

Eco-Anarchism

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Contents

References And Suggested Readings	4
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Environmental direct action has been a major site for the revival of anarchist political culture since the 1970s. In tandem, a diverse body of eco-anarchist thought has emerged in response to the environmental crisis.

In Germany and France, mobilizations against nuclear energy in the 1970s provided the major vehicle of continuity for the radical surge of 1968, and formed a laboratory for direct action tactics and autonomous organization. In the United States, anti-nuclear campaigns turned toward direct action in 1976 with the Clamshell Alliance's occupations of the planned site of the Seabrook reactor in New Hampshire. The occupation inspired similar direct action groups nationwide, including the Abalone Alliance in California, where anarchist eco-feminists including Starhawk (Miriam Simos, b. 1951) had a prominent role in imbuing its political culture with direct democracy, non-violence, and an earth-based spirituality.

Eco-feminism was also influential in the European and American anti-militarist movements of the 1980s (at Greenham Common, Seneca Falls, Pantex), where connections were made between a militarized culture, poverty, and environmental destruction as manifestations of patriarchal contempt for life. Ecological, feminist anti-militarism expressed an anarchist critique of domination as such, stressing an inexorable connection between the domination of nature and domination of humans (with patriarchy as the prototype of both).

Throughout the 1990s, a new cycle of environmental direct action emerged with distinctly anarchist cultures, including British and Israeli anti-roads movements, North American forest defense campaigns, and, to some extent, the animal liberation movement. The Earth First! network (especially in Europe) is broadly considered to be anarchist, as are the action-banners Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front.

Eco-anarchism as a body of writing represents diverse engagements with the connection between environmental crisis, capitalism, hierarchy, and the ideology of economic growth and technological progress – stressing the social critiques deemphasized in the holistic, consciousness-transformational message of deep ecology. At the same time, the anarchist emphasis on decentralization and worker/community ownership strongly coheres with the requirements of a low-throughput economy, leading to visions of communistic localism and bio-regionalism.

Murray Bookchin was among the first to address environmental problems in decentralist anti-capitalist terms. His dialectical and evolutionary theory of social ecology argued that humans belong to a natural continuum but that their second, sociocultural nature has been disfigured by the rise of hierarchy – initially from gerontocracy in stateless societies. Bookchin's vituperative claims to theoretical exclusivity and his promotion of electoral democracy, however, drew harsh criticism from anarchists.

Since the mid-1980s, a major current of eco-anarchist expression has been anarchoprimitivism. First articulated in the Detroit magazine *Fifth Estate*, the current was developed by authors including Fredy Perlman, John Zerzan, and David Watson and in publications such as *Green Anarchy* (US) and *Green Anarchist* (UK). Strongly antagonistic to industrial society, technology, and modernity, primitivist critiques reject civilization as essentially hierarchical, posit hunter-gatherer communities as sites of primitive anarchy, and promote a reconnection to the wild as part of anarchist revolutionary struggles.

SEE ALSO: Abalone Alliance ; Anarchism ; Anti-Nuclear Protest Movements ; Earth First! ; Ecological Protest Movements ; Kropotkin, Peter (1842–1921) ; Reclaim the Streets ; Reclus, Elisée (1830–1905)

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