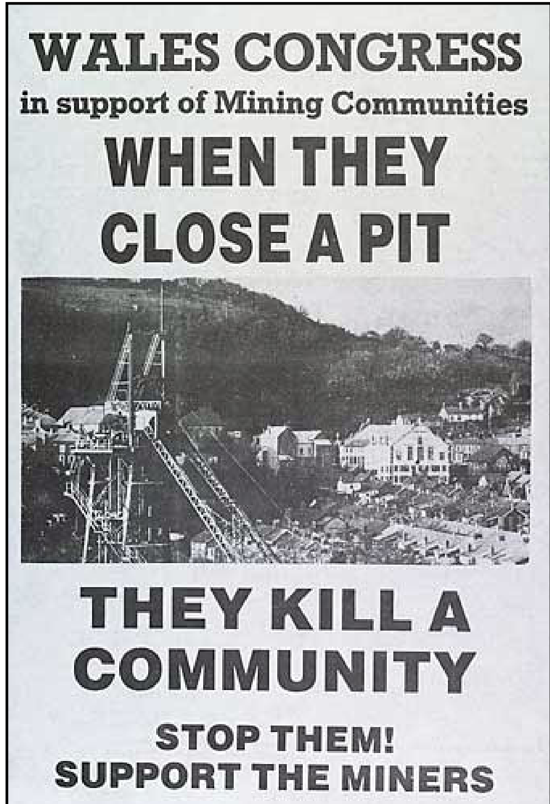
their communities whose mining jobs were lost without transition plans and without offering any new employment in the environmental sector. The closure of the pits was, as should be well-known, part of Thatcher's ideological battle against organised labour in trade unions. Positive effects for the environment were merely incidental. But it was also Thatcher who started the outsourcing and offshoring of production and industry. The destruction of the coal industry at home had the downside that the UK had to import millions of tons of coal from as far away as Australia – hardly beneficial for the environment – because demand for it was still high.

Today, the UK still burns millions of tons of coal every year. But without any meaningful coal industry at home, the UK was only able to produce 16,8 million tons on its own in 2020 and had to import 45 million tons from all over the world with Russia, Colombia and the United States as the three biggest exporters to the UK and over two million tons of coal still arriving all the way from Australia (Jarvis). At least Johnson seems to have learned something from Thatcher's mistakes and promised to create "up to 2 million green jobs by 2030" in his COP26 introduction. But comments like the ones above point to what many consider the blind eye of the Tories: failing to see

or not caring enough about the social implications of their policies. This is particularly relevant for climate change and environmental pollution, which are fuelled by social inequality and will have the most severe consequences for the poor in the UK and the world.

Brexit and Empire 2.0

This leads me to the last point. It was abundantly clear that in a post-Brexit world, freed from the shackles of the EU, the UK government would look around the globe for more favourable trade deals and increase business with countries beyond Europe. (The negative impact of far longer transport routes on the environment was not really an issue.) Brexiteers were enthusiastic about this prospect and the abundance of possibilities this would bring for the UK and its economy. Brexit campaigns were full of empire rhetoric, recalling the days of past glory when the British Empire was so vast that “[t]he sun never set on the British empire, […] because even God couldn’t trust the Englishman in the dark” (Tharoor, 2016, p. 161) and when “a small island perched on the edge of the European continent became a leader of world trade” (Koram and Nisancioglu, 2017). This enthusiasm is certainly not shared everywhere in the world. For example, the project of creating new trade deals with the African Commonwealth



Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

nations was dubbed ‘Empire 2.0’ or ‘economic imperialism’ and aroused opposition and scepticism in Africa and elsewhere. With good reason these countries have premonitions that such trade deals will not foster mutually beneficial relationships between equal partners but will rather provide larger markets in which British businesses can conveniently sell their products and services. The fact that top politicians and government officials in Britain

feel that the UK is entitled to act with a world leader mentality concerning the most urgent issue facing this planet in the next decades is utterly misguided. It becomes more and more obvious that, despite this mentality, the recent Conservative governments have only exacerbated environmental pollution by investing in fossil-fuel related infrastructure projects in Africa. This transport infrastructure is meant to facilitate free trade and received investments from the UK's development bank which obtains official development assistance (ODA) from the Department for International Development (Willis, 2020).

Admitting Historical Responsibility

Despite all this and perhaps in order to counter the lack of enthusiasm for trade deals with the UK in some parts of the world, Boris Johnson made a remarkable admission in his speech at the COP26, when he acknowledged:

[A]nd as we look at the green industrial revolution that is now needed – around the world we in the developed world must recognise the special responsibility to help everybody else to do it because it was here in Glasgow 250 years ago that James Watt came up with a machine that was powered by steam that was produced by burning coal and yes my friends – we have brought you to the very place where the doomsday device began to tick and even though for 200 years the industrialised countries were in complete ignorance of the problem that they were creating we now have a duty now to find those funds. [sic]

Johnson apparently admits that industrialised countries, particularly the UK, have a special historical responsibility for dealing with the consequences of climate change, environmental pollution, and other problems.

It is true that within the West, the UK has a special place and role in imperialism, colonialism, and empire, in coal-powered industrial capitalism, globalisation and global markets, which propelled climate change, environmental pollution and irreversible devastation. While this holds true for other European colonial powers or the US as well, the British Empire was unparalleled in its historical reach and global extension, demanding full control not only of peoples but also of natural resources and nature itself. The infrastructure and wealth enjoyed in the UK today have their roots in enormous amounts of past pollution – a lot of which is still in the atmosphere today. The carbon analyst Danny Chivers went through historic emissions data. He compared them to current population levels and found that between 1850 and 2007,

the UK was responsible for more carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels per person than any other major country (Chivers, 2011).

Living Up to Historical Responsibility?

Admitting historical responsibility is one thing, living up to it is quite another. How far away the current UK government is from doing so can be exemplified by Britain's waste trade practice. The UK is Europe's largest producer of plastic waste, exporting around two-thirds of it. In fact, only the US is producing even more. Despite a promise in the Conservative election manifesto, the UK continues to sell waste to underdeveloped[2] countries in the global south, that struggle with ocean plastic and e-waste pollution and suffer from health and environmental risks for the local population and wildlife. Loopholes in the legislation will allow the UK to keep sending its waste abroad, for example by labelling e-waste as donations or repairables. The EU had previously closed such loopholes, but UK post-Brexit laws still lag behind despite protests and "waste ship back initiatives" from countries like Sri Lanka or Malaysia returning illegally imported waste to the UK. If this is supposed to be the fair and equal trade that Johnson and his administration want to promote in the present, they probably should not talk about doing justice to responsibilities (cf. McVeigh, 2021).

In sum, there is not much to be found in terms of conservative environmental policies in the past decades apart from opportunist rhetoric mixed with economic and business interests. The more surprising it is that for example conservative philosopher Roger Scruton, who believes that climate change is a serious threat that demands action, argues that conservatism is much better suited to tackle environmental problems than liberalism or socialism. With the arguments proposed in this article and the fact that C/conservatives in the US, Australia etc. outright deny climate change and science, it is beyond me how he comes to this conclusion.

Economic and business interests were, in fact, the motives for the first green policies in the UK initiated by the same men who would be conservative businesspeople today. The Kings Hill Forest Act of 1791 was passed to protect the forests on St. Vincent and can be seen as one of the earliest examples of British conservational action against climate change and environmental destruction. But it was only introduced in order to protect economic interests and preserve economic value for a longer period of time after soil degradation, deforestation, and anthropogenic

climate change as a result of plundering the island had threatened the profits the colonisers could extract.

Economic opportunism is closely linked to the history of the UK. It can also be found in the British abolition of slavery driven by economic interests but sold as humanitarianism, in joining the EEC when it was economically viable and leaving the EU again when some (mainly Conservatives) were convinced it was not in the UK's economic and financial interests any longer, etc. It also speaks volumes that YouGov polls consistently show large numbers of the British population being proud of the legacy of the British Empire and believing that former colonies are better off for having been under British rule. No wonder when little is taught in British schools and universities about the atrocities committed under colonial rule and when high-profile personalities like for example the conservative historian Niall Ferguson or David Cameron keep claiming that British rule did nothing but help develop India and should be celebrated. The opposite is true, India developed Britain. Even if the UK wanted to repay India in reparations, it could never afford it – so exorbitantly high is the amount of wealth, resources, and labour the British colonisation drained from India and its people (cf. Patnaik, 2017).

Admitting the wrongdoings of the past and acknowledging the special responsibility of the UK for climate change and environmental pollution has little meaning if no real effort is made to have the past fully and critically reappraised, which must include Britain's historic role in slavery and colonialism because exposure to colonial rule continues to be an indicator of poverty today. It is doubtful that Boris Johnson, his successor and Conservative governments will take the UK's historical responsibility seriously, that Johnson's rhetorical enthusiasm for the environment will be lasting and that it will be reflected in actual legislation and action, because it has been nothing but greenwashing so far.

I have attempted to outline why I do not think it is plausible that Boris Johnson and his Cabinet are more serious about environmental politics now than Conservative governments have been in the past. The evidence shows the opposite. It could certainly be advantageous if one country led the way and showed what a successful transition could look like. But before the Tories can lead the world into a green future, they have to deliver much more convincingly at home. Johnson raised high expectations for the government under his leadership but falls short of meeting them in the UK, let alone on a global scale. A serious opposition party would be welcome,

one that holds the Tories accountable, offers a real alternative with socially compatible green policies, acts with determination to minimise the impact of climate change and pollution as long as it is still possible, and is committed to fighting social inequality now amid a serious 'cost of living crisis' more than ever, not just in the UK but globally.

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Endnotes

1 See also "UK Climate Leadership" in bold letters under: https://ukcop26.org/uk-presidency/uk-climate-leadership/

2 The term 'underdeveloped' is used here in reference to Walter Rodney's book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), in which he describes how European colonial regimes deliberately underdeveloped African countries,

particularly by one sided trade deals which mainly benefitted European colonial powers and exploited countries of the global south and their resources. 'Underdevelopment' is therefore not defined by a lack of resources but rather an uneven and unjust distribution and utilisation of the wealth generated by those resources.

Postcards, from the future

Kylie Crane

Postcards may seem familiar, if slightly old-fashioned objects. Yet looking at postcards more closely, as devices that traverse space and time, may also prompt questions of belonging, privilege, and access. Here, Kylie Crane (Rostock) shows how postcards can help us engage with the complex entanglements of the Anthropocene, and invites us to think through the connections and juxtapositions represented by this supposedly familiar medium.

Postcards are kind of old-fashioned, an analogue cultural practice by now almost rendered outdated by instant social media messaging. For one: postcards cross spatial and temporal distances, and take some time to traverse the distance from holiday destination to addressee. Also, they are individualised objects, as each addressee requires a different card, and a different address, and a (handwritten) message.

At the same time, postcards are of course mass objects, their meaning deriving in part from the photos depicted on the one side. The sentiment "'Wow, that's so postcard!' (Visitor seeing Victoria Falls […])" (Urry and Larsen 2011: front matter), only makes sense if a postcard entails a regime of seeing, the postcard entails a *gaze* as much as a look. The verb brings with it weight from Michel Foucault, Mary Louise Pratt, and, crucially, John Urry, suggesting the ways we learn to look. "Gazing refers to 'discursive determinations', of socially constructed seeing or 'scopic regimes'" (Urry and Larsen 2011: 2), the ways we are 'schooled' to see.

