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Problematising the discursive bases of contemporary ecopolitical vanguardism in social ecology and ecosocialism

Despite its pre-1968 epistemic ground receding further into history, vanguardism persists as an ecopolitical position, its hubris continuing to have a divisive effect on those agonistic collective strategies otherwise required to confront and surround neoliberal configurations – which themselves involve advanced mechanisms of corporate collaboration. Accordingly, in support of transversal ecopolitics, in what follows, contemporary ecopolitical vanguardism's historical-discursive bases in Murray Bookchin's social ecology and Joel Kovel's ecosocialism will be critically engaged with through archaeological and deconstructive means, and *vis-à-vis* deep ecology and ecofeminism that emerged alongside these two movements, but which remain orientated around the transversalism of a post-1968 episteme. In this regard, while Foucauldian and Derridean approaches will inform the ensuing discussion, Laclau and Mouffe's conception of radical democracy – as the extension of chains of equivalence between struggles to facilitate the formation of a left-wing hegemony based on dialogical engagement – will also comprise a key theoretical coordinate.

Keywords: deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, ecosocialism, vanguardism

Introduction

The ecological movement's emergence in the 1960s was coterminous with the epistemic shift toward those post-1968 discursive relations identified within Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's concept of radical democratic politics, and this was reflected in the transversal approaches of deep ecology and ecofeminism, orientated around the extension of chains of equivalence between struggles, to facilitate the formation of a left-wing hegemony based on dialogical engagement – something incompatible with the vanguardist polemics of pre-1968 Marxist-orientated discursive relations. Accordingly, the vanguardism of Murray Bookchin's social ecology, which emerged alongside deep ecology and ecofeminism, was both anachronistic and in tension with the nascent transversalism of its immediate context. Moreover, social ecology also thereby prolonged the perceived legitimacy of vanguardism, even though its epistemic basis was receding further into history. And while this, in turn, precipitated the movement's own subsequent 'negation' by Joel Kovel's ecosocialism, the latter similarly fostered ecological vanguardist aspirations elsewhere, which continue to emerge in the present. However, vanguardism is an increasingly tenuous position to adopt in ecopolitics, because the complexity of current global neoliberal challenges requires coordinated responses among articulated resistance movements, in a contest reminiscent of the Chinese game of *Go* – in which vanguardism's unilateral pretensions are increasingly out of place. Moreover, such precarity also derives from vanguardism's confrontation with transversal analytic tools, like archaeology and deconstruction, through which its claims to privilege based on hierarchic difference can readily emerge as arbitrary expressions of a 'will to power'.

In the interest of advancing such ecopolitical transversalism through problematising the discursive bases of current ecopolitical vanguardism, in what follows, the earlier approaches of Bookchin's social ecology and Kovel's ecosocialism will be engaged with through archaeological and deconstructive means. And through this process, these two movements' positions and rhetoric will be considered *vis-à-vis* each other and both deep ecology and ecofeminism, in ways that reveal the increasing fragility of the vanguardist stance. That is, first, against the backdrop of Michel Foucault's conception of an episteme, the emergent surfaces of 1960s ecological degradation will be considered, before deep ecology's and ecofeminism's respective authoritative delimitations of the problem/s are thematised, in relation to the post-1968 grids of specification identified through Laclau and Mouffe's concept of radical democracy. Second, the contentions of Bookchin's social ecology will similarly be considered, to render conspicuous how the discursively determined essentialist apriorism of its vanguardism was both inimical to the emerging tranversalism of its own era, and correlatively

anachronistic. Third, Kovel's subsequent ecosocialist 'negation' of Bookchin's social ecology, and rejection of deep ecology, will then be problematised. On the one hand, it will be argued that the persistence of Kovel's vanguardist approaches and tropes, alongside his partial rapprochement with ecofeminism and allusions to postmodern thinkers like Foucault and Jacques Derrida, saw his form of ecosocialism struggling to straddle the widening divide between two incompatible epistemes. On the other hand, a Derridean deconstructive reading of the conceptual parallels between ecosocialist and deep ecological tenets will be provided, which accordingly erodes the bases of Kovel's vanguardist claims concerning ecosocialism's pre-eminence. Finally, the article will conclude by considering the destabilising implications of such Foucauldian and Derridean readings for more recent ecological vanguardist initiatives, like that of Kai Heron and Jodi Dean's 'Climate Leninism', and Andreas Malm's call for ecological 'War Communism'.

Deep ecology and ecofeminism as authorities of delimitation

For Foucault, archeologically speaking, when "one can describe, between a number of statements…a system of dispersion", and "between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices…a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformation)", one is "dealing with a *discursive formation*" (2002: 41). And for him, this term subsumes those things we generally refer to as "'science', 'ideology', 'theory', or 'domain of objectivity'" while also allowing us to understand that the elements of the division in question, be they "objects, mode of statement, concepts, [and/or] thematic choices" are subject to "rules of formation" – which are the "conditions of existence… but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance" of any "given discursive division" (Foucault 2002: 42). However, for this very reason, the "analysis of discursive formations" is indissociable from an "analysis of the *episteme*" within which they emerged, which comprises "something like a world view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates"; in other words, "a general stage of reason, [or] a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape", because it constitutes "the total set of relations that unite… the discursive practices" of their time (Foucault 2002: 211). Correlatively, new epistemes are also identifiable (a) by mapping the emergent "*surfaces*" of new objects of discourse, (b) by the descriptions of those "authorities of delimitation" which develop 'rules' to guide how such objects 'should' be related to, and (c) by analysing the relevant "*grids of specification*", or the systems which emerge to classify such objects and such new approaches to them (Foucault 2002: 45-46).