Postcards might be old-fashioned, but they are not 'out of fashion'. They are still readily available as souvenirs at most tourist destinations. The meaning-making-work, or semiotics, of postcards is much more complex than

the flimsy cardboard might suggest. It is to two images stylised as postcards that I turn in this contribution. Both images explicitly employ the tropes of the postcard, revealed as a kind of visual aesthetics as well as device that traverses space and time. The first interrupts the semiotics of the postcard by bringing together into a single image two diverse spaces (and/or times). In doing so, as I argue, it specifically works to complicate the environmental politics of the planet. The second image entails an expansion of the environments of the planet by imagining an interplanetary dimension. Both, in fact, are parts of projects entitled "Postcards from the Future" (and can, or at least could, be found on the internet).

Postcards as Future Artefacts

Attuning to the temporal dimensions of these "Postcards from the Future" without neglecting their material dimensions, we can draw on several articulations by other thinkers: the future fossil (cf. e.g. Farmer 2018 or Farrier 2020), or fossil remains (cf. e.g. Mitman et.al. 2018), or fossil futures (cf. e.g. Parikka). Elsewhere, I make an argument for thinking about this kind of material entanglement as a *future artefact*, in order to specifically attend to the making, that is, the creative or constitutive process (Crane 2021). The future artefact shifts the present into a (speculative) future. This is part of what is happening in these images: A speculative intervention that anticipates future responses to our current behaviours and patterns of consumption. Both the "Parliament Square Paddy Fields" image, with its splicing of spatial spheres, and the "Interplanetary Dial Codes" image, depicting an astro-futuristic fantasy, work within tensions of time and space, as commentaries on cognitive dissonances that pervade our engagements with our habitats.

Parliament Square Paddy Fields

The first image I turn to is "Parliament Square Paddy Fields," part of one of the two different "Postcards from the Future" series I examine in this contribution. This is one of a set of images created as in a collaboration between visual artists Robert Graves and Didier Madoc-Jones, in this context known as GMJ. The postcards were initially displayed in London, and were arranged around six themes: "Flooded London, Hot London, Frozen London, Self Sufficient London, Living in London & Powering London" (see website). This image depicts Parliament House in the background, shrouded in smog (nothing new, yet). In the foreground, paddy fields have been superimposed on the square, replete with humans and oxen hard at work. Four of the figures in the foreground are bent over, harvesting; their arms are *white*.

"Parliament Square Paddy Fields", https://www.postcardsfromthefuture.com/work-1/project-two-9mb57-y6nk2

Jennifer Wenzel suggests in her analysis of GMJ's "Postcards from the Future" in *Dispositions of Nature* that the images enact an "apocalyptic inversion of progress narratives, which posits the Third World as the frightening future of the First" (Wenzel 2020: 37). Kyle Powys Whyte uses the phrase "today's dystopia of our ancestors" (Whyte 2017: 208) to make the point that the folding of temporal frameworks that sometimes accompanies the Anthropocene is not limited to the future (i.e. what is to come from the present moment), but *also* as a way of thinking about the present from a non-dominant, not-necessarily present standpoint (present, here, in both the temporal and spatial sense). Whyte's intervention brings attention to the ways in which environmental crisis imagined in the future tense is premised on privilege, or that some people's (dystopian) future is already other people's present. This important insight brings forth some of the problematic politics evinced in the GMJ image.

Contrapuntal Gazing: the Importance of Different Perspectives

When the images are transported from the context of their original setting—the exhibition in the Museum of London—to the various contexts made possible through the internet, their interpretations become opened to, exposed to, *contrapuntal gazing*. Contrapuntal readings derive from the work of Edward Said, who in turn draws on musical terminology: Jennifer Wenzel also evokes it in *Dis-*

positions of Nature "to consider how different kinds of texts foster and complicate the work of world-imagining and reading across geographic and experiential divides […], seeing one place always as imbricated with another" (Wenzel 2020: 8). This is true of many artefacts as they are transformed across media forms, and are done so at scales of magnitudes when said artefacts can be accessed from many different, especially different geographical, contexts. That is to say: The splicing of the 'Third World' into the 'First World' scene works differently *in* London (its first space of exhibition) than it does when viewed from the Sundarbans, the Ganges Delta, or from non-subcontinental colonial settings, as made possible by the internet. Further, for many of these settings, the backdrop of British Parliament has been—metaphorically—present through colonialism for a long time: The "Parliament Square Paddy Fields" image's intervention into the kinds of divisions of space that characterise, for instance, postcolonial approaches to the environmental humanities, is, seen from the colonised world, not the setting but perhaps (only?) the *white* bodies engaged in hard labour.

The evocation of *the* future, here, morphs into an evocation of *a* future. The past, the present, *and the future* are subject to positions and relations, shaped by other positions and relations with respect to, for instance, British colonialism. This reference point shifts in the second postcard, from a site on the globe to the globe itself.

Interplanetary Dial Codes

The second image, "Interplanetary Dial Codes," articulates a site outside both our[1] temporal presence and our spatial present. Viraj Joshi, like GMJ, superimposes different images, most noticeably an image of the Earth

"Interplanetary Dial Codes" by Viraj Joshi, Postcards From The Future, https://www.virajvjoshi.com/postcards-from-the-future/03

visible outside of a phone booth on the surface of a celestial body. The image is incongruous for a number of reasons, not least the increasing absence of phone booths.[2] It is a commentary on media fossils for other reasons, too: Phone booths use landlines, infrastructures embedded in the earth, traversing distances through cables. Further, the use of such a telephone also requires, for humans, oxygen. Even if you might be able to find a phonebooth in an extraterrestrial location, you won't be able to use it, because the receiver will be outside your helmet and your supply of oxygen and human-calibrated pressure. There are very specific media requirements for the phonebooth.

The explicit rendition of specific, localised, environmental disaster—present in many of the GMJ images—is waived in this image for the inclusion of the earth as a whole. It visually recollects the image sometimes called 'Earthrise', which, as Ursula K. Heise has pointed out, is usually reoriented so that the earth appears to rise above the horizon of the moon in a fashion that recollects the sun: "In spite of their technological— indeed, to some extent, military—origin, images of Earth in space were quickly appropriated by the environmentalist movement and prominently displayed at the first Earth Day in 1970" (Heise 2008: 22).

In Heise's interpretation, seeing the earth from afar is akin to being able to imagine it as a whole. As an image, though, it is suggestive of the gaze, much like the GMJ postcard discussed above. At this distance, it becomes possible to comprehend and also consume the earth as a whole. In looking *with* Joshi's image, we gaze at the planet, and we might more readily be able to understand ourselves as species, as inhabitants of a planet both far away and close by. The cognitive dissonance between a fossilized media artefact and an impossible media (due to lack of medium) creates a space of interpretation that allows for humour as well as for other experiments in affective engagement.

Expansive Solidarities Across Time and Space

Postcards from the future sent from one part of the globe to another establish deictic relations on the globe: They suggest a 'here' and 'there,' and with it, an 'I' (or 'us') and you. The lines that are drawn around these spaces (of identity) cross the globe, dividing it into spheres. The affordances of space travel, extending in our current moment only to an elite few, are predicated on a (privileged) writer and an addressee, insisting still on a 'here' and 'there', an 'us' and 'them'. The postcard from outer space engages in the touristic practice of the gaze, but this

plays out on different spheres: (inter-) planetary rather than global. Incongruous access, anachronistic engagements, temporal leaps and geographic displacements: Postcards are a particularly apt medium for exploring belonging, privilege, and access.[3]

Joseph Masco notes that "perhaps what our specific historical moment requires is an explicit commitment—a critical theory commitment—to generating the nonutopian but nonetheless positive futurities that can reactivate the world-making powers of society" (Masco 2021: 362). Such a positive spin on the crises that characterise our times might arise, these fantatistical postcards suggest, through thinking through solidarities as expansive, both spatially as well as temporally. These solidarities might arise through techniques of juxtaposition, splicing (incongruous) images together; they will, the postcards also suggest, also derive through spatial and temporal incongruities. Dwelling on, dwelling *with*, such incongruities might give rise to thinking through the cognitive dissonances that characterise our lives.

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Endnotes

1 Here 'our' is species-wide, or rather, it traverses subject positions beyond location.

2 An increasing absence of something is hard to trace; in some places, phone booths have been repurposed as small libraries or book exchanges, and it is through this repurposing that the absence is rendered noticeable; in other places, phone booths are left standing but without a new function, as artefacts of the past slowly degrading (or ruins).

3 If the idea of extra-terrestrial postcards has caught your fancy, you can send a postcard to space: <https://www.clubforfuture.org/missions/>; on another site, the didactic utopian potential of future postcards is harnessed in an exercise on re-imagination, where participants in an activity imagine themselves as a future person (or other kind of relation) who wants to thank them for their positive actions: <https://www.reimaginary.com/methods/postcards-from-the-future>

“how YOU can help”: The Climate Crisis in Children’s Picture Books

Hanne Bolze

Younger generations will see their world profoundly affected by climate crisis, which raises the question of how to explain the topic to children: how can we acknowledge the urgency and complexity of climate change but also frame it in a way that leads to hope and action rather than despair and nihilism? Here, Hanne Bolze (Rostock) surveys children’s picture books and their different approaches to this question.

Imagine, for a moment: your doorbell rings. As you open the door, you see a polar bear (or a wolf, or another large animal). Its home – ‘Nature’ – is being destroyed, so it has come to ask for your help. Specifically, it wants *you* to persuade ‘the grown-ups’ to listen, to understand, and to change their behaviour.

This is the premise of several children’s books about climate change: a child character is cast as the agent for change who must mediate between the nonhuman ‘natural’ world and the adults who are – almost unthinkingly – destroying the environment. Picture books such as *Greta and the Giants* by Zoë Tucker and Zoe Persico (London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, 2019) or *The Tantrum That Saved the World* by Megan Herbert and Michael E. Mann (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2022) echo the ‘Fridays for Future’-protests that were initially triggered by then-15-year-old Greta Thunberg’s school strike. They focus on the struggle to be heard by those in power: the young protagonist initiates and leads a protest movement and eventually, together with other nonhuman and human friends, persuades the grown-ups to listen. The adults then gain a better understanding of the nonhuman environment and embrace meaningful change.

This narrative presents a straightforward conflict between perpetrators (politicians, corporations, or grown-ups) and victims (children, climate migrants, and nonhuman nature), which is resolved by education, awareness and the will to change. The change itself remains slightly nebulous, consisting mostly of stopping harmful behaviour. If only a real-life solution were that simple! Of course, the enormous scale and complexity of the climate crisis cannot be completely and comprehensively depicted in a children's book, or any book for that matter. However, different books may touch on different aspects, which together allow for a more rounded representation of the climate crisis. In the following, I will give an overview of three categories of children's picture books on the topic, highlighting which aspects they focus on and how they may complement each other.

Climate Crisis Representation in Picture Books

Picture books about the climate crisis are still a relatively new phenomenon: while the genres of adult and young adult climate change fiction have developed rapidly since the early 2000s, children's books have somewhat lagged behind. Some early examples were the critically acclaimed *The Journey Home* by Frann Preston-Cannon (London: Pavilion Children's Books, 2012), which tells a bleak tale of habitat loss and species extinction, or Jean Craighead George's *The Last Polar Bear* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), in which a young Inuit boy rescues a polar bear cub from melting ice floes.

While the ending of *The Journey Home* offers no comfort, concluding that the endangered animals may return "when the trees grow back and when the ice returns and when the cities stop getting bigger and when the hunting stops" (28), *The Last Polar Bear* ends with the orphaned bear cub taken back to the town, where the boy plans to feed him and "show him how to live in a warming world" (32). This is hardly a happy ending for the cub, which must now live in an unfamiliar environment as the last of its kind. These books thus illustrate the balancing act required by children's books about climate change, and by climate change discourse in general: if the portrayal is too superficial, I may not believe it is a real problem; if the portrayal is too serious, I may lose hope altogether and fail to even attempt meaningful change.

Recent children's books therefore tend to fit the bleak portrayal of the climate crisis into a narrative of conflict and resolution: once it is identified, (a part of) the presented problem can be resolved on the textual level through

the characters' actions. Together, the information about the problem and the presentation of the diegetic solution serve as inspiration for readers to become active themselves. In short, the books have a clear environmentalist didactic purpose, seeking to provide both education and a call to action. In reality, precisely these two aspects have proven to be difficult to bring together: when it comes to the climate crisis, I may well accept that my behaviour is harmful, but I mostly continue to *act* as if it were not. Children's books are thus deliberate attempts to bridge this cognitive gap between knowing and acting, all within the short but by no means simple space of a picture book. In analysing the way they frame and depict the climate crisis, I want to focus on three aspects: the *problem*, the *solution*, and the question of *perspective*.

Depicting Climate Crisis: the Problem

Climate change may be mostly associated with global heating, melting ice and rising sea levels, as well as extreme weather events, but scientists and activists increasingly speak of a climate *crisis*. This reflects that in addition to global heating, other issues such as habitat destruction (deforestation, desertification), pollution (microplastic, toxic waste, etc.), mass extinction and resource depletion are all part of the same environmental crisis. Although they are not always directly caused by rising temperatures, they may exacerbate and be exacerbated by global heating. For example, rain forest clearing releases carbon into the atmosphere, intensifying global heating, which in turn entails more extreme droughts, which raise the risk of wildfires in other parts of the world. Thus deforestation is both a cause and a symptom of global heating: to focus on the changing climate alone would ignore the destructive impact of (some) human beings in other areas.

To depict these global and historical entanglements of the climate crisis is of course a complex affair, children's books therefore often focus on one specific aspect. If the young protagonist directly experiences the repercussions of the environmental crisis in a homogenous local setting, the environmental crisis becomes more palpable. In most stories, the presented conflict fits into a problem-solving narrative of individual consumer choices or grassroots collective action, although many imply that this may not be enough.

Questions we may ask include: Which aspects of the climate crisis do the stories focus on? Is this aspect typical for a particular region (e.g. Europe)? Are local problems put into a wider (global

and historical) context? Do the stories acknowledge the processes that have led to the problem in the first place (consumerism, globalisation, colonialism, deforestation, mining, extraction and burning of fossil fuels, etc.), and do they recognise that other problems exist elsewhere?

Depicting Climate Crisis: the Solution

The climate crisis offers few glimpses of hope, and even fewer plans of action that might lend themselves to conflict-solving narratives in children's books. Additionally, different settings require different approaches to tackling the crisis. Urban readers in the Global North may do well to reduce their individual and collective carbon footprint, but advice to 'eat less meat' and 'use public transport' will sound cynical to rural communities in the Global South, who despite their relatively minor contribution to the climate crisis already suffer disproportionately from its effects.

We must therefore pay special attention to the 'solutions' offered in the stories: do they offer hope, and how? Is the 'solution' focused on the local problem, or does it embrace a wider context? Is it presented as a panacea for a homogenous problem that all humans must adapt to in the same way, or does it allow for nuance? Does it tackle the *symptom* or the *cause* of the problem? That is, will it lead to meaningful change within the story? Might it be applied *outside* the story? Who carries responsibility for implementing the solution? And finally, is it a solution for everyone?

The Question of Perspective

This last question proves to be quite important. An environmentalist agenda seems a given in climate change stories: they promote (human) change in order to 'save' the (nonhuman) environment. But *The Last Polar Bear*'s resolution provides only for the human child, who manages to fulfil his task and 'rescue' the polar bear cub, whereas the cub is still alone among humans and outside its natural habitat. The ending is thus only 'happy' from an anthropocentric perspective, that is, if we judge it from a human point of view. Conversely, an ecocentric perspective assumes that nonhuman life has inherent value that does not depend on how useful the animal is to human beings. This means that I not only want to 'save the environment' when it is inhabited by cute polar bear cubs, but also when it is home to blood-sucking mosquitos or other so-called 'pests'.

We may therefore ask: does the depiction of the problem incorporate the perspective of the

nonhuman world? Is the nonhuman world presented as valuable in itself, or only in reference to human characters? Is the solution for everyone? Is there a hierarchy between human and nonhuman characters in the story – are human characters depicted as more powerful or important? Are (some) human characters depicted as 'innocent' or 'blameless' in order to represent the 'good' side?

1. Protest, Awareness, Change: Child Characters vs. the Establishment

Greta and the Giants and *The Tantrum That Saved the World* focus on habitat destruction and stress the need for, and the power of, grassroots collective action. *Greta* has a nonspecific forest setting that may stand symbolically for any or all environments on the planet, whereas *Tantrum* represents different habitats affected by the climate crisis through the human and nonhuman refugees who invade Sophia's home. These environments are being destroyed by human action, namely by the 'giants' (*Greta*) or people in power more generally (*Tantrum*). Both books thus acknowledge the need for collective action and change that goes beyond individual consumer choices, as the people at decision-making level are made to listen and stop their harmful behaviour by the protest movement led by the protagonist.

Yet Greta and Sophia's role as spokesperson and 'saviour' for the nonhuman environment is not unproblematic and warrants closer inspection. Firstly, by placing the human child on the side of the 'victims', the stories fail to acknowledge that children also have a detrimental impact on the environment, and that the very lives they lead, in the very home they inhabit as the 'wild' animals come to seek their help, are deeply entangled in environmental exploitation and destruction, not just locally but globally. Secondly, the common trope of locating hope for a better future in the figure of the child places unfair responsibility on the next generation(s) and defers meaningful action that should be implemented now, or should have been implemented already. And thirdly, the child 'saving' the animals and their habitat reinforces an anthropocentric hierarchy, as it emphasizes the idea of nonhuman nature as weak and subordinate to humans. For instance, Greta is introduced as living "at the heart of a beautiful forest" (2): The image shows her surrounded by eight forest animals.

While she has turned her face to look outward, the animals are facing her. The image thus supports the story's anthropocentric stance, which presents the human child as the centre of attention, "at the heart" not only of the forest but of the animals. The

Greta and the Giants, page 2

choice of animals is also important: we see one butterfly and seven mammals, among them a wolf and a bear, who look friendly and benevolent. Later, the wolf is described as "soft […], with his tail low to the ground. 'Please help us,' he whispered" (5): he is thus depicted as inferior to Greta, humble and distinctly non-threatening. The accompanying picture emphasizes his fluffy fur and shows no teeth or claws. While the text explains that "all the animals of the forest" are there (5), the accompanying picture shows three mammals (wolf, fox and red squirrel), an owl and several butterflies. Other pictures in the book add more birds and mammals, but no reptiles, amphibians, or other insects. The representation of nonhuman nature is thus reduced to friendly-looking recognisable animals. For a more ecocentric approach, we

might want to stress the inherent value of nonhuman nature. That is, animals do not need to be cute or helpful in order to count: I should accept their right to exist even if I do not particularly like them. This point is especially pertinent since children living in an urban environment will already have a positive bias towards some animals but may need help extending this view towards other species. Would Greta also be willing to save the habitat of toads, slugs and mosquitoes?

2. Communication and Cooperation: Child Characters in Grassroots Environmentalism

Two picture books which acknowledge both these aspects are *The Last Wolf* by Mini Grey (London: Penguin, 2018) and *Clean Up!* by Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola (London et al.: Puffin, 2020). Each focuses on one specific aspect of the climate crisis, namely biodiversity loss and plastic pollution, respectively. Here, the young protagonists face problems in a clearly-defined local setting (a forest, a beach) and come up with small-scale solutions that are similarly focused on this setting. In contrast to *Greta* and *Tantrum*, they do not feature a conflict with a group of perpetrators, but instead focus on finding concrete ways to tackle the problem. It is not the shadowy perpetrators who must act (or stop acting), but the characters themselves.

Habitat Loss: The Last Wolf

Grey's *The Last Wolf* acknowledges its protagonist's implication in environmental destruction from the outset, as Little Red, a modern-day Little Red Riding Hood, sets out to 'hunt' a wolf. The fairy-tale reference acts as a poignant reminder that wolves have long lost their power, and that humans are to blame for this (although Red's depiction is a welcome change from the naïve victim in need of rescuing in "Little Red Riding Hood"). Worse still, Red's first apparent wolf sighting in the forest turns out to be a bin bag. When she eventually finds the "Last Wolf", he is an endangered specimen who, together with the Last Lynx and the Last Bear, is presented as a grandfatherly figure. The three animals fondly remember the good old days of living in a vast forest teeming with wildlife, educating Red about the habitat and biodiversity that have been lost. Although the animals are clearly anthropomorphised and depicted as kind and unthreatening, their depiction blurs the anthropocentric human-nonhuman hierarchy, as they stand in for kind grandparents who tell stories and take Red home through the forest when she is afraid to return in the dark. As they walk her back, the reader realises that the 'forest' Red ventured into is a mere cluster of trees, fenced in

and surrounded by houses.

The picture of this pitiful forest seen from above stands in stark contrast to the earlier double spread of the large forest as remembered by the animals, which filled two pages with no house in sight. Red thus realises that she and her mother, who live in one of the houses, are part of the problem. Instead of looking for a wolf, she now wants more trees: Red has thus identified habitat loss as (one of) the underlying cause(s) of species extinction. As a resolution, Red and her mother start growing oak trees in pots on the windowsill, but the story cautions that this solution will take a long time: "…for a really wonderful tree, about a hundred years" (30). The aerial view of the forest and houses may also lead to more questions: there is – at present – no space for more trees, so where can they be planted?

Plastic Pollution: Clean Up!

Similarly, *Clean Up!* presents a positive empowering story about Rocket, a girl organizing a beach clean-up while on holiday in Jamaica, along with some context info about Jamaica, its ocean wildlife and the damaging effects of plastic pollution. Like Red in *The Last Wolf*, Rocket becomes aware of the problem through contact with the nonhuman environment, here a baby turtle tangled in plastic. She is then

The Last Wolf, detail from pages 26-27

educated about plastic pollution by her grandparents, who have an animal sanctuary on the island. Rocket's grandfather takes the Last Wolf's role, telling Rocket about the past, when they could still see whales swimming near the island. It is only when he leads her down the beach that Rocket notices the plastic: "It feels as though there is more plastic than sand!" (17).

As in *The Last Wolf*, where it is the mother's idea to grow trees, the young protagonist is here part of a larger like-minded group who work together. The idea of the beach clean-up is presented as a logical step once people have become aware of the plastic. Several characters add more input, as one girl's mother designs rubbish bins, and the grandparents have a barbecue for the whole clean-up crew. Rocket stresses that "**Everyone** on the island wants clean beaches" (29, original emphasis): the responsibility to take care of the environment is shared and does not rest solely on the shoulders of one child character.

Shared Responsibility and Intergenerational Cooperation

By presenting a protagonist who is part of the problem but manages to implement small-scale change with the help of others, these books pull away from the idealised (and problematic) notion of the innocent child saviour who is somehow not implicated in environmental destruction and must educate harmful grown-ups. Rocket's teenage brother Jamal, pictured throughout looking at his smartphone, also acts as a reminder that idealistic children will eventually become part of the adult world and become entangled in consumerism and global supply chains. In order to be sustainable, environmentalism must include grown-ups.

These two books thus shift the perpetrator-victim conflict to one between humans and nonhumans, where the child recognises she is part of those who cost the animals their habitat. They also introduce an element of education through the older generation (the Last Wolf and the grandfather), as well as collective action that allows different generations to work together. The responsibility is thus shared more evenly, as the child protagonist becomes part of a like-minded group with a shared environmentalist cause, rather than its leader.