Of course, Foucault's focus on archeological analysis was followed by his genealogical turn in which power increasingly featured as a key variable. But in this regard, as he clearly indicates in *The Discourse on Language*, the two approaches nevertheless remain *complementary*. Indeed, as he suggests, archeological or "critical and genealogical descriptions…alternate, support and complete each other" (1972: 234). That is, on the one hand, the archaeological or "critical side of the analysis deals with the systems enveloping discourse, attempting to mark out and distinguish the principles of ordering, exclusion and rarity in discourse" (Foucault 1972: 234) – through means such as those discussed above. On the other hand, genealogical analysis, "by way of contrast, deals with series of effective formation of discourse", insofar as "it attempts to grasp…[their] power of affirmation", at the very moment when power constitutes "domains of objects, in relation to which one can affirm or deny true or false propositions" (Foucault 1972: 234). Accordingly, Foucault's later genealogical advancement that "the events of May 1968" involved a new "problematic" (1984: 115),[1] archaeologically speaking intimates the emergence of a new episteme, one wherein Marxism found itself "powerless…to confront…problems" which were "not traditionally part of its statutory domain", pertaining to, among other things, "the environment" and "women" (Foucault 1984: 115).

In this regard, in her *Silent Spring* (1962), one of the most influential books of the 20th century, Rachel Carsons thematised the ecological damage wrought by DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), a pesticide which thinned the eggshells of various bird species and thereby prevented successful incubation – with the eponymous allusion to natural springs devoid of birdsong, a poignant reminder of ecosystemic fragility. Her work also underscored human health issues posed by corporate agribusiness practice during the Great Acceleration after World War II, which construed nature as an expendable resource, and humans as somehow detached from the associated depredations – even though their consumerism rendered them susceptible to its compounding negative effects. And while this specific issue was resolved through the United States's ban of DDT in 1972, this

1 In "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault", Foucault distinguishes between "the history of ideas" involving "the analysis of systems of representation – which operates in proximity to archaeology – and genealogical histories of thought, in which "the element of problems or, more exactly, problematizations", is paramount, and this is because he views "thought…[a]s something quite different from the set of representations that underlies a certain behavior" (Foucault 1984: 117). That is, for him, "[t]hought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals"; in other words, "[t]hought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (Foucault 1984: 117).

was accompanied by more varied concerns over the health of corporate food production (Cody 1972: 339-340). Moreover, spectacular ecological disasters in the 1960s also rendered conspicuous the unsustainability of the current episteme's approach to nature. That is, further surfaces of emergence of the ecological crisis as discursive object, were the Santa Barbara oil spill, the burning of the Cuyahoga River – through ignition of toxic pollutants on its surface – and the 'death' of Lake Erie through eutrophication (Maher 2017: 109). And these also occurred alongside major shifts in human coordinates *vis-à-vis* the natural world and the earth's place in the universe. While Alan Landsburg's TV series *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* (1968) disclosed to global audiences images of a greater but hitherto unseen part of the world, the 'Earthrise' photograph made possible by the Apollo 8 mission in the same year was analogously catalytic of existential reflection, as it visually encompassed the earth for the first time *and* rendered its isolation in space apparent (Sachs 1999: 111-117).

Accordingly, such surfaces of emergence precipitated grappling toward a new episteme characterised by sustainable human-nature interfacing, with Arne Naess's deep ecology underpinned by his interpretation of Spinozan philosophy, an early authority of delimitation. That is, notwithstanding Spinoza's lack of ecological concern given his historical situatedness (Kober 2013: 57),[2] as Bill Devall explains in his 40-year retrospective on the deep ecology movement, Naess's recourse to Spinoza's mind-body parallelism sought to counter Cartesian epistemic influence that was informing the privileging of mind over matter,[3] particularly via the "dominant social paradigm" or DSP (2001: 19, 23). For Kilbourne, Beckmann, and Thelen, the DSP's three structures – the neoliberal capitalist economy, informed by techno-optimism, and orientated around liberal democratic election cycles – comprise a paradigm of mutually supportive discourses (2002: 193-402), not unlike Foucault's conception of an episteme. And the DSP also strongly

2 As Kober explains, "[i]n the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents a rigorous naturalistic view of humans and their non-unique position in nature, as an inherent part of nature, subjects of the very same domain as all other objects and beings, governed by the same laws" (2013: 43). However, while "[t]his approach seems open to interpretations close to those of Deep Ecology", it must also be remembered that Spinoza's description of "what is commonly referred to as moral behavior – altruism, compassion, help and so on – [i]s grounded in utility and self-benefit", and thus "only applies in relation to other human beings" who can offer reciprocity in this regard; indeed, for Spinoza, "there is actually no good reason to refrain from killing animals, or using anything in nature in any way we might wish to do so" (Kober 2013: 43, 60).

3 According to Lord, "Spinoza does not take seriously Descartes' doubt about the existence of the body or his scepticism about the nature of bodily sensation"; rather, for Spinoza, while "thinking and extension are different in kind", it remains the case "that bodies and ideas have *parallel* streams of causality; that the order of causality is *the same* in the attribute of thinking as it is in the attribute of extension" (2010: 51-52, 54).

supports the principle of a Cartesian rational subject, ostensibly divorced from the ecological consequences of its consumerist decisions, who can thus persist in technological exploitation of nature, based on calculations that the requisite societal change can somehow always be politically deferred. In contrast, Naess not only advanced that greater "respect for the biosphere" needs to be "accorded priority" in policy decisions (1986: 46), orientated around an "egalitarianism of life-forms in the biosphere" (1979: 296). In addition, through Spinoza's concept of "'God or Nature', *Deus sive Natura*" (1981: 76-77), Naess coupled human and natural evolution through their shared divinity. To elaborate, while Naess recognised that, for Spinoza, "[d]esire…is…the *conatus* itself to act" (2005: 6), simultaneously, Naess maintained this impetus toward "self-preservation" as something sublimely "inherent in all…finite…things", as the *animus* behind evolutionary development (Naess 1975: 84-85). Accordingly, for deep ecologists, "[h]umans have no right to reduce this…diversity except to satisfy vital needs", and have a correlative obligation to pursue ecological restoration (Devall 2001: 23). This is especially given the Anthropocene, commencing with 19th-century industrialism, and proceeding through "the nuclear age and the Great Acceleration", which is "driving the sixth major extinction event in Earth history" (Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen and McNeill 2011: 849).

Yet, as a fledgling authority of delimitation at the dawn of a new episteme, deep ecology necessarily found itself in dialogue with other such authorities of delimitation, like ecofeminism. For Foucault, "the dialogue situation" entails specific rights and duties: while the "person asking the questions" has "the right…to remain unconvinced, to perceive a contradiction, to require more information, to emphasize different postulates, to point out faulty reasoning, and so on", in turn, "the person answering the questions…is tied to what…[w]as said earlier" and "to the questioning of the other" – as their partner in a process of mutual elucidation (1984: 111). And what became a robust dialogue between ecofeminism and deep ecology commenced with Ariel Salleh's "Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-feminist Connection", which critiqued deep ecology's patriarchal prejudices and related myopic social analyses (1984: 340-343), and which elicited significant response from deep ecologists (Salleh 1991: 133). A key contention for ecofeminism is deep ecology's universalising reference to *human* culpability for ecological degradation – since "the humanist identity is implicitly masculine and depends on being nonidentical with nature", while the "meta-industrial class" of women and indigenous peoples are familiar with "labour as a 'socially reproductive' metabolic exchange with the environment" (Salleh 1999: 208-211). Moreover, while ecofeminism and deep ecology identify similar emergent surfaces of ecological degradation, including Carson's *Silent Spring*, ecofeminism also identifies deep ecologists' universalisation of their own

position as a form of patriarchal violence, expressed through their "appropriation of…Carson's path-breaking work", and their correlative diminishment of "the motive force of women in environmental campaigns" (Salleh 1991: 132). And this discursive violence derives from patriarchy's historical splitting-off of "feminine and other abject bodies" to position them as "Nature", and hence as a "resource" to be "colonised by masculine energies and sublimated through Economics, Science and the Law", in a fundamental "repression of life processes" summed up in the "Man/Woman=Nature equation" (Salleh 1997: 54). Accordingly, while deep ecology's thematisation of ecological issues might remain salutary, for ecofeminism its terms of reference ironically echo the historical-discursive patriarchal prejudices which precipitated ecological degradation in the first place – such that they require reconsideration. Similarly, Mary Mellor maintains that "the male and productivist basis of Marxist theory" has prevented "a 'marriage' between Marxism and radical feminism", and hence there exists a need to theorise both "the finite nature of the planet and the biological differences between men and women", to factor in the "immediate altruism" of women's care-giving work – especially since such meta-industrial labour comprises "a substantial proportion of the material basis of men's lives" (1992: 45-48, 54).

However, while Mellor does not thereby reject Marxism, but rather endeavours to interface with socialist (and other) struggles toward the synthesis of a new politico-economic position, Salleh similarly acknowledges ecofeminist synergies with "eco-anarchists like Murray Bookchin, deep ecologists like Bill Devall, and bioregionalists like Peter Berg and Kirk Sale" (1997: 189). Furthermore, in "The Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate: A Reply to Patriarchal Reason", Salleh suggests that "convergences between deep ecology and ecofeminism promise to be fruitful" provided "remedial work is done" (1992: 195), while in their turn, Zimmerman correlatively "attempt[ed] to find common ground between ecofeminism and Deep Ecology" (2014: 254), and Sale himself felt that, until the mid-1980s at least, a sense prevailed that "there was really only one big ecology movement and…we shared an essentially similar position on the environmental destruction of the earth" (1988: 670). Accordingly, these constructive exchanges reflect the "transversal" struggles of the post-1968 episteme, which are not "limited to one country" or one "political or economic form of government", but instead focus on "instances of power closest to them" and target "power effects" (Foucault 1982: 329-330). Indeed, as transversal struggles, they are engaged in without expectation of any imminent "solution", as they focus on "the status of the individual", their "right to be different", and "everything that separates the individual" from their resources and/or community, with such activism based on critical appraisal of how "knowledge circulates and functions" in relation to power, and on a refusal of the "abstractions of economic and ideological

state violence" (Foucault 1982: 330-331). Thus, until the mid-1980s, the above ecological movements approximated "[o]ne of the central tenets" of Laclau and Mouffe's grid of specification, advanced in their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), namely "the need to create a chain of equivalence among the various democratic struggles", including "struggles…in the defense of the environment", to more effectively "articulate…a new left-wing hegemonic project" capable of countering neoliberal hegemony (2001: xviii).

The vanguardism of Murray Bookchin's social ecology

However, from the earlier archeological discussion of discursive formations, what should be clear at this point is that the 'common sense' which predominates in any given era, is always a conceptual product afforded by consensus concerning the rules of the discourse/s in question. And these rules – of what it is acceptable or unacceptable to say – often prevail as the parameters of "fellowships of discourse", which work "to preserve or…reproduce discourse…in order that it should circulate within a closed community, according to strict regulations" (Foucault 1972: 225). Of course, dialogue – as defined above – remains possible within such fellowships, to the extent that the logic of these rules and/or their implications continue to be interrogated, with a view to their refinement. But such refinement can also occur only incrementally when, in the presence of polemics, only *certain* of such rules (or aspects thereof) remain open for debate, while others are deemed sacrosanct. And where this is the case, "[d]octrinal adherence" is birthed, accompanied by corresponding "ritual" – as found in "[r]eligious…juridical, therapeutic", and "political discourse", which "determines the…roles of the speakers" (Foucault 1972: 225). Examples of this include the ritualistic *presumption* of Christian missionaries concerning the superiority of their faith over indigenous beliefs during the era of colonisation (Mudimbe 1985: 151-154), the ritualised *competition* between disciplinary juridical authorities and biopower exponents of psychiatry (Moulin 1975: 215) – which Foucault and his colleagues approach from different angles in their collaborative work *I, Pierre Rivière* – and the ritual *arrogance* of Nazi advocates in the 1930s concerning the ostensible "exceptionalism" of the Aryan race (Williams 2011: 28). As Foucault explains, in such cases, the "polemicist…proceeds encased in privileges that he… will never agree to question", and believes himself to be possessed of "rights authorizing him to wage war" on "the person he confronts" as "an enemy who is wrong…[and] harmful" and who accordingly needs to be "abolish[ed]…as interlocutor" (1984: 112).