However, these books focus on the *effects* more than the *causes* of the crisis: *Clean Up!* 'solves' the plastic pollution on the beach, but does not address the continued production of single-use plastic and lack of recycling. The book's happy resolution does not consider the plastic that is still in the ocean, as Rocket rather optimistically

states her belief that "one day the whales will come back" (32). And while the reference to "Little Red Riding Hood" in *The Last Wolf* may lead to a re-evaluation of the original fairy-tale's message of 'bad' wolves and the 'good' hunter, the tree-planting resolution is qualified by the apparent lack of space and the time it will take for the trees to grow. While the books provide examples of concrete individual environmentalism, the stories themselves do not address the larger context and causes of deforestation and plastic pollution, which would require action, legislation and change at a much higher level.

3. History, Context, 'How You Can Help': Non-fiction

For a more comprehensive overview of the global and historical entanglements of the climate crisis, we must turn to non-fiction. Two recent picture books that choose a much larger scale are *A Planet Full of Plastic: And How You Can Help* by Neal Layton (London: Wren & Rook, 2019) and *The Story of Climate Change: A First Book About How We Can Help Save Our Planet* by Catherine Barr and Steve Williams (London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2021). As the full titles show, these books are presented as both comprehensive education about the problem on a global scale (the planet) and as manual for individual action ("You Can Help"). Although these books are nonfiction, they follow a similar structure to the picture books analysed above, starting with historical information (how did this become a problem?), followed by education about the present context (how serious is it?), and ending with practical suggestions and a more hopeful outlook (what can be done?).

A Planet Full of Plastic

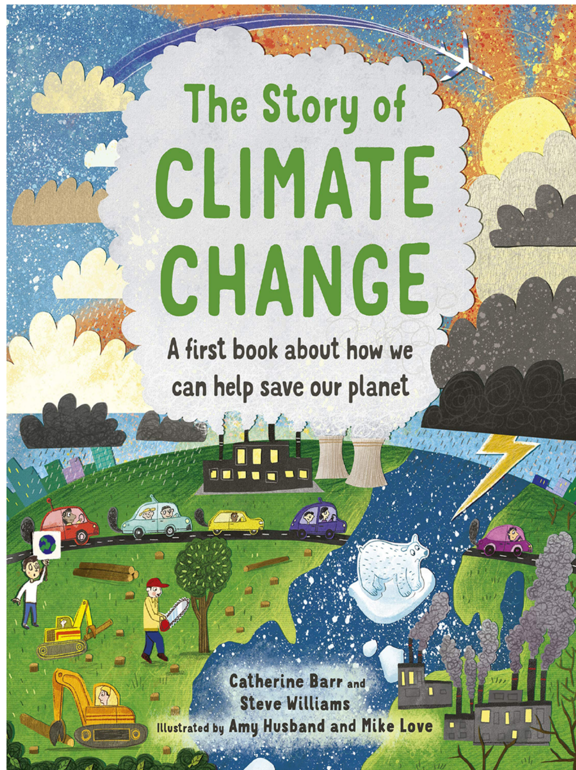
Layton's book focuses on the topic of plastic pollution. It starts with an overview of plastic as a very useful material before explaining the dilemma of getting rid of it. The pictures combine drawings with photographs: for example, a drawing of animals entangled in plastic becomes more serious by being imposed on a photograph of plastic waste floating in the ocean. Elsewhere, plastic items are inserted as photographs in larger drawn pictures. In both cases, the photographs lend the pictures more concrete urgency and make the plastic items more tangible, alerting the reader to the 'real' plastic items that might otherwise blend into the scenery.

Having explained biodegrading, the problem of plastic waste and the North Pacific Garbage Patch, the book explains the Reduce-Reuse-Recycle principles and introduces ideas of cleaning up plastic in the oceans,

as well as scientific research into other possible solutions, such as biodegrading or finding alternatives to plastic. The book ends with three practical ways to help (upcycling, reduce, and clean-up) and some examples of children who instigated bigger campaigns to tackle the plastic problem. While the book offers a clear picture of the scale of the problem, it thus ends on a more productive note, offering suggestions for small-scale approaches and encouraging more ambitious large-scale innovative thinking.

The Story of Climate Change

The cover of *The Story of Climate Change* reflects its larger scope. A combination of images represents various global and historical entanglements of the climate crisis, such as extreme weather events (rain and flooding), air pollution through cars, factories and planes, deforestation, an unhappy polar bear on a melting ice floe, and a lone protester.



The Story of Climate Change, front cover. Illustrated by Amy Husband and Mike Love

All of these aspects are then explained in more detail within the book. It starts with three double spreads that lay the groundwork for its explanation of global heating, covering the beginning of life on earth and the creation of the planet's atmosphere, the origins of the fossil fuels coal, oil, and gas, and the planet's changing climate cycles, before introducing humans and their burning of fossil fuels, as well as deforestation and intensive livestock farming. Having explained the scientific background of global heating, the book explains its effects on the planet, such as habitat destruction, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss.

Importantly, the book adds much-needed nuance to the discussion of causes and solutions. Countries from the Global South, as well as Indigenous

and postcolonial activists, have long protested that the idea that climate change is caused by *humans* does not distinguish between those who have contributed most to its causes (namely, rich countries) and those who suffer most from its impact. *The Story of Climate Change* acknowledges that "humans" are not a homogenous group (24), and its depiction of the specific effects of climate change in different places shows that each may require different solutions.

Like *A Planet Full of Plastic*, this book ends on a cautiously hopeful note: explaining how oceans and forests act as carbon sinks, it stresses the need to preserve the Amazon rainforest, e.g. by eating less meat, and to use renewable energy. The penultimate double spread shows a utopian 'green' way of living, with solar panels and wind turbines, high-speed trains, electric cars and bicycles, plant-based food, vegetable gardens and tree planting, insect hotels, trees, hedges, and birds and butterflies, and the book's back displays an alternative to the front cover, with calm weather, renewable energy sources and more trees and protesters. We can thus read these two books as examples, in book form, of what the fictional protagonists attempt in *Greta* and *Tantrum*: to educate, raise awareness, and to encourage a change in behaviour.

Conclusion: No book is perfect…

This overview has shown that the various categories of children's climate change books each touch on and highlight different important aspects. While books from the first category stress the need for collective activism and the imperative for change on the level of political and corporate decision-makers, they single out the young protagonist as leading advocate for the nonhuman environment and the planet as a whole. As they contain few concrete suggestions for the changes they seek outside of joining protest movements, books from this category offer perhaps the least impetus to individual action, especially since their inherent anthropocentric stance remains unchallenged. Yet they may well inspire some critical discussion: why does the protagonist have to persuade the adults, why do they not see the problem themselves? How am *I* part of the problem?

Books in the second category hone in on a more local setting, with a clearly defined problem and the characters' small-scale individual attempts to tackle it. They thus raise awareness of how the characters and their lives are intertwined with their nonhuman environment and its destruction, stressing the need for intergenerational communication and cooperation. Introducing young

readers to a problem they can easily identify with and possibly apply to their own lives, these books can serve as first steps to introduce the climate crisis, providing opportunities for a discussion that moves from the local level to a wider context. The books thus leave room for further questions when looking beyond the confines of their specific local setting: what happens to the plastic in the oceans? Where could we make space for more trees?

Last but not least, the nonfiction books in the third category fill in scientific background information by providing more comprehensive explanations of the causes, effects, and possible 'solutions', which include but go beyond individual carbon footprint reduction, extending to scientific innovation, activism, as well as politically promoted large-scale lifestyle changes.

Read on their own, each of the books analysed here omits aspects of the climate crisis we may deem important and will need to address critically. Read together, they offer a more varied and rounded picture of the climate crisis, as they each add information and tackle questions brought up by the others. When it comes to representing the climate crisis for young readers, instead of looking for the one perfect book, we should thus (always!) look for more.

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Strategic Exhaustion? Moving Forward With and Beyond Extinction Rebellion

Alexander Kurunczi

Is it more important to patiently muster broad popular support for tough measures against climate breakdown or to engage in radical forms of protest to empasise the seriousness of the threat? This question is often addressed to Extinction Rebellion (XR), the movement investigated here by Alexander Kurunczi (Bochum). Focusing on its predecessors and its genesis, discussing its main arguments for moving beyond both green capitalism and politics in the traditional sense, evaluating its spectacular forms of protest, he suggests to collaborate with XR in a spirit of critical solidarity. It is one important ally in a broad-based campaign: a campaign that uses many different strategies and tries to bring together many different perspectives without forgetting the importance of discussion and critique for rescuing the living world.

The notion of the future has re-emerged as an essential keyword for political struggles. Demanding a future has become the clarion call for an increasingly vocal mass of young people mobilising around — amongst other topics — the question of environmental justice and ecology. Lately, one of the most galvanising environmental movements in the UK has been *Extinction Rebellion* (XR). Taking the national (and international) spotlight in 2018, it arose as a broad-based movement, adamant to tackle what it perceived as a climate emergency; their central claim being that extant political institutions and decision-makers had addressed climate policy only in woefully inadequate terms. This is, of course, hardly a new diagnosis. Frustration with policy-making is a recurring refrain in various sections of environmental movements that have dotted the globe in the past thirty or so years. The protests that invariably accompany the international climate summits of the last three decades are a case in point. Whether

Geneva, Copenhagen, or Paris: symbolising the hope of a complete transformation of society without any actual revolution of our economy, our ways of living, and our everyday practices the summit cities are almost always also sites of unrelenting unrest. These protests are ambivalent, though: they understand the inadequacy of the policies that the summits' hard-earned compromises come up with. Yet, they remain committed to the institutions responsible for those very policies. They understand that no climate agreement so far has had any material effect whatsoever on the actual global CO2 emissions; they are also aware that, in this respect, economic crises, like the financial crisis of 2007 or the covid pandemic, have proved a much better 'tool' for curbing emissions. And yet these movements often become, sometimes somewhat surreptitiously, cheerleaders of the very elite climate politics originally responsible for the half measures against which the protests are mounted.

If climate summits are not the solution, the age-old question of the Left arises again: what is to be done? Which actions can generate a mass-movement capable of materially changing the social and political drivers of climate catastrophe? While it is seductive here to rely on the nation state with its far-ranging powers to implement policies and regulations, only some actors on the ecologically-minded Left believe that the liberal nation state will go beyond some version of 'Green Keynesianism' predicated upon notions of 'green growth'. These ideas boil down to the dream of an innovative capitalism that simply does away with CO2 emissions and goes green — incentivising industries to take a tad more responsibility, pushing net-zero emission targets far back, and hoping that capitalism can be made sustainable, whether by virtue of technological progress, ethical consumption choices, or both. Many on the Left would disagree with that assessment, surmising that it is akin to waving a magic wand; they contend that climate catastrophe and capitalism are interlinked. Where profit is the guiding maxim, unsustainable resource extraction and environmental degradation way beyond CO2 emissions — in a globalised economy often to the detriment of the Southern hemisphere — appear to be a prerequisite for growth. Pushing the capitalist state into a greener direction will arguably be to no avail. Changing the grim outlook of climate catastrophe means changing the system of economic and social relations which fuels it. If the question is what needs to be done, their answer, somewhat understandably, is that capitalism needs to disappear. But that only shifts the original question. How does any movement go about bringing about capitalism's disintegration,

strategically and tactically? Who can be won for this struggle? And, equally pivotally: is this even a feasible demand? Historically, it has been around this issue that contentious debates ensued. Indeed, the strands of a reformist and a revolutionary environmentalism have always uneasily co-existed within the green movement. Some prefer moderate policy adaptations, others ask for a full-on revolution; some rely on green parties and institutional change, others aim at dismantling these very institutions and seek more radical vehicles of the people's will.