Moreover, such polemics can amount to a discursive virus of sorts, which may later inhibit dynamics of dialogue well beyond the confines of the initial polemical fellowship of discourse. For instance, the ritualised presumptions

of colonial roles so concretised the essentialism of the polemicists' positions in administrative discourse, that indigenous people subject to such vitriol felt obliged to essentialise their *own* position, if only as a defensive strategy. And a case in point would be the assertion of an equal but "oppositional [African] identity as essentially unchangeable" under the guidance of Léopold Senghor, through "the cultural movement known as 'negritude'" (Longhurst et al. 2017: 235). Yet, when this strategic response congeals into political dogma, it can end up mirroring the polemical catalyst in question, even after the polemicists themselves are long gone, in a form of discursive trauma that mirrors repetition compulsion – with contemporary African diatribes against homosexuality as un-African (Lewis 2008: 104-109) a case in point. Accordingly, what this illustrates is how discourse opens "a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy", but thereafter imposes limits on their discursive agency, relative to the existing roles, rules, and dynamics of the discourse/s in question (Foucault 1969: 124-131).

Similarly, although Murray Bookchin's social ecology emerged as another ecological authority of delimitation alongside deep ecology and ecofeminism, its primary grids of specification were "the communist antifascist political struggles of the 1930s and 1940s", of which Bookchin had been part (Light 1998: 3). And as in the above colonial example, this had involved discourses being advanced by antagonistic – as opposed to agonistic – authorities of delimitation, operating within the grids of specification of a pre-war episteme. Accordingly, where the agonism of transversalism informed the strategic approaches of ecofeminism and deep ecology as discussed above, the antagonistic *dispositif* of vanguardism came to inform Bookchin's social ecology,[4] particularly from the mid-1980s onward.[5] That is, while Marx "believed the vanguard could speed the approach of revolution by helping the proletariat develop class awareness", for Lenin "the vanguard itself [w]as the principal revolutionary agent that would…establish a socialist state before the proletariat developed self-awareness" (Baradat 1994: 191). And Bookchin similarly maintained: "I believe in a 'vanguard'" because "a minority social project that advances views in opposition to the conventional wisdom of a time is usually…a vanguard" (in Cohn 2006: 234). Admittedly, he may

4 Of course, vanguardism has involved many permutations after being coined by Saint-Simon, as it was progressively embraced by emerging radical elements within various artistic, cultural, and political circles, including Marx and Lenin (Graeber 2003), but the latter conceptions are being referred to here.

5 In contrast, Bookchin's 1970s commitment to anarchism is saliently demonstrated in his *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, where he negates "Marx's famous choice of socialism or barbarism" by advancing instead "the more drastic alternatives of anarchism or annihilation", and moreover maintains that "an anarchist society, far from being a remote ideal, has become a precondition for the practice of ecological principles" (Bookchin 1986: 62, 98).

have "balk[ed] at anything…like 'a Leninist…military organization'", but scholars like Regina Cochrane nevertheless "see…Bookchin as surreptitiously reinstating the 'scientific authority' of the classical Marxist theorist" who – based on their ostensible "panoptical knowledge of history or nature" – presumes the right of their movement to function as a vanguard (Cohn 2006: 234). However, while such vanguardism functioned strategically in the 1930s anti-fascist struggles – in ways akin to Senghor's essentialist anti-colonial struggle – its polemics were in tension with the dialogical transversalism toward a left-wing hegemony of the emerging post-1968 grids of specification.

As Laclau and Mouffe argue, "essentialist apriorism" or "the conviction that the social is sutured at some point, from which it is possible to fix the meaning of any event independently of any articulatory practice", has traditionally "galvanized the political imagination of the Left" around "the classic concept of 'revolution' cast in the Jacobin mould" (2001: 177) – involving a group convinced that, like Lenin, they *know* 'what is to be done'. In contrast, in the post-1968 episteme, Laclau and Mouffe identify increasing recourse to a "logic of equivalence", involving "the expansion of chains of equivalence…to other struggles" in the interest of their "equivalential articulation" within a framework of alliances – which also "does not simply establish an 'alliance' between given interests, but modifies the very identity of the forces engaging in that alliance" (2001: 182). That is, their "logic of autonomy" still requires that "[e]ach…struggle…retains its differential specificity with respect to the others", but not as "an absolute principle of identity" which would render related "thought…a closed totality" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 184). Rather, "the moment of totality ceases to be a *horizon*" of possibility that might, respectively, dissolve all differences or reify them as absolutes, and instead "becomes a *foundation*" for transformative dialogue (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 183). And through such dialogue, "the problematic of possessive individualism… as the matrix of production of the identity of the different groups" – so powerfully reflected in vanguardism – is progressively replaced by "the construction of a new 'common sense'"; one in which "the demands of each group are articulated equivalentially" so that, "in Marx's words,…'the free development of each should be the condition for the free development of all'" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 183).