Occupy's Shadow: The Genesis of XR

In many respects, XR has attempted to move beyond this deadlock. It promises to join the power of a broad-based mass movement with the militancy of tactics so conspicuously absent from a movement like *Fridays for Future* or the American *Sunrise Movement*. In its own succinct words, it promises to move beyond politics. Despite its comet-like rise since 2018, its flamboyant protests, including blockades, arrests, and huge theatrical celebrations, its ability to mobilise thousands of people from all fields of life congregating in huge 'protestivals' that disrupted the urban centres of the UK — notably London —, XR did not emerge out of the blue. It is the logical result of an ambient continuity of environmental struggles in Britain. When the 90s gave birth to *Reclaim the Streets,* the highly controversial *Earth Liberation Front* and *Earth First!*, the 2000s had the numerous *Climate Camps for Action*, and the 2010s saw *Frack Off* and the UK iterations of *Fridays for Future*. But amidst this plethora of often interconnected and (with the exception of *Fridays for Future*) often short-lived, albeit by no means plainly unsuccessful movements, two stand out as direct precursors to XR: *Compassionate Revolution, Ltd* and *Rising Up!*. It is easy to see the progression here. *Compassionate Revolution* was conjured up in the aftermath of the *Occupy* movement by two of the central theoretical figureheads and later co-founders of XR: Roger Hallam and Gail Bradbrook. It was a call to action that resonated only to a very limited extent. It never managed to generate the mass protests we have seen from either *Fridays for Future* or XR. But it formulated programmatically what was to be become XR's clarion call: that the environment, and hence the world, needed saving, and that echoing *Occupy Wall Street* mass-protest and radical demands are not mutually exclusive. Founded as a limited company, its legal body still plays a vital role in the way that the money XR has been generating — through donations or, more questionably, in odd schemes to partner up with economic actors

and cooperations for 'green growth'-initiatives — is used for XR's different chapters and their projects. Less a grassroots movement than a flexible instrument of organising finance, *Compassionate Revolution*s claims were not fleshed out after its original genesis. Primarily they wanted to do *something*. There were no clear policy proposals, though. Committed to filling this void, *Rising Up!*, which was founded two years later, proposed a programmatically anti-capitalist manifesto, including a host of far-ranging, potentially fairly transformative measures: the acceptance of ecocide as an international crime, the proposal of a Green New Deal, or the project of widespread reforestation across the globe.

Retrospectively, it is easy to see how Gail Bradbrook, Roger Hallam, as well as other organisers of these earlier movements that play key roles in XR now, learned from their comparatively unsuccessful attempts and implemented those lessons in XR's political infrastructure. *Extinction Rebellion* emerged from the trajectory of somewhat insufficient mobilisation. Now, it sets out to combine the best of both worlds, having grown in the shadow of massive movements such as *Occupy*: from the dyed-in-the-wool anti-capitalists of the *Occupy*-movement it takes the dedication to mass movements and broad coalitions, aiming at replenishing their ranks with groups from all strands of life; it also lifts

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Let%27s_change_-_End_Fossil_Fuels_now

the carnivalistic elements of protestivals from groups like *Earth First!*; and it dedicates itself to militant disruptions seen in the *Animal Defamation League*'s repertoire or the protests against the construction of the M11 in London in the mid-1990s. XR's playbook also carbon-copied *Occupy*'s penchant for catchy, all-encompassing demands. Halting just shy of the claim to represent the 99 per cent, XR has opted for three succinct demands, addressed to the UK government: that they accept the current situation as a climate emergency, reach net zero emissions by 2025, and create a citizens' assembly to foster the democratic process in reaching this aim.

The Eternal Socialist Question: What About the Working Class?

Simple as this may sound, strategic questions abound. This was neatly encapsulated in a mural made during one of the occupations in London in 2019. Allegedly created by Banksy, the image shows a young girl who has planted a sapling. XR's iconic hourglass symbol is visible as well as a caption: "From this moment despair ends and tactics begin", it claims. The line stems from one of the seminal texts of the counter-cultural movement: Raul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, originally published in 1967 (2012, 17). As a metacommentary on what has happened to XR, the story seems almost too good to be true. A huge swath of XR's internal debates have circled around which tactics to use, and consensus is far from being found. One persistent bone of contention

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:From_this_moment_despair_ends.jpg

within broad-based movements with a fairly decentralised structure is that chapters can perform all sorts of direct actions as long as the local activists are in favour of it; often, this leads to a lack of discussion, and the potential problems of certain actions are not reflected upon to an appropriate degree. Consequently, forms of protest that might not be sanctioned by a majority of a movement can nonetheless be performed by one of the local groups in the name of the movement proper. Turmoil and distancing gestures from official Twitter accounts frequently follow. The autonomy of those chapters might lead to commendable forms of protest, like the occupation of Oxford Circus or the XR North participation in the blockade of an arms factory in Oldham earlier in 2021. It is in these moments that XR's claim to building a broad movement resonates strongly in the tactics on the ground; they manage to evoke a politics of collective joy and participation coupled with substantial critique. They also come up with direct action forms that tackle important points where state, capitalism, and fossil fuel industry meet. In other instances, their attempts at disrupting the public have rightly evoked scathing criticism. When XR supporters decided to block London underground systems in October 2019, this brought the city to a standstill just like the earlier protestivals of *Reclaim the Streets* did in the 1990s. But rather than target the problem of single-person car ownership and blocking the roads — as *Reclaim the Streets* did —, the protestors directed their wrath against those (working-class) people already using a much more sustainable form of transport. And contrary to the subway protests initiated by environmental movements London had previously seen, XR's proved to be of distinctly limited imaginative capacity: rather than, for instance, blocking the subway entrance gates so that the rides would be free, they simply disrupted an ecologically much more sustainable practice than one-person-vehicle-transport. Would it be inaccurate to argue that, in this instance, XR prioritised the publicity and visibility of a headline-grabbing intervention over a sustained blockade of fossil fuel infrastructure? And can those actions mirror the rhetoric of equality and democracy the movement is, by its own admission, so beholden to? Whatever the answer here may be, it is hardly surprising that XR was castigated for a lack of working-class consciousness in the aftermath, conjuring up the external socialist question: how does the movement relate to the working class and the precariat?

Just Get Arrested and Everything Will Be Fine?

Another question looms large. Is this really the best path towards

building popular support? XR's answer to this hinges on their notion of 'arrestability'. They derive this concept from the academic work of Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, who analysed uprisings in a select sample of countries classified as authoritarian. Heavily indebted to those empirical findings, XR's activists argue that meaningful change — specifically, the toppling of an oppressive authoritarian regime — was brought about once 3.5 per cent of the population had been mobilised. For XR mobilising equals being arrested. Their reliance on that particular study is both remarkable and concerning. Gail Bradbrook, for instance, has repeatedly claimed that reading Chenoweth and Stephan's book was tantamount to 'a prayer being answered'. Sometimes, the rhetoric of revelation runs irritatingly strong in XR. They argue that as long as enough people are arrested this will sway public opinion (for instance, by rendering the police forces more susceptible to sympathising with their cause or by being tried in court and thus having an audience they might convince of their cause) (Chenoweth/Stephan 2011, 10-11). Their habitually cordial relationships with the state forces during their protests are indicative of that approach, too. Obviously, though, this view brings up some thorny issues. Firstly, Chenoweth and Stephan's account needs to be read with a grain of salt. Chenoweth has pointed out that their sample referred to very specific cases which are not easily applicable to the XR strongholds, namely the UK, France, Germany, the US. As deficient as those democracies might be, to classify them as authoritarian simply misses the mark. While it is commendable that XR believes in science, taking this one methodologically flawed study as a blueprint runs the risk of simplifying things too much (briefly, we might add the criticism that Chenoweth and Stephan's study is a rather selective reading of a very liberal canon of several case studies; for instance, to classify the struggle against apartheid in South Africa as non-violent appears a rather curious choice [2011, 233-42]). Arguably, a theory of change should be a bit more complicated than the simplistic formula of 'arrest equals change'. Secondly, it is no coincidence that those who are arrested tend to be (young) white middle-class activists. Like so many environmental movements flourishing in Europe, XR is dominated by that very clientele. They mobilise a very specific urban, (often) bourgeois constituency. This, however, is not just a question of equal representation within the movement (though it is that too). Rather, it speaks to the different relations to the state and law enforcement that people of colour have in the British context (and in almost all national contexts of state-sanctioned violence) — even though, admittedly, recent

crackdowns against militants seem to have been similarly draconian, irrespective of the identities of the particular people it targeted. Not least of all, the structure of XR has opened the doors to dubious endorsements. Seeking a broad coalition comes with its own pitfalls, one of which has been that the movement has courted and enfolded groups that are not exactly proponents of emancipatory and egalitarian politics. For instance, XR's flirtatious tapping into the UK's anti-vaccer movement, defending their 'right to protest' — as though protests against mask mandates and protests against the fossil fuel industry were somehow ethically similar endeavours — is just the latest example of deficient aspirations towards building a mass-movement without clear ethical or political guidelines. Fostering a non-confrontational environment in XR's assemblies is all good and well; nevertheless political demarcation lines have to be considered, and some coalitions cannot be legitimised by arguing that one gains power through numbers alone.

In addition, there is also the vital question of long-term commitment. There is a core of 'arrestables' XR relies on as their backbone. However, otherwise commitment fluctuates. In that respect, XR's strategies have suffered from a phenomenon widely observable on the Left during the last two decades: its lack of deep-rooted organisational structures. While the movement *has* been capable of mobilising a huge swath of people from different fields of life, it often struggled with maintaining their engagement. Organisation is underdeveloped, mobilisation often episodic. XR, so far, has shown little interest in creating within their movement the infrastructure to nurture *sustained* forms of disruption. This is particularly perturbing, because their aspirations of establishing a broad-based movement as well as their commitment to non-violence could very well contribute to XR being a massive force on the British political landscape. And while it is not clear which role XR's strategic decisions *vis-à-vis* the covid pandemic have played in its waning influence, its contributions to what some have hailed as the emergence of an emancipatory 'ecological class consciousness' have not yet materialised. Not least of all, because XR's infrastructure lacks anything resembling actual permanent institutions in communities that would keep people engaged. XR seems to have realised as much. Recently, it updated its strategy paper, emphasising, besides a host of other strategic questions, that "[w]eekly local group meetings need to welcome people, feed them, love them and *train them up towards mass rebellion*" (XR 2022, 16; emphasis A.K.). Rather than performing militant stunts with a significant symbolic

impact, movement organising seems to be pushed to the forefront here. Roger Hallam's part-time departure to set up *Insulate Britain*, an organisation focussed on housing questions more generally, might have indicated a shift here towards the more familiar terrain of party politics and single-issue groups, even when those are still couched in environmental terms (and despite XR publically sending "love and courage" to *Insulate Britain* activists). Does that mean that XR's promise to move beyond politics is exhausted? Not necessarily. But of course, neither strategic orientation solves all the issues in one clear stroke; instead, it only begets new questions. This is especially the case as leftist activists have shown a penchant for making some 'other Left', for instance horizontalists, proponents of party politics, violent militants, civil demonstrators etc., the scapegoat for the failure of the movement as such.