In contrast, though, in the mid-1980s, Bookchin rejected out of hand both deep ecology, as part of "the 'spiritual' wing of the American Green[,] and ecofeminist movements" (Sale 1988: 670), and instead advanced social ecology as the vanguard of the ecological revolution. Moreover, as Sale elaborates, this occurred through "extraordinary language that was…shocking to and totally unexpected by most of the participants" at the 1987 Socialist Scholars Conference – whose approaches were variously informed by transversalism – as "Bookchin laid into those who fell short of the social ecology ideal…with a vengeance…[un] equaled in political disputes since the 1930s" (1988: 670).

In short, social ecology, Bookchin maintained, objected to deep ecology's suggestion that "a substantial decrease of the human population" is required for "[t]he flourishing of non-human life" (Devall 2001: 23), because of its ostensible genocidal implications. Indeed, Bookchin felt that "the poorest, the darkest and the sickest" would be targeted within an ecofascist strategy (Sale 1988: 672) – one that would moreover compound ecological problems since, for social ecology, "the very *idea* of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human" (Bookchin 1991: 131). For social ecologists, this oversight also proceeded from deep ecology's limited social analysis reflected in their Anthropocene theorisations (of humanity's responsibility as a *species* for precipitating the sixth major extinction), which ignores how not *all* human societies are *equally* industrial – a prejudice similarly reflected in deep ecology's generalisation that "[p]resent human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and…rapidly worsening" (Devall 2001: 23). As Bookchin retorts, this effectively "preaches a gospel of a kind of 'original sin' that accurses a vague species called 'Humanity' – as though people of color are equatable with whites, women with men, the Third World with the First, [and] the poor with the rich" in terms of their levels of consumption and pollution (1999: 283). More specifically, Bookchin denounced "biocentric egalitarianism" as "essentially misanthropic" for "relegat[ing]… the welfare of the human to a status secondary to that of the biosphere as a whole" – particularly in the wake of "an *Earth First!* article that spoke favorably of AIDS as…a welcome and necessary control on human global population" (Sale 1988: 670, 674). Indeed, Bookchin "paid particularly close attention to…*Earth First!*" not only because he saw in its assertions the echoes of eco-fascism, but also because the movement was a "self-styled…vanguard organization" (Light 1998: 3), which thus challenged Bookchin's conception of social ecology as *the* vanguard of the ecological revolution. To be sure, "Bookchin…later admitted that 'statements made by *Earth First!* activists are not to be confused with those made by deep ecology theorists'", which resonated with deep ecologist Warwick Fox's cautioning of "critics not to commit the fallacy of 'misplaced misanthropy'", since deep ecology's criticism of "an arrogant anthropocentrism does *not* mean that deep ecology is misanthropic" (Ross and Adkins 2018: 199). But regardless, the discursive lines separating deep ecology and ecofeminism from social ecology continued to harden, owing largely to the anachronistic political imaginary of Bookchin's approach – an imaginary in which vanguardism remained essential, and in which there could only be one 'right' answer to the ecological crisis, namely that of the social ecology position.

To be clear, the above does not imply indictment of Bookchin for his vanguardism; rather, his authorial position "as a function of discourse" (Foucault 1969: 124) is only thereby recognised. That is, archaeologically speaking, the episteme within which this author emerged provided "a set of possible positions

for a subject" (Foucault 2002: 122), but each was accompanied by constraints that curtailed agency through requiring recourse to certain principles – which in Bookchin's case were variants of Marxist-Leninist theory/political praxis. Accordingly, this procedure, which leads "us to constitute ourselves" in relation to discourses that precede us, and then "to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, [and] saying" in terms *of* such discourses (Foucault 1970: 315), emerged strongly in the alpha and omega of Bookchin's approach, namely his concept of 'organic society' and faith in 'libertarian municipalism' – the functional equivalents of Marx's initial 'primitive communism' and final 'socialist utopia,' respectively.

On the one hand, Bookchin defines organic society as "a spontaneously formed, noncoercive, and egalitarian" living arrangement that "emerge[d] from innate human needs for association, interdependence, and care", and which was socially unstratified and correlatively informed by understandings of ecosystemic interdependence (1982: 5). However, in White's summation of Bookchin's argument, such "primal unity" was subsequently dissolved through "the emergence of social hierarchy and social domination" at both "material and subjective" levels: while social stratification saw material power shift into elite hands to progressively normalise hierarchical relations, corresponding "epistemologies of rule" precipitated "the shift from animism" which had characterised organic society (2003: 39). And Bookchin theorises these epistemologies as a "repressive sensibility and body of values" that "mentaliz[ed] the entire realm of experience along lines of command and obedience" (1982: 89). For Bookchin, then, meaningful emphasis on *quality* of life (as the deep ecologists would have it) is impossible until this "legacy of domination" – reflected in both "Hebrew and Hellenic mentalities" and the modern societies which they birthed – is addressed (1982: 112).

On the other hand, for Bookchin, "the traditional Leftist" aspiration "to capture state power in the interest of achieving…progress" was "wrongheaded", because "[t]he city, rather than the state, was the domain in which politics had its proper home" – since only there "could an active citizenry manage its own affairs" (Muhammad 2018: 804). Accordingly, echoes of anarchism rather than statecraft informed Bookchin's "political strategy [of]…'libertarian municipalism'", which "involved running candidates for municipal government on a platform that sought to open up…management…to popular decision-making", so as to "institutionalize participatory government in a step-by-step manner" that would eventually see "[d]ensely-packed populations…spread out, and giant urban centers…broken up into wards" (Muhammad 2018: 804-805).

However, insofar as the above was articulated with a vanguardist edge in terms of a pre-1968 episteme, it rendered Bookchin's social ecology vulnerable to usurpation, not least because the movement thereby performatively endorsed the legitimacy of such a process of hubristic dethroning, as it were – a process which Kovel's ecosocialism then proceeded to mimic.

Kovel's ecosocialism: 'negation' of social ecology and (ironic) rejection of deep ecology

Such usurpation occurred most palpably in the ecosocialist Joel Kovel's "Negating Bookchin", where the titular 'negation' refers to Hegel's concept of "sublation", or "[t]he idea that one can simultaneously negate and preserve some term or object" (Bowman 2013: 56). To this end, Kovel proffers a "heuristic fiction" that "Bookchin's manifest work is an imbrication of two…discourses,…B1 and B2", each predicated on "different archaeological scripts" (1997: 5). But while Kovel advances his "profound…sympathy" for B1 – despite some of its features becoming questionable – the polemics of B2 are deemed overly problematic for their quasi-religiously fundamentalist tone, which eschews dialogue (1997: 5). Accordingly, while Kovel critiques various elements of B1, and subordinates them to ecosocialism's vanguardist framework, he explicitly rejects the polemical language of B2 in favour of dialogic engagement.

However, archaeologically speaking, this indicates how Kovel's ecosocialism is schizophrenically situated between the pre-1968 grids of specification that informed Bookchin's social ecology – within which such 'negation' remained thinkable – and the post-1968 transversal grids of specification, discussed earlier, where the maintenance of dialogue is paramount. And this accordingly begs the question of which grids of specification, in the last instance, loomed largest for Kovel's ecosocialism *as* an emergent authority of delimitation in ecopolitics? For an answer, the following needs to be considered.

On the one hand, concerning B1, first, Kovel disagrees with Bookchin's conception of "justice [a]s merely the redistribution of scarcity", and hence as less important than freedom, which Bookchin defines as "participation in a fuller, more ethical life through the overcoming of hierarchy/domination" (1997: 6). And this is not simply because Kovel's ecosocialism continues to draw generally on Marxism, but also because Kovel is unwilling to "reduce…the struggle against suffering and exploitation to an empty gesture", while advancing the only "real work" as that of "overcoming 'hierarchy'" (1997: 27). For Kovel, Bookchin's focus here derived from the *de rigueur* attack on hierarchy in "New Left protests of the 1960s", which Bookchin embraced as "the germ of a new and more universal revolutionary subject" (1997: 8). But in Kovel's view, such

"utopian hopes" today "seem a hoax" in a world of mass unemployment and starvation (1997: 27). Moreover, under the right conditions, hierarchy can also be significantly enabling and even necessary for communal stability. Thus, Kovel advances not the dissolution of all hierarchy, but that focus fall instead on "those hierarchies that degenerate into domination" (1997: 22), and he corroborates this with reference to "What is Social Ecology?" where Bookchin himself later conceded to the value of hierarchy in certain caring communal contexts (in Kovel 1997: 22). Second, contrary to Bookchin for whom the traditional Leftist goal of achieving state power was anathema, Kovel points to the "development of organic agriculture in…Cuba" after the "Soviet collapse",[6] which showed "the potentialities for growth persisting even in…the socialist party-state" so despised by Bookchin (1997: 25). Thus, for Kovel, while going forward "Bookchin must be willing to live with hierarchy", such historical developments also indicate that his libertarian municipalism requires reduction "to one pathway among many toward social-ecological transformation" (1997: 23-24). Accordingly, Kovel thereby negates and preserves (through, respectively, modifying and shelving) the above two features of Bookchin's position, which sees his own version of ecosocialism eviscerate the credibility of social ecology, before assuming the mantle of ecopolitical vanguard itself.

On the other hand, though, while Kovel seeks to problematise Bookchin's organic society from a postmodern position "marked by…incredulity toward all 'grand narratives'" (White 2003: 41), he then also – notwithstanding the performative contradiction involved – continues to advance ecosocialism's vanguard status, and moreover does so through critiquing Bookchin's diatribes against "postmodernists…ecofeminists…and…Karl Marx" (1997: 14-15). To elaborate, in the latter regard, Kovel defends Marx with reference to his lesser-known "*Ethnological Notebooks*…published in 1972", which contain "the last of Marx's works" and which intimate "convergence between [the] radical social theories" of Marxism and social ecology (1997: 10-11, 17, 25) – the theoretical recollection of which could conceivably bolster ecosocialism's vanguard credibility within a pre-1968 episteme. However, next, ecofeminism is defended with reference to the Chipko movement's value and Vandana Shiva's work, but with the caveat that this "commits neither to the fetishization of the East, nor to an ecofeminist 'vanguard'" (Kovel 1997: 25) – presumably because the

6 The Soviet Union's disintegration in 1991 obliged Cuba to start "buying oil on the world market", where it could only afford part of its requirements, which nearly "collapsed" the economy (Sarmiento 2010: 77). However, despite initial difficulties, after "a shift to urban agriculture" and "agroecological production" (Koont 2007: 312), the country's food production processes recovered.

latter status is ultimately reserved for ecosocialism.[7] Concordantly, Kovel also suggests that Bookchin's related polemic is anachronistically underpinned by a "typically masculinist position" that, "fearing merger with the archaic mother", tries instead to "establish…a kind of hypertrophic rationalism" that "blocks not only the mythic world view…but closes off all radical spirituality" (Kovel 1997: 34). Accordingly, this further invalidates social ecology's vanguard status, but now with reference to a post-1968 episteme where spirituality is recognised as politically valuable. Finally, and continuing along this trajectory, Bookchin's notion that recourse to such myth entails a "regressive" return to "infancy and passivity" is countered by Kovel in a way that defends postmodernists (1997: 33). That is, for Kovel, Bookchin "cannot seem to comprehend that one can move safely in and out of the sphere of representations" without "the imagination and…reality" dissolving into each other (1997: 34). And Kovel then supports postmodern thinkers – including "Foucault and Derrida" – who underscore that this is both possible and potentially beneficial, as "the sphere of representation, or the imaginary" are "a kind of dialectical space" of experimentation, which correlatively teaches us "the virtue of skepticism about truth claims" we might want to make as works in interminable progress (1997: 30). In sum, then, the ostensible vanguardist pre-eminence of Kovel's ecosocialism over Bookchin's social ecology seems both couched within a pre-1968 episteme where it is predicated on ecosocialism's greater theoretical acumen concerning Marx's writings, and something based on ecosocialism's deference to postmodern grids of specification – even though vanguardism, *as* a resurgent discursive atavism of pre-1968 grids of specification, is of questionable value therein.