XR in the Future: Between Hope and Critique

The contemporary landscape of the political Left — particularly beyond political parties —, then, resembles a mosaic of alternatives. This composition, ripe with differences, inevitably gives birth to critique. Moreover, the seeming unassailability of capitalist social relations puts social movements into the unenviable position of shouldering immense expectations. In that respect, the ecstatic episodes of a 'politics of the streets' as facilitated by XR should not be denigrated. They imbued participants with a visceral sense of urgency, of a vision that things could be different — they provided an opening. The promise XR holds, which is essentially that of a mass-movement, is worth pursuing. Without doubt, it is part of an ecology of different organisations on the Left working towards the same goal: an emancipated society. That does not necessarily mean that all actions are beyond criticism, though, and hard questions need to be asked of XR's involvement with a less materialist, more esoteric clientele. The mass intake of psychedelic drugs, as suggested by Bradbrook, might perhaps be *an* element of revolution; it should definitely not be *the* quintessence. Without attempting to meticulously map the role drugs may or may not play in revolutionary struggles — and this question is clearly ripe with ambiguity —, a rhetoric such as Bradbrook's again problematically favour individual perception-altering moments over the need to build a lasting organisational infrastructure. Briefly put, this amounts to consciousness-widening instead of consciousness-raising. Educating participants and engaging in the often time-consuming process of building power in the existing institutions as well as creating new institutions in which popular power can be realised is eschewed here in favour of the

silver bullet of drug consumption. This approach is arguably inimical to building power and creating political pressure. Of course, tactical faux pas such as this one, should not ban XR from being considered a relevant part of the Left's environmental and overall anti-capitalist movement of movements. XR's failures in many respects are an invitation for critique, and progressive social movements are no strangers to failure. With Marx we might add that "[p]roletarian revolutions constantly engage in self-criticism". They are, he reminds us, wont to "return to what has already been accomplished in order to begin the task again, with merciless thoroughness they mock the inadequate, weak and wretched aspects of their first attempt" (1978, 150). XR took the efforts of previous movements and tried to adapt these strategies to the current moment. These strategies deserve scrutiny, doubling-down where appropriate, and overhaul where necessary. With the goal of 1.5 degree of global warming almost unachievably out of view, action becomes paramount. As American Beat Generation poet Diane Di Prima once put it: "No one way works, it will take all of us shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down" (qtd. in Nunes 2021, 201).[1] Discarding XR would be foolish; taking its approach as the only way forward and beyond critique would not be helpful either.

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Urbanature Planning: Galway National Park City

Tina-Karen Pusse

How can we organise our lives in order to reduce our individual and collective carbon footprints and become more resilient to the effects of climate crisis? And what role can city planning play in providing a framework for a 'greener' way of living? In this article, Tina-Karen Pusse (Galway) discusses the concept of the 15-minute city and offers an alternative, 'messier' approach chosen by Galway, Ireland.

At the time of writing, we are not quite out of a pandemic and have just tapped our feet into a geopolitical situation that could well escalate to a third world war. Yet there are few issues where fronts in twitter space have hardened as much as in "cost of living" discussions between rural and urban dwellers. Triggered by general inflation, specifically steep increases in the price of gas and electricity, but also of rents in urban centres, debates about how and where to live can heat up quickly.

On one side, there are the proponents of the "15-minute city", an urban planning concept based on mixed residential, commercial and communal use that allows city dwellers to cater for their daily needs, or reach their place of work within a 15-minute walk or bike ride. This model is often presented as the solution to our environmental woes and logistical problems (while not taking into account that the job market rarely aligns with this model, especially in households with more than one earner). On the other side, the pandemic experience with remote working has allowed more and more former city dwellers to move to the outskirts and countryside, where they now find themselves stuck with long and costly commutes on those days of the week when they do have to come in at work again.

The 15-minute City

Proponents of this model come from different ends of the political spectrum, reaching from signatories of the Ecomodernist Manifesto, a group of scholars arguing that "decoupling" humanity from nature and "intensifying many human activities" (meant as condensing different areas of life within a smaller radius) leads to less interference with the "natural world" while enabling green growth (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015), to de-growth Extinction Rebellion activist and author George Monbiot. Both sides believe that a concentration of human populations in well-organised large cities, with dense populations and efficient infrastructures will reduce energy use and land sealing per capita, will allow for social activity with very little commute and is therefore a more sustainable form of human habitation, in the case of Monbiot especially when pitched against a shift towards individual e-mobility. While green growth proponents find the efficiency gains and carbon savings of such urban planning most appealing, for Extinction Rebellion the main merit is the idea that dense human dwelling will free up more land for rewilding initiatives, thereby also reducing agro-industrial space. This idea has its merits: the most convincing one being that it breaks with the ideology of countryside living as "closer to nature", and therefore ecologically aware by default.

However, reducing our immediate geographic impact by decreasing the surface space used for dwelling, community space, commerce, and agriculture so that more land can be used for rewilding initiatives, is a prime example of what Timothy Morton in *Ecology without Nature* describes as the *ideological load* of the concept of nature itself, that from which we have decoupled ourselves over time, in the name of, amongst others, Christianity, Cartesian Philosophy, Romanticism or Capitalism. Framing humans as separate from and therefore disruptive to the non-human world, either in the context of aesthetics, religion, metaphysics or economic production, makes it tempting for environmentalists to believe that "nature" will recover from us through a mere shrinking process of the human sphere, not taking into account the complex entanglements of living beings and non-living matter, not even fully taking into account the human body as one of the sites of such entanglements.

Humans as Eco-tourists in 'Wilderness' Areas

One could say that both the Ecomodernists and Extinction Rebellion are thinking in the paradigm of separation of the *human* sphere

and the sphere of *everything else* (i.e. nonhuman nature), in so far as they, in a reverse exorcism, argue for humanity to cast itself off the sites that it destroyed, to let them "heal". These new wilderness areas, so the argument, could then be cautiously re-entered for recreational purposes to "let people enjoy magnificent nature experiences" (so Monbiot in the BBC Reel "Could Rewilding be a Natural Solution to Urban Stress?", see Carfrae 2020). In other words, the role of humans in such 'wilderness' areas would be that of eco-tourists.

Neo-romantic urbanites who suffer from burnout, depression or a general lack of enthusiasm for the spaces they inhabit can then enjoy the amenity of a fragment or pocket of 'wildlife', on a managed hiking trail, feel 'in harmony with nature' or renew their strength for a weekend, while also being protected from its dangers and discomforts by their equipment, bug spray, and conveniently located sleeping facilities. This staging of wilderness allows them to consume the forests and bogs, coastlines and mountains as products, and under the condition that they remove themselves from these sites quickly and leave nothing behind. While remaining in their general framing of separation, they entertain the fantasy of momentary oneness with 'nature'.

Smart Cities: Efficiency vs. Vulnerability

While we increasingly feel the effects of climate change, pollution, soil depletion, ecological loss, war and pandemics, such a cure of sporadic forest bathing in our nearby wildlife pocket may soothe our anxieties. But it comes with the risk that such stress relief also calms the previously felt urgency, the need, as Donna Haraway points out, to 'stay with the trouble', to take full responsibility for our sites of destruction, to acknowledge and welcome other life forms everywhere. Especially in light of recent events, the idea of perfectly efficient utopian megacities (unlike the chaotic present time examples such as Mexico City or Lagos) seems already dated, stemming from a time when there was still trust in efficient, uninterrupted material flows of energy, gas, building materials, waste management, sewage treatment, flood defences and food supply. In other words: the bigger and more densely populated the city, the higher its dependency on a smoothly running urban metabolism. Equally, the enthusiasm for Smart Cities and their promise of efficiency gains, added security and social backup for the elderly population or people with disabilities, has been severely dampened by ransomware attacks on public bodies and organisations in the last few years. It is its very density, efficiency

(just-in-time delivery, no storage facilities) and dependency on remote management through cloud solutions (sometimes as banal as swipe card access to doors and lifts) that makes these cities extremely vulnerable and unsafe. As cities become more efficient and living in them more convenient, they can become less resilient, unless multiple layers of backup systems are built in, which, again, would require more energy and materials (i.e. redundancies). It is the very cracks in the system, their inefficiencies, that can provide opportunities in times of need, such as the existence of multiple heating or transport systems in one area. One would not want to live on the 15th floor in a micro apartment without mechanical doors at a time of electricity fluctuations, or when the city is cut off from food or water supply for an extended period of time. Very soon, it would become undeniable that "nature" is not "out there", starting 15 km from the city boundaries, but always already right here.

Increased Consumption: the Wealth Paradox

In addition, urban planning has to take the wealth paradox into account. When economic activity increases in cities, despite (or rather because of) resource-efficient infrastructure, city dwellers tend to develop quicker consumption turnovers (less bulk buying, more single item purchases, partially due to their reduced storage space). Kennedy et al.'s study (even though stats may have changed since 2011) shows that while 7% of the global population live in 27 megacities, their residents use 9% of electricity, 10% of gas, and produce 13% of waste. This is not to say that increased consumption does not apply to wealthy countryside dwellers, but densification does not solve the problem by itself. The industrial and agricultural spaces and processes needed to meet increased consumption demands have to be added to their ecological footprint per capita. Especially when dense cities are wealthy, they rely on workers who cannot afford to live in them, and the efficiency of their urban cores becomes increasingly outweighed by their spread into the peripheries and the long commutes they require. Eventually, prime locations become so expensive that they are no longer inhabited, but left vacant as investment assets of global funds (Bourne 2019). An accurate ecological footprint of a city should therefore not be based on its registered population, but must *include* commuter flow and the remote footprints of asset speculation. To contest this, a *sustainable* 15-minute city needs to include provision of housing that is still affordable for its lowest-paid citizens in every area, i.e. kitchen staff of upmarket restaurants, too, must reach their places of work

within a 15-minute bike ride.

Galway: An Alternative to the Human-Nature Divide of the 15-Minute City Concept

As an alternative to the binary approach of the Ecomodernist Manifesto that favours a clear division between dense urban centres and wildlife areas, Galway, at the West Coast of Ireland, aims to break down this human/nature divide and invites wildlife into the fabric of its city. Its "National Park City" initiative was launched in 2020 and comprises of projects on biodiversity trails, eco neighbourhoods, circular economy, youth activism, and sustainability in the workplace. University of Galway, the city's biggest community (a quarter of Galway's 85 000 inhabitants are students and staff of its university) has taken on the challenge of being carbon neutral by 2030. While the physical campus is still being expanded, energy consumption has decreased significantly in absolute numbers, even though footprints of employees working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic were included in the calculations. Biodiversity and pollination trails replace landscaped gardens, an increasing number of the university's labs are "green lab certified" (a process to be completed by 2025), contractors and tender processes have

Nesting swans at city canal, photo credit Chaosheng Zhang, with kind permission

to guarantee the same sustainability standards. University of Galway is networking internationally with other public institutions on the same mission to share best practise (NUI Galway, *Sustainability Strategy*).

Especially when it comes to transport management, it has to be acknowledged that Galway is not very efficiently organised and its City Council, unfortunately, remains dominated by representatives resisting its full transition to cycle-friendly mobility. Even its transition to individual electric mobility is hindered by the fact that the majority of housing in Galway consists of two-two-storey terraces with off-street parking, making it impossible to charge electric vehicles at home, as they would block pavements. Nevertheless, bus services, mail delivery vehicles and the campus fleet have been electrified and the City offers a sufficient number of charging stations.

"Henry the Heron", photo credit CliveHughesIrishArt, with kind permission

Wildlife Within the City

Counterintuitively, especially its busy medieval centre with its narrow streets and inefficient terraces allows wildlife in Galway to flourish.

The narrowness of streets slows down traffic so that it is not a major threat to animals crossing roads. Small back-to-back gardens between terrace rows create green spaces inaccessible to the general public, increasingly used as common neighbourhood parks, connected biodiversity trails, or involuntarily overgrown, when public land is closed in by private gardens, another example of how inefficient land use creates opportunities for small scale rewilding.