Perhaps even more ironic, is Kovel's rejection of deep ecology despite it sharing many features with his own version of ecosocialism, which leads a binary opposition of 'Kovel's ecosocialism/deep ecology' to readily deconstruct beneath a Derridean reading thereof. That is, deconstruction of the arbitrary privileging of one term over another – in the binary oppositions of male/female, and of civilisation/nature – is key to Salleh's ecofeminist critique of patriarchal power for its environmental degradation, summed up in her 'Man/Woman=Nature' equation, discussed earlier. But Kovel's binary oppositional self-privileging of ecosocialism over deep ecology is based on reasons no less arbitrary. After all,

7 Kovel's rapprochement with movements like ecofeminism – previously eschewed by social ecology – at times seems to indicate nascent transversalism, but this also occurred alongside persistent intimations of ecosocialism's pre-eminence. For example, under the auspices of the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Kovel supported "major emphasis" being given "to ecofeminist work because of the centrality of gender in our relations with nature", before ultimately defining "ecosocialism" as the most important of "ecologically rational alternatives to capitalism" (Kovel 2009: 34).

Kovel maintains that, to become credible, deep ecology will have "to stay clear" of its spurious "association[s] and prove its *bona fides* as an ecophilosophy by incorporating the critique of domination over humanity, which leads necessarily to the critique of capitalism and the question of how to surpass capitalism" (2007: 190). In other words, for Kovel, deep ecology will have to adopt ecosocialism's mode of questioning and arrive at the same conclusions as ecosocialism – such that it ceases *to be* – before it can achieve credibility. Yet there are at least four significant synergies between Kovel's ecosocialism and deep ecology which render Kovel's above assertions problematic: first, their similar concept of *intrinsic value*; second, their parallel connection of such intrinsic value to existential *intuition* and their related valorisation of those spiritual/religious traditions which reflect such *insights*; third, their analogous reification of first peoples' indigenous knowledge systems as the most concentrated forms *of* such ecosystemic intuition/insights; and fourth, their comparable advancement of such concentrated intuition/insights as leading to increasing *identification* with nature.

That is, the first point of deep ecology is that the "flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves…independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes" (Devall 2001: 23). However, similarly, for Kovel, "the *intrinsic value of nature* or *I-V*" involves "an assertion that we should *value nature for itself, irrespective of what we would do to it*", and that this comprises "the defining concept that differentiates ecosocialism from the various socialisms of the 19th and 20th centuries" (2014: 18). Accordingly, while Kovel's latter contention helpfully outlines the parameters of ecosocialism *vis-à-vis* earlier socialisms, what is not clear is how his concept of the intrinsic value of nature differs from the first point of deep ecology.

Second, this issue becomes even more opaque when Kovel maintains that his model of "I-V enters deeply into human existence…not just by encountering wilderness" but also "from our timeless time in the womb" and extends into "the entire panoply of spiritual and religious forms" (2014: 20). And this growing opacity is because, again, such sentiments have their counterpart in Naess's assertions that "rich experiences in free nature contribute…to a sense of maturity" (Devall 2001: 24) – defined in terms of Spinoza's principles of nature-as-creative (*natura naturans*) and nature-as-created (*natura naturata*). Accordingly, this necessarily extends from the moment of conception, right into deep ecology's "radical pluralism" toward the "'foundational' beliefs" of "Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Moslems, pantheists, agnostics, and materialists" (2001: 23-24).

Third, and even more interestingly, both Kovel's ecosocialism and deep ecology analogously reify first peoples' indigenous knowledge systems as reflecting the most concentrated forms *of* such ecosystemic intuition/insights. That is, Kovel argues that "indigeneity serves as an important index of ecosocialist potential",

and that "[s]ocieties like Western Europe, where both the actual presence and cultural trace of the indigenous past are…most suppressed…have the weakest potential for ecosocialist transformation", on account of their orientation around the "regulated, rationalized, and reformist codes" of "late capitalist efficiency" (2014: 15). Yet, in advancing this, Kovel succinctly echoes an array of deep ecologists who earlier "contributed thoughtful commentary on…primal cultures" as "models of appropriate experiences that encourage greater human maturity", with such maturity couched not in "the human-in-environment metaphor" – associated with the colonial project and capitalist anthropocentrism – but rather in terms of "a more realistic human-in-ecosystems and politics-in-ecosystems" metaphor (Devall 2001: 24-25).

Fourth, Kovel speaks of "bringing nature into continuity with humankind's rootedness" as "the spiritual process at the heart of ecosocialist politics", which "entails a kind of identification with nature that fills the self with its grandeur and fires it up" (2014: 16-17). But it can scarcely be missed that this mirrors Naess's own assertions concerning "[t]he 'ecological self'" as "defined by…'broad identification' with nature, whether based on biophilia or on experiences in the 'wildness' of nature" (Devall 2001: 26).

In sum, as Spivak points out concerning deconstruction, rather than being bound by one's perspective, "one can at least deliberately reverse perspectives as often as possible", to explore how "the two terms of an opposition are merely accomplices of each other" (1997: xxxviii). And such entanglement certainly seems to characterise the relationship between Kovel's ecosocialism and deep ecology when their synergies are viewed in the above light. Accordingly, while such appraisal works toward greater transversalism in contemporary ecopolitics, it correlatively undermines Kovel's attempts to subordinate deep ecology to his own version of ecosocialism, and with this, the ecological vanguard status of such ecosocialism. Indeed, on the contrary, it instead underscores deep ecologist Sale's initial sense, that "there…really [is] only one big ecology movement and… we share…an essentially similar position on the environmental destruction of the earth" (1988: 670).

Conclusion

On the one hand, the foregoing archaeological analyses highlight not only the anachronistic gravitation of Bookchin's social ecology around pre-1968 grids of specification, but also the schizophrenic pull within Kovel's ecosocialism between the latter and post-1968 transversal grids of specification, as he endeavoured to 'negate' social ecology and advance his own version of ecosocialism as *the* vanguard of the ecological revolution within a postmodern context. And while the

cogency of such ecosocialist endeavours in the contemporary era was accordingly problematised, on the other hand, the arbitrariness of Kovel's distinction between his version of ecosocialism and deep ecology – upon which this ecosocialism's vanguard status was also supposed to rest – was moreover rendered conspicuous through application of a deconstructive lens.

Interestingly, considered against this backdrop, what a methodological admixture of archaeology and deconstruction also makes visible at this point in the present argument, is that despite Kovel's eschewal of B2 rhetoric, his own version of ecosocialism might not be able to distinguish itself from Bookchin's social ecology on this basis either. That is, as indicated, Kovel characterizes B2's quasi-religious idiom as echoing a "vindictiveness of Old Testament proportion", through which Bookchin construed his opponents as "not simply mistaken but guilty of treachery", and articulated their failings in an "ecological…retelling of the [Judeo-Christian] legend of the Fall" – replete with the "Great Satan" or "arch-betrayer" of "the Deep Ecologist" (Kovel 1997: 5, 9-10,12). However, in "Ecosocialism as a Human Phenomenon", Kovel clearly echoes such B2 rhetoric when, for instance, he laments how "social-democratic parties" have "[s]educed" the Left, and "deluded" it through "dreams of Leninist glory" (2014: 15). Indeed, he even employs B2 Manichean tropes when, for example, he advances that Rosa Luxemburg's aphorism "Socialism or Barbarism" should be updated to "Ecosocialism or Ecocatastrophe",[8] while progressively articulating the ecosocialist struggle against capitalism in religiously "existential" terms (2014: 10). That is, while the capitalist "economy" is said by Kovel to "rule…over society as God rules over the world", even constituting a "cancer" on the "organism" of the earth that is also "a spiritual force…of an evil kind" (2014: 11-12, 21), against this veritable consortium of villainy, he suggests, is arrayed "the spiritual process at the heart of ecosocialist politics[,]…through which the self's transactions with the world…become spiritual modes of being", capable of "heal[ing] the wounds inflicted by civilization" (Kovel 2014: 14, 17, 19-20). To be sure, these B2 rhetorical reflections (and related vanguardist tropes) may well have derived from the text's keynote address status at the 2013 International Ecosocialist Conference in Quito, Ecuador, where generating motivation among activists could have been deemed paramount. But regardless, one must still ask: given the 'common sense' of post-1968 transversal grids of specification that emerged in relation to the growing power of neoliberal hegemony, how effectively *can* an ecopolitical strategy respond to such hegemony, if its primary coordinates remain the grids of specification of a previous episteme – to the extent that they even inform its rhetoric?

8 This, of course, also parallels Bookchin's assertion concerning the Manichean choice we now face between 'anarchism or annihilation' (See note 5, above).

Perhaps this schizophrenic vacillation in Kovel's ecosocialism, though, is an effect of its emergence as an authority of delimitation on a historical-discursive cusp. That is, between the waning influence of pre-1968 grids of specification, in which vanguardism still functioned as an operational *dispositif*, and the growing influence of post-1968 transversal grids of specification, orientated around alliance formation and the extension of chains of equivalence between struggles. In this regard, one must remember that "Kovel was not a '60s radical" but rather "a '50s radical", who "developed his values, his critical thinking and worldview in a time when nonconforming was rare" (Halleck and Smith 2018: 44) – on account of the grids of specification operative in the era, from which Kovel could only deviate so far. Nevertheless, the discursive effects of his continued vanguardism include the continued validation of vanguardism *itself* as an ecopolitical position, even as the epistemic ground for this continues to recede into history.

To be sure, as Graeber (2003) ironically puts it, "[r]evolutionary thinkers" have been asserting that "the age of vanguardism is over for most of a century"; however, the persistence of vanguardism in ecopolitics continues to evince how it is "easier to renounce the principle than to shake the accompanying habits of thought." Thus, while ecosocialism has admittedly been theorised differently by subsequent thinkers, in contemporary ecopolitics "radical vanguardist visions" still continue to proffer "the false promise of a single correct criteria by which to formulate and evaluate strategies for change" (Meyer 2023: 1). For example, Andreas Malm recently advanced the immediate need for an eco-variant of "war communism" modelled on the Bolshevik Revolution, which correlatively eschews both anarchism and social democracy as impotent (2020: 154-157), while Kai Heron and Jodi Dean (2022) have similarly maintained "Climate Leninism" – freed from "laws…regarding private property" – as "the only appropriate response" to the ecological crisis. Of course, "the importance of *affective* libidinal bonds in the process of collective identification" remains "a crucial insight for envisaging an agonistic politics" [emphasis added] (Mouffe 2014: 268). But to remain *effective* today, this also requires cognizance of the contemporary ecopolitical terrain as akin to a game of *Go*, in which agonistically collective strategies are required to surround and capture neoliberal configurations, which themselves entail advanced mechanisms of corporate collaboration. And here, vanguardism is steadily emerging as an anachronism on the battlefield, not only by virtue of its fragility in the face of archaeological and deconstructive critiques, but also on account of how the divisiveness indissociable from its *hubris* is a hindrance to the efficacy of transversalism.

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