Its many canals and rivers connect fresh water with the Atlantic coast, providing inner city aquatic habitats for eels, salmon, otters and seals as well

Google Maps Satellite View of Shantalla, a former inner city council house area of Galway

as for a huge population of continental and marine birds. Foxes, badgers, bats and hedgehogs are regularly spotted in gardens, parks and sheds, and unlike in many other cities, feral mammals do not rely on dumpsters to survive. Through partnerships between community groups, the Applied Ecology Unit at University of Galway, and the Heritage Office, Galway Council is backing biodiversity projects that integrate human and non-human habitats: Despite immense pressure on the provision of housing and the temptation of very high land prices, approximately 20% of the city's land area is designated as protected habitats and communal parks, such as Terryland Forest Park, originally planned in the 1990s to combat urban sprawl and to protect native trees within the city boundaries (McGrath 2021). This 180 acres biodiversity trail is community run. By the time of writing 100 000 native Irish trees and tens of thousands of wildflowers were planted by Schools, council staff and volunteers, functioning as a carbon sink, a rich habitat for smaller animals, and a sponge buffer for flooding events simultaneously. At its borders, small areas are designated for organic gardening. As in many cities with sufficient green spaces, bees and other insects are protected from aggressive herbicides and pesticides used in agricultural settings. These neighbourly relationships between humans and animal cohabitants allow for a symbiosis of cultured and less regulated plant and animal life and create kinship between human and non-human cohabitants in neighbourhoods.

Sustainable City Planning

As the city is planning to grow from 85 000 to 120 000 inhabitants over the coming 20 years, all areas of planning have to include achieving the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), signed by Ireland in 2020 (Galway City Council, *Draft Development Plan*). This requires condensing housing, especially vertically and through "sensitive infill" (mixed commercial and residential use, reducing the number of detached houses), improving public transport and pedestrianising wider areas of the City. While these changes are necessary, the example of Galway at present already demonstrates that urban living and frequent encounters with non- or less domesticated plants and animals are not mutually exclusive, that the human sphere and "the wild" do not need to, or rather should not be strictly divided. Indeed, urban ecologist Eric W. Sanderson, senior conservation scientist for the Wildlife Conservation Society, argues that cities can be a refuge for endangered plants and animals that are supressed in farmland areas (cited in Marinelli 2021).

Merging the 'Human Sphere' and 'the Wild': Galway as a Messy Alternative

In *Darwin comes to Town*, biologist Menno Schilthuizen outlines that wildlife species adapted to urban environments are best understood when compared with the evolutionary pressure of an archipelago, where new species, such as the London Underground Mosquito, develop at increased speed. The biggest challenge of city planning in such non-anthropocentric frames is how to balance needs of multiple species within limited space, which ultimately means that optimisation for humans, efficiency and convenience should *not* be first planning principles.

While efforts of increasing wildlife habitats on farming sites, especially through reduction of meat and dairy consumption are necessary, hyper-densification of housing may not be. Instead, organising housing in a way that allows for neighbourly relationships with wildlife or directly supports it can be achieved already through relatively small changes, such as incentives or regulations to use gardens and rooftops as pollination trails, restricting residential parking permits to allow for de-sealing of a higher percentage of the city's surface area or a larger proportion of communal space in neighbourhoods, to reduce individual space requirements moderately. Since reproductive rates are falling globally with huge demographic decreases soon to be expected in the Northern hemisphere, but also in Asia, we have to realise that many of

today's housing crises might only be a one-generation problem, and that the challenges of extreme climate events, material flow disruptions and even wildlife protection can be addressed, perhaps more successfully, within small city settings that are not perfectly optimised for human habitation, but instead leave space and opportunities for multiple nonhuman life forms. By demonstrating that the distinction between the "human sphere" and "the wild" is just one of the many dominant narratives we have become accustomed to, one which is indeed very present in the Ecomodernist movement as well as in Extinction Rebellion campaigns, the Galway National Park City initiative stands for a messier, neither anthropocentric nor ecocentric environmentalism, one that 'stays with the trouble' of trying to create and support spaces that might not be ideal for either species, but in which many, including humans, can exist together and encounter one another.

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"Let's take everybody along, let's improve well-being and stop focusing on growth":

An Interview with Rob Nunney, Green Party Councillor in Manchester

Sebastian Berg

Despite the obstacles small parties face in the majoritarian systems that apply to most types of elections in Britain, the Green Party has recently managed to get many more feet into the doors of local politics. In the 2022 local elections (with about a third of council seats contested all over the country), they more than doubled their representatives by 86 to 159. This trend affects also rock-solid red-wall councils such as Manchester's, where Labour still holds 91 of 96 seats (down from 96 of 96 in 2015). While one of Manchester's now three Green councillors has recently defected from Labour, the other two have been elected (in 2021 and 2022 respectively) to represent Woodhouse Park, a working-class area in the southern margins of the city. Hard Times asked Rob Nunney, who in 2021 became the first Green councillor in the city since 2008, about the reasons why a ward ranked as Manchester's sixth most deprived (out of a total of 32) returns Green rather than Labour councillors. Further, he discusses the chances and limitations of Green local politics and the most pressing issues to be addressed in Britain generally as well as in Manchester specifically.

Given the scale and the intensity of the ecological crisis, how effective are local politics and local government? What can you achieve at the level of a large city like Manchester?

I think they have potential to be very effective. But the issue here in Manchester (and I'm sure it's the same across the the UK) is getting funding from central government for projects such as retrofitting, which is a really big thing that we're pushing for in the Green Party at the moment – not only because of the climate crisis, there's the cost of living crisis as well. So you're solving two crises together. Manchester City Council has a target to meet net zero by 2038. The council is struggling

to keep on target with that. As far as its direct emissions from the council, we're actually doing quite well, we're on target to halve our emissions by 2025. But the issue is, although the council may seem to have quite a large scope and produce quite a lot of emissions, it only works out as 2% of what the city produces. So the biggest challenge for us as a council is to get businesses and residents on board and doing whatever they can to reduce their emissions.

At the same time another challenge is lobbying central government to try and get some funding so we can actually help community housing groups, for example, with the rolling out of retrofitting and things like that.

On the one hand, you are dependent on central government and its funding. On the other, looking at Manchester, there is something specific to its local politics – its very large Labour majority on the City Council. I've noticed that you have one new member in the Green Party group. So now you are three Greens (and two Lib Dems) against 91 Labour councillors. Does it make life more complicated to be faced with a near-monopoly of Labour representatives?

Absolutely. Before May this year, I was the only Green Party member on the council and obviously I got into politics because I have deep concerns about climate breakdown and how slowly we are moving to tackle this. Time is quickly running out. So my whole purpose of becoming a politician is around climate breakdown. Now, Manchester City Council has 16 committees. There are six scrutiny committees. As a councillor, you have the right to sit on at least one scrutiny committee, but as a sole councillor, I didn't have the right to choose which one. I was asked in my induction – this is standard – to rate my top three choices. And because they could, the Labour Council, the Labour Administration punished me and gave me a scrutiny committee seat which was not in my top three. Based on what I just said, you can imagine my number one choice was the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee. However, after the last local elections, we became a group. Now, as a group, we are treated differently. All opposition members, between us – the two Lib Dems and the two Green Party members, we have a right to one seat between us on every committee. So we then actually discussed and decided with the Lib Dems who's going to be sitting on what. And I'm very pleased to say that we managed to get a seat for me on the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee. So just actually being on that committee alone has made a difference. I can actually try to influence by scrutinising and asking

questions – try to push things forward as much as possible. I sat on my first real meeting a couple of weeks ago and procurement was on the agenda. Because like I was saying, the council itself, we're doing well on reaching our targets, but it's getting to companies in the city as a whole. The council decided to put a 10% weighting on Manchester procurement bids. If you can show that your company has ambitious sustainability targets then the council will give your bid a higher priority.

This way the council is more likely to give contracts to businesses who have sound sustainability plans and to companies with the right ethos. I brought up a point of how we're going to actually make sure that this is not green washing and to hold firms to account to make sure that their green claims are actually followed through. The Competition and Markets Authority has a Green Claims Code which I brought to the attention of the committee. This was not something which had been considered so I brought it up. So I feel like now I'm actually bringing up things that wouldn't have been spotted before. I'm not saying that there aren't other good members on the scrutiny committee, but the more people who are focused on this with different points of views and different eyes, the better. I feel much more empowered now to actually help steer the Council in the right direction, and that has been made possible by having enough councillors to form a group. It was very difficult to influence the council being a sole councillor. In fact, the only thing I could do is really ask questions at full Council meetings. The scrutiny committee that I was on was the Children and Young People, so I would try and bring climate change onto the agenda whenever I could because it's very cross-cutting, everything ties in with environmental issues. So, yes, it's better than it was, but it's still very Labour-dominated.

In your 2022 local election manifesto you argue that you would like to replace the current cabinet system by a committee system. As you mention, there are committees at the moment, but there is also a cabinet. So I assume, in a committee system committees are stronger and have more influence?

The basic difference is a committee system takes away the power from a few, giving it to more councillors and spreading the decision-making across the Council, rather than the cabinet, the executive, making all the decisions – and the rest of the Council having very little say or input on the direction of council policy. Our manifesto in general for the Green Party of England and Wales is very much centred around democracy and improving democracy. We are for proportional

representation, for example. Within the party, everything is decided democratically too. Everybody has the same voting rights. Yes, I think democracy needs to be brought down to as low a grassroots level as possible. That's part of what we're actually doing in our campaigning as well. It's giving residents the feeling that because they're in touch with us they can have influence on how we represent them. So if we had a committee structure, rather than a cabinet structure with the executive making all the decisions, then we would be able to represent them even better.

Does it make a difference that you are the official opposition now? Does this give you any more rights, any more privileges?

Not that I'm aware of. Because our numbers haven't increased dramatically, it's still proportional, so we still have the same rights to the one seat on each committee. However, it's early days yet. What we are hoping is that we will have a stronger voice in the press because they want to hear an opinion on something that is not the opinion of the ruling administration. Then the obvious choice would be to

photo credit Rob Nunney, with kind persmission

come to to us as the official opposition. Already the Labour group is taking us more seriously because when I got elected, it could have been brushed off as a fluke, as a flash in the pan. But when we got our second councillor elected, it became difficult to just fob us off and say, well, it's just coincidence or whatever. It's clearly a movement now. So it does make a difference, but it's slow going, unfortunately.

There seems to be a general trend that there are more and more Green councillors all over England, or all over Britain. Do you think this is primarily related to the whole debate about the climate crisis or climate breakdown?

I think it's the result of a combination of things that climate breakdown is definitely much higher on the agenda with the media and that people are considering it more. But also as a party, we're much better at campaigning than we used to be. We have a tactic and it's clearly working. We know how to relate to residents and how to be in touch with them. Not out of touch. And to understand where they're coming from and to take the time and effort to actually interact with them. This happens on a local level here in Manchester, but I'm sure it happens up and down the country. However, particularly here, because Labour has had such a major stronghold for so long, they've become complacent. I've had residents telling me that the way that we work is how Labour used to work years ago. So I get the impression that the bigger parties have become out of touch. It's a combination of the two: raised awareness of the climate issue and us getting better at campaigning.

That's interesting. Related to campaigning and being in or out of touch with people: according to my knowledge of Manchester, Woodhouse Park would not have been the most likely ward to elect the first two Green councillors. One would probably have thought of places like Chorlton[1]. Is Woodhouse Park's proximity to the airport of central importance here?

It is related to what we touched upon just now, talking about politicians being out of touch and residents feeling left behind and not being listened to. They're not getting attention, particularly in wards such as Woodhouse Park or several others. But we have to work within the first past the post system. That's something that we have ambitions to change on a local level. If we had proportional representation in Manchester, we would already have had several councillors. The way that first past the post works, it encourages parties to focus on one or two wards or constituencies. Those which they have no chance of winning they don't give

much attention to, which is unfair of course. But unfortunately, we have to work within those limits in order to be elected. When we started campaigning in Woodhouse Park, we made efforts to get to know the residents, to knock on doors, publish regular newsletters, keep locals informed of what we were doing and feeding back to them what they told us, so they knew that we were in touch with them. We knew that we were basically echoing to them what we'd already been told by them and acting on these issues such as the one you mentioned, the airport.

The airport is important at a local level. Being neighbours with the airport can be quite difficult, particularly with parking problems. There's a lot of grievance around travellers who use the airport and, to avoid the high costs of airport parking, park on residential streets. That's one of the issues that we haven't yet managed to resolve. We need to get the airport on board and put their hands in their pockets and help resolve these issues. It's all down to being in touch with what residents want and need, but on the other hand, it has to be something that also chimes with us. I'm not saying we should completely sell out, we have to stick to our principles. For instance, we had a beautiful green space and a resident said to me, oh, we haven't got enough parking spaces, can we make that into a car park? I would be likely to argue the point that we really need to reduce reliance on cars rather than building more car parks. Our success caught a lot of people by surprise, people who weren't in the know. Because, like you say, our strongest wards are places like Chorlton, Whalley Range, Levenshulme, where we often come second. But coming second never gets you anywhere. So that's what we worked on, we chose the area where we were most likely to be effective and we worked at it and it's a lot of hard work. A lot of raising awareness was required because when people think of the Greens, they don't necessarily think of our social values. I do not know the number of times it was said to me before I got elected, oh, you'll never get elected here because we're working class and we always vote socialist. These people just didn't realise that we have a very socialist agenda, a very socialist manifesto.

Absolutely. I had a look at the last local election manifesto and it contains lots of left wing, socialist ideas. Did you focus on these in your campaigning and canvassing?

No, people are not excited about policy - apart from nerds like me and possibly you. The vast majority of people live very busy lives: I can speak of Woodhouse Park because I know the area so well. I mean the population, the people, because over the last four

years I‘ve got to know them: they lead busy lives, they have day-to-day worries with the cost of living, and people who survive on benefits are more concerned about making ends meet. Climate change for many people seems a long-off issue, something in the distance, so you have to prioritise your problems. If you've got a problem of feeding your kids or keeping them warm, of course you're going to focus on that. You just haven't got the head space to actually consider a massive issue such as climate breakdown. But the flip side of that is we've actually reached out to people who, I would say, didn't vote for me or Astrid[2] because of our Green credentials initially. However, they have seen what we've done for them and they are considering these green issues more and more.

To give you an example, in the last mayor election, in May last year, I'm really proud to say that Woodhouse Park had the biggest share of votes for our Green Party candidate in the whole of Greater Manchester. Like you said, you would expect such a result in Chorlton or Whalley Range or even Hulme. However, we've managed to win over hearts and minds. I think, without claiming credit for it, it's a fantastic achievement because we have to win over the hearts and minds of ordinary people. When I say ordinary people, I mean the majority of people. If we are going to do anything about the climate crisis, we have to all go along together, take as many people with us as possible. Just a small proportion of us who are really keen and working hard and trying to live the greenest life that we can, isn't going to make a difference in the big picture. So I'm really pleased about that actually changing in areas such as Woodhouse Park.

Speaking about green lives, looking at Manchester, do you have a vision how a green Manchester should look like? Which are the most important changes that should be made?

Well, the bee in the bonnet is transport, for example. It causes me a lot of problems with casework. Residents often have issues with parking and that also ties in with our goals to be carbon-neutral and also to have more active and healthier lives. Everything just ties in. So if I were to imagine a model city, we would have 15-minutes neighbourhoods where you can actually reach green spaces, work, and leisure within 15 minutes of your own home. You'd be able to do that by active travel, be able to walk safely and cycle safely. So we would have a fantastic cycle network and walking network where you are separate from the main roads, like the Amsterdam system. I've cycled around Amsterdam. It's amazing, you hardly ever go on a shared road with car traffic. And when you do, there's so much respect for

cyclists. It's a very different feeling to here where many people don't cycle because they're scared to do so, they realise it can be very risky. So we would have much better public transport. Ideally, public transport would be free.

We would have a frequent flyer levy at Manchester Airport. As you pointed out, Manchester Airport is in the ward I represent. So it's something that I am very keen on. It's something that the Labour administration in Manchester is very much against. They are all for growing passenger numbers and growing the airport, almost doubling passenger numbers in the next few years. I think we need to vastly reduce the amount of flying – in a fair way, which the frequent fly levy would do, because 15% of the population take 70% of flights. So it's only fair that your average working-class person, who gets two weeks off and wants to go and spend them in the sun once a year, can do so. But then if you've got somebody who's on their fourth long haul flight that year, then, they should be penalised, they should be discouraged.

When I think about planning the city, we can be doing much more around tackling heat islands too, for example, because not only is that working towards mitigating climate breakdown, but it's also adaptation. So you could have much better use of trees, living walls and things like that in city centres. This also helps protect biodiversity. That's my vision. And better access to green spaces: we don't all need to have our own private garden, a big garden, we just need access to a quality green space on our doorstep that we can share. Finally, we would have homes which are fully retrofitted, so heating would be a lot cheaper and emissions from that would be vastly reduced.

Whenever I come back to Manchester, I'm surprised that there are another ten high-rise buildings that have gone up in the meantime, especially in the city centre. Usually, they are luxury homes. Is this something that needs to be addressed? There is currently a lot of debate about the cost of living crisis and concretely about homelessness, social housing versus luxury flats, especially in inner city areas.

Absolutely. The vast majority of these buildings that are going up in the city centre, they're going up for investments rather than for producing affordable homes for those who need them. And this planning permission is given without forcing the builders to have any kind of proportion of their buildings classed as affordable or social housing, which would be very easy to do, and it's done in many other places, but it just seems not to be made use

of here in Manchester. The previous Council Leader's focus seemed to be just on the prestige of the city centre, rather than having more focus on improving the lives of actual Mancunians (we will see what the current Leader thinks once she really gets into the role).[3] It was all about how can we get more investment into Manchester, which I suppose, in the capitalist system that we have, is important. I don't know how familiar you are with our manifestos – we want to move away from focusing on GDP, for example, because that's not important. What is important is people's wellbeing, and you can have the best growth or GDP in the world and have a massive gap between the richest and the poorest, and those who are the poorest are really struggling. Let's narrow that gap, let's take everybody along, let's improve wellbeing and stop focusing on growth. Eternal growth is an oxymoron. I think that's caused us a lot of problems, that's got us where we are now, consuming the planet's finite resources.

May I come back to the fact that Woodhouse Park is a working-class area. The German Green Party in many ways is quite different from the Green Party of England and Wales. In Germany you often hear allegations that the Green Party is obsessed with some form of middle-class authoritarianism: a prescriptive and intolerant approach on how people should live. And this is often used against the party. If, for example, they come up with a recommendation to have a weekly vegan or vegetarian day in school canteens, people get the feeling (popularised by parts of the media) that this is sliding into an eco- and dietary dictatorship. Do you encounter similar accusations of being prescriptive and intending people to change their behaviour in ways they supposedly don't want?

I haven't really encountered that much. The German Greens have been a victim of their success because they've been able to enact their policies or they've been able to reach a larger audience and talk about them. Hence people are more likely to make these accusations, whereas we're not in a position where we can really enact our policies to the degree that we would like to.

But I would say that we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. What I mean is the number of times when I talk to friends, usually in my circles beyond the Green Party, about green issues, the general feeling seems to be, well, what difference am I going to make? I can stop flying, or I can use my car less or sell it, but I'm just one individual. That's not going to make a difference. This is why we need to have these prescriptive regulations in place. We all agree that we have to do it as

a group, however big that group is – the bigger the better. But then when we put measures in place to do that, then we get criticised as well. While it's essential, that we all have to do it, it's as important to bring people along with us, as I mentioned earlier. And that's one of my big criticisms of the plan for the Clean Air Zone[4], that it was very much stick and not enough carrot. I blame the Greater Manchester Combined Authority[5] and I blame the government as well.

That's interesting. Could you elaborate – what kind of carrot should have been offered?

Well, there are so many things that we can do to improve the air quality. The thing I mentioned earlier was improving the transport infrastructure: the public transport, the walking and cycling infrastructure, there's stuff that we could do immediately. It's well known that travelling at 50 mph produces much lower emissions than travelling at 70 miles an hour. So we could identify the hot spots around the M 60 and reduce those speeds there. And that would be an immediate win with very little investment and no difficulty on behalf of the drivers.

It's not really a carrot, at least not for the drivers, who might even feel punished (though I agree, that's ridiculous). Ok, better possibilities for cycling: this definitely is a carrot…

And better funding to help • • • drivers to make the transition, because nobody wins if small businesses are having to pay these fines in order to continue as they are. They're paying the fines and we as a whole don't get cleaner air. But having said that, the new Clean Air Plan doesn't go far enough. There's very much a reliance on the perception that we're slowly moving towards cleaner vehicles anyway. Let's just sit back and see what happens. I think we could have imposed a zone in smaller areas, a charging Clean Air Zone, in the city centre for example, and to discourage people from driving into the city centre, particularly in polluting vehicles. So we could still have a charging Clean Air Zone but make it more targeted. It was very ambitious, too ambitious in the area, that is, but not necessarily in other scopes – private vehicles weren't even considered, for example. So it's just a missed opportunity, I think. And I blame Greater Manchester as well as the government. Sorry, I think they both could have done much better on it.

My final question is related to exactly the notion of grassroots democracy whose importance you have mentioned repeatedly, and it's about

a very specific issue in your manifesto: statues and monuments. There has been and still is heated debate in Britain about what to do with the statues of traders in human lives and of colonialists such as Colston, Rhodes, etc. The point in your manifesto is that local communities should decide for themselves what to do with them, which I think makes perfect sense. However, it's hard to define a community: in case of a conflict, who actually should decide on who qualifies as member of the community? Let's take the case of the statue of a trader with enslaved people: is the community that should decide on this question the local (in Manchester's case, city-wide) black, Asian, minority ethnic community, or is it the local community in whose neighbourhood the monument is located? What exactly is your idea of community?

That's something that could be worked out at the finer points if we got to that stage where we actually did engage the community. And I think that you made a very good point that those who are black should have a bigger say than somebody like myself. However, if the statue is going to be in my local area, then it should be weighted like that: those who live close to it should have a bigger say than those who live far away. And then, those who have more connections to the actual issue, they should have a bigger say, too. But the most important thing is actually making efforts to engage the community, to engage residents about what's going on in their area. And that doesn't just go for statues or monuments. I think that goes for many things. There are a few low traffic neighbourhoods that have been put in place in and around Levenshulme and there's been a lot of backlash. There were certain people who were very much against it. I don't know what's actually being done, but I know that there has been some work with the local communities to find out opinions and how to put this forward.

Thus it's essential that you have an argument, that eventually you can say, well, this is what most people want here. You discuss the benefits of it, it's not just you deciding top-down that this is the best thing to do. So for us, it's essential that you bring people into the decision making process as much as possible.

Endnotes

1 Manchester's Connewitz, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, or Schanzenviertel.

2 Astrid Johnson became Woodhouse Park's second Green representative, elected one year after Rob Nunney in May 2022.

3 Bev Craig succeeded Richard Leese as Leader of the Council in late 2021. Leese had been Leader since 1996.

4 Greater Manchester's Clean Air Zone was supposed to be established in late May 2022 but was stopped after public protest and central government intervention. The original scheme would have charged buses, coaches, taxis, private hire vehicles, heavy goods vehicles, vans, and minibuses for moving through parts of Greater Manchester. New planning is in process, considering new vehicle and travel technology and the cost-of-living crisis. The new Clean Air Zone is supposed to operate without charges.

5 The Greater Manchester Combined Authority consists of ten indirectly elected city councillors and the directly elected mayor, Andy Burnham. Among its tasks are public transport, skills, housing, regeneration, waste management, carbon neutrality and planning permission.

Hard Times Ahead

